

## **Quality of Service of Hotel and Lodging Businesses in Samutsongkram Province, Thailand**

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*The objectives of this study were to examine the level of the quality of Service of the hotel and lodging businesses in Samutsongkram province, Thailand and to develop the guidelines for the development of their quality of service. The period of study was between October and November 2017. This was a quantitative research. The sample of the research consisted on 400 individuals who had the experiences in using the service of one or more hotels and/or accommodations in Samutsongkram province. They were selected by accidental sampling. The data were collected via a use of a questionnaire. The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics. The research results indicated that the overall quality of service of the hotels and lodgings was rated at a high level. When considering each aspect of the quality of service, it was found that the most rated factor was the aspect of reliability of the service. This was followed by assurance, safety, physical attributes, caring for the customers, ability to respond to the customer needs and wants respectively. This study suggests that the entrepreneurs of the hotel and lodging businesses should focus on providing continuously development programs for their staff members. They should also utilize modern technologies in enhancing their service in all aspects to maximize the customer satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** Quality of service; hotel and lodging businesses; Samutsongkram province.

**Field of research:** Marketing.

### **1. Research Background and Significance**

Thai government has been supporting and promoting the hotel and lodging businesses by launching public relations and marketing campaigns on tourist attractions in the provinces throughout Thailand including Samutsongkram province. Samutsongkram province is one of the well-known tourist destinations of Thailand which attract a number of tourists, both Thai and foreign. Many investors have realized the opportunity to do tourism-related businesses in this province. Hotel and lodging business is one form of business that is of interest of the investors. During the past few years, the business of hotel and lodging has been popular which is evident by higher number of hotels and lodgings operated in the province which has been doubled.

Hotel and lodging businesses pay an important role in the tourism industry of the country, both at micro and macro level. The hotels not only provide places to stay, but they also provide places for dining, meeting and conferences. The operation of hotels have to use marketing strategies to develop their competitive advantages in order to attract visitors and make them satisfy with the service.

It can be said that the situation of hotel and lodging businesses in Samutsongkram province is highly competitive as there are many hotels and lodgings that try to encourage

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visitors in use their businesses. These hotels realize that one of the key factors to success for their business are to create customer base and customer loyalty, and to enhance their image. In order to create customer loyalty, the hotel businesses have to do their best to improve their quality of service in all aspects. Customers are willing to pay more for better quality of service. If they are satisfied with the quality of service, they are likely to have loyalty to these businesses. The loyal customers are normally not easily influenced by lower price offered by other hotels because they do not want to take a risk of using services of the hotels they are not familiar with. The customer loyalty also leads to repurchase behavior (Kotler, 2003). As it is known that the enhancement of the quality of service is a key factor leading to the customer loyalty, a number of hotels have been using it as a main strategy. However, many hotels still lack proper system or mechanism to ensure the quality of their service.

Upon realizing the significance of the hotel and lodging businesses and the importance of the quality of service as a key factor for the success of the operation of the hotels, the researchers conducted this study with the aim to examine the level of the quality of service of the hotel and lodging businesses and to develop the guidelines for the enhancement of the quality of service. It employed the case of the hotel and lodging businesses in Samutsongkram province, Thailand.

## **2. The Objectives of the Research**

This research aimed to:

- 2.1. Investigate the level of the service quality of the hotel and lodging businesses in Samutsongkram province; and
2. Develop the guidelines for the development of their quality of service.

## **3. The Review of Literature**

The quality of service refers to an ability of the business to respond to the customers' needs and wants. It is one of the most important factors for any businesses to differentiate themselves from other businesses. In other words, the quality of service plays an important role in making the organization superior to its competitors. First, the organization needs to find out what their customers expect to get when using the service. Then, it has to try its best to provide the service that can perfectly meet or exceed the customers' expectation.

Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1990) developed an approach or a framework for the measurement of the quality of service by identifying the gap between the customers' expectation and the real service offered to them. This framework is known as 'SERVQUAL' which consists of 10 aspects of aspects that need to be measured. These are:

1. The feature or characteristics of the service refers to tangible characteristics of the service such as the decoration of a place of service and surroundings, equipment and instruments used to provide service, the uniform of the staff etc.
2. Reliability refers to the ability of the organization to deliver service as promising to the customers.

3. Enthusiasm refers to willingness to support and help, and being ready to provide service to the customers immediately.

4. Expertise refers to knowledge and ability in working in the assigned tasks effectively and correctly.

5. Modesty refers to hospitality, politeness, and humility expressed with others.

6. Trustworthiness refers to ability to create customers' trust and credibility.

7. Security refers to a situation in which it is free from risks, dangers, and problems.

8. Service accessibility refers to ease and convenience of receiving service from the organization.

9. Communication refers to an ability to develop meaningful relationship with others and an ability to express the thoughts to others clearly as well as an ability to understand what the customers wanted correctly.

10. Understanding of customers refers to an attempt to know and understand the customers' needs and wants and ability to respond to such needs and wants correctly.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

This research used a quantitative research approach as a framework for the investigation. The research population were people who used to have experiences in staying at one or more hotels or other types of accommodation in Sumutsongkram province. As the total number of the population could not be obtained, the researchers determined the sample size by setting at the size at .05 percent, the reliability level at 95 percent, and the discrepancy level at 5 percent. As a result, the research sample size was determined at 385 individuals. However, in order to prevent any errors, another 4 percent was added, making the sample size to be 400 individuals. The sample was selected by using an accidental sampling. The study was conducted over the two-month period between October and November 2017,

The main research instrument was a questionnaire which was designed by the researchers. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part contains five checklist questions about the demographic background of the respondents including gender, age, education background, occupation, and average income per month. The second part of the questionnaire contains the questions about the quality of service which were designed according to the concept of the quality of service proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1990). There are a total of 24 questions asking about the performance of the hotels in providing the service to the guests in terms of their ability to respond to the customers' needs/wants, the reliability of their service, their physical attributes, their empathy to customers, their confidence to provide service, and the security service. These questions are in a form of five Likert-scale questions, ranging from 1 (referring to the least) to 5 (referring to the most).

Before collecting the data, the researchers tested the content validity of the questionnaire by having it tested by three experts. The questionnaires was tried and tested to ensure that all the questions in the questionnaire can measure what they aim to

measure. As a result, the IOC or Index of Item-Objective Congruence of all the questions in the questionnaire was at .06. As for the reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher ensured its reliability by testing the Cronbach's Alpha with 30 copies of the questionnaire. The testing result showed that the coefficient of reliability of the questionnaire was at .742.

After the data were collected with the questionnaire, the data were analyzed by the statistics including mean, standard deviation and multiple regression analysis with the coefficient of reliability of 95 percent. The collected data were then analyzed by descriptive statistics including mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), and standard deviation (SD).

## 5. The Research Findings

Following the analysis of the data, the following results were reported

(1) In terms of an ability to respond to the customers' needs and wants, the study showed that overall, it was rated at a moderate level. The four aspects including, sorted in a descending order based on mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD), service providers having an ability and knowledge to work on assigned tasks; service providers having an ability to create trust to customers, service providers being polite and courteous, and service providers providing service to customers with willingness, were rated in a moderate level. The mean and standard deviation of all these aspects were displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of the quality of service in the aspect of an ability to respond to the customers' needs and wants.**

| <b>Ability to respond to the customers' needs and wants</b>                 | <b>Mean (<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b> | <b>Standard deviation (SD)</b> | <b>Interpretation of the data</b> |
|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Service providers having an ability and knowledge to work on assigned tasks | 3.35                               | 0.99                           | Moderate                          |
| Service providers having an ability to create trust to customers            | 3.23                               | 0.85                           | Moderate                          |
| Service providers being polite and courteous                                | 3.23                               | 0.85                           | Moderate                          |
| Service providers providing service to customers with willingness           | 2.92                               | 1.17                           | Moderate                          |

(2) In terms of the reliability of the service of the hotel and lodging business in Samutsongkram province, the four aspects including, sorted in a descending order based on mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD), service providers being reliable, the organizations paying attention to details, the organization providing service according to time promised, and the organization providing service to customers perfectly as promised, were rated at a very high level. The mean and standard deviation of all these aspects were displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2 Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation of the quality of service in the aspect of the reliability of the service.**

| <b>The reliability of service</b>                                     | <b>Mean (<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b> | <b>Standard deviation (SD)</b> | <b>Interpretation of the data</b> |
|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| service providers being reliable                                      | 4.49                               | 0.65                           | Very high                         |
| the organizations paying attention to details                         | 4.42                               | 0.71                           | Very high                         |
| the organization providing service according to time promised         | 4.40                               | 0.79                           | Very high                         |
| the organization providing service to customers perfectly as promised | 4.37                               | 0.81                           | Very high                         |

(3) In terms of the physical attributes of the place of service and surrounding, it was found that the two aspect including, sort in a descending order following mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation, the place of service and surround being clean and beautiful, the organization keeping developing new forms of service, were rated at a high level, whereas the equipment and technology being modern was rated at a moderate level. The mean and standard deviation of all these aspects were displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3 Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) of the quality of service in the aspect of the physical attributes of the place of service and surrounding**

| <b>The physical attributes of the place of service and surrounding</b> | <b>Mean (<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b> | <b>Standard deviation (SD)</b> | <b>Interpretation of the data</b> |
|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| the place of service and surround being clean and beautiful            | 3.66                               | 0.92                           | High                              |
| the organization keeping developing new forms of service               | 3.41                               | 1.17                           | High                              |
| the equipment and technology being modern                              | 3.02                               | 1.32                           | Moderate                          |

(4) In terms of the empathy to the customers, it was found that the organization being honest to solve the problems for the customer was rated at high level, whereas the other three aspects including, sorted in a descending order based on mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD), the organization focusing on the most benefits of the customers, the organization being able to communicate with the customers clearly, and the organization being able to understand the real needs and wants of the customers, were rated at a moderate level. The mean and standard deviation of all these aspects were displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4 Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) of the quality of service in the aspect of the empathy to the customers**

| <b>The empathy to the customers</b>   | <b>Mean (<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b> | <b>Standard deviation (SD)</b> | <b>Interpretation of the data</b> |
|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| The organization being honest to solve the problems for the customer                | 3.70                               | 0.75                           | High                              |
| The organization focusing on the most benefits of the customers                     | 3.37                               | 0.84                           | Moderate                          |
| The organization being able to communicate with the customers clearly,              | 3.23                               | 0.84                           | Moderate                          |
| The organization being able to understand the real needs and wants of the customers | 2.84                               | 1.34                           | Moderate                          |

(5) In terms of the ability of the hotel to create trust towards the customers, the study reported that only one aspect which was service providers being ready to provide service whenever the customers want was rated at a very high level, whereas the rest of the aspects including, sorted in a descending order based on mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD), the service being easy and convenient to be accessed by the customers, service providers being willing and pleased to provide service to the customers, and service providers being able to provide service promptly, were rated at a high level. The mean and standard deviation of all these aspects were displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5 Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) of the quality of service in the aspect of the ability to create trust towards the customers**

| <b>The ability to create trust towards the customers</b>                         | <b>Mean (<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b> | <b>Standard deviation (SD)</b> | <b>Interpretation of the data</b> |
|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Service providers being ready to provide service whenever the customers want     | 4.24                               | 0.76                           | Very high                         |
| The service being easy and convenient to be accessed by the customers            | 4.12                               | 0.88                           | High                              |
| Service providers being willing and pleased to provide service to the customers, | 3.97                               | 0.75                           | High                              |
| Service providers being able to provide service promptly                         | 3.75                               | 0.78                           | High                              |

(6) In terms of the security and safety of the hotel and lodging businesses, the study reported that all of the five aspects including, sorted in a descending order based on mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD), the organization focusing on safety and security, service providers being able to use equipment proficiently, staff providers being careful when providing service, equipment being checked for their safety on an on-going basis, and the place of service and surrounding areas facilitating the customers' main purposes of visiting were rated at a high level. The mean and standard deviation of all these aspects were displayed in Table 6.

**Table 6 Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) of the quality of service  
in the aspect of the security and safety of the hotel and lodging businesses**

| <b>The security and safety of the hotel and lodging businesses</b>                               | <b>Mean (<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b> | <b>Standard deviation (SD)</b> | <b>Interpretation of the data</b> |
|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| The organization focusing on safety and security   | 3.92                               | 1.27                           | High                              |
| Service providers being able to use equipment proficiently                                       | 3.85                               | 1.27                           | High                              |
| Staff providers being careful when providing service   | 3.75                               | 1.17                           | High                              |
| Equipment being checked for their safety on an on-going basis                                    | 3.66                               | 0.99                           | High                              |
| The place of service and surrounding areas facilitating the customers' main purposes of visiting | 3.49                               | 1.28                           | High                              |

(7) As for the guidelines for the improvement of the quality of service, entrepreneurs of the hotel and lodging businesses in Samutsongkram province should focus on the ability to respond to the customers' needs and wants by providing the employees with a training on how to enhance their personality and how to motivate themselves to work. In addition, they should also employ modern technology in providing service to the customers. Last but not least, the entrepreneurs should also monitor the needs and wants of customers on an on-going basis.

## **6. Conclusion and Discussion**

The overall quality of the service offered by the hotel and lodging business in Samutsongkram province in all six dimensions including an ability to respond to the customers' needs and wants, the reliability of the service, the physical attributes of the place of service and surrounding, the empathy to the customers, the ability of the hotel to create trust towards the customers were at a favorable level in the perception of the customers. Among these, it was found that all the aspects of the reliability of the service were rated at a very high level. This result is consistent to the study of Sahassa, Thabhiranrak, and Kruanamkam (2017) which found that service providers with proper knowledge and ability to provide efficient service such as being able to answer the questions of customers properly and being able to provide proper advices to the customers.

## **7. Suggestions**

Based on the results of the research, the following suggestion are provided:

7.1 The entrepreneurs should try their best to provide services as they have promised to the customers.

7.2 They should provide trainings for the employees on an on-going basis to enhance their performance in providing service to customers of the hotel.

7.3 They have to provide and improve the place of service and surroundings that facilitate the guests' main purposes of visit.

7.4 They should employ modern technology to enhance the service of the hotels.

7.5 They should conduct a survey on the guests' satisfaction on an on-going basis so that they can use the results to enhance their services.

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