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E-TOURISM SERVICE QUALITY FACTORS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THAI AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the factors of E-Tourism Service Quality that enhance the Customer relationship between E-tourism service providers and Thai and International tourists. E-Tourism Service Quality relating to the website's quality / social networks and the service from Thai electronic travel service provider increases of the retention international customer.

Keywords: E-Tourism Quality, E-tourism Service, E-Tourism Marketing Management Quality, Enhance Customer Relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The current business environment constantly changes and becomes increasingly more competitive. Organizations must look more closely and adjust quickly to survive in the digital age where information has an instant access. Many organizations have adopted information and communication technology (ICT) as a management tool to ensure efficient operations and reduce costs. Moreover, information and communication technologies (ICT) play a role in transforming operational processes and organizational effectiveness in many companies.

Most organizations have developed websites and applications for customer to communicate, provide tourism and service information, and e-commerce transactions. This channel creates value to industry business because customers are able to access the service anytime and anywhere [22].

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [25] has identified the opportunities of using the electronic commerce through the internet for the travel industry, especially in developing countries. UNCTAD suggested tourism industry must increase the benefits of ICT by adopting electronic commerce and create communicative infrastructure in dealing with customers to improve revenue and reduce costs. The internet has significant capabilities to support business features and processes. The benefits of the internet to the tourism industry are the capability to provide continuous information and networking. This capability is particularly important because the tourism industry depends on linking information and services passed on to customers in the form of digital service.

In Thailand, the government has initiated a policy to help the economy recover in 2009 until 2010. The Tourism Authority of Thailand is the responsible agency. Recognizing the importance of Thai tourism, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has set up a Department of Tourism to urgently solve tourism related problems. Improving the quality of electronic tourism management is essential and beneficial to tourism development in Thailand.

The objective of the study is to study E-Tourism Quality from the perspective of foreign and Thai tourists related E-Tourism Service Quality relating to website's quality / social networks and the service from Thai electronic travel service provider to both foreign visitors and Thai residents as a channel of customer communication.

LITERATURE

E-Tourism Service Quality

Service quality has been widely researched using "SERVQUAL" model [16] assessing the customer's evaluation of service providers. Service quality consists of 10 factors which are reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understand customer, and tangible. These factors were grouped to five constructs, Reliability and Fast Service, Responsiveness, Empathy, Assurance, and Tangible. Grönroos [7] indicated the two main factors in the service quality were functional quality and technical quality.

However, the traditional service quality where customers meet directly with service provider is different from the electronic service via internet because of factors, such as the channels of service provider, security, and ease of use through web services [20].

The concept of service quality has been applied to improve service quality over the Internet, or electronic service quality, such as ES-QUAL model [17], eTailQ model [28], SITEQUAL model [30], WebQual model [1], e-SQ model [31] and other researches [3] [10] [11] [12] [19] [26] [29] [31].

Electronic service quality includes site quality and data quality [10], other indicators include the data quality, beautiful design, immediate response, security and privacy [19] [31].

The quality management of websites cannot be guaranteed by E-service Quality. The results of research are mixed. Some studies only partially focus on quality. Electronic service providers must emphasis quality for each process in an electronic service. Electronic service quality consists of service design, customer support, web design and technology support [20].

Because communication channels vary through websites and social network studying both areas is needed. Any neglect of process quality may affect the performance of electronic services

Electronic service quality is more effective with continuous improvement and quality improvement in all service and after-service processes. In this research, the term Electronic Service Chain (E-Service Chain) relates to the services quality improvement process. Service quality will cover all services required for tourism including the website quality as a service channel, customer service quality, information technology quality that supports electronic services.

Social networking service quality in electronics tourism has four factors. These are Website Design Quality, Electronic Service Design Quality, Customer Service Quality, and Technology Support Quality.

Website design quality is the quality relates to the capability of the electronic service channel that the users need to access the service channel via the web. Quality website relates to a design with useful data, updated and easy to understand information relevant to the customer's use and links for easy access to other web pages [6]. New information should be well-displayed for the best user experience [12] [19] [23].

Electronic Service Design Quality for product design or customer service must provide user-friendly processes [30]. The process should be simple with variety of services required according to the business nature. For example, banking services must include all the financial services such as deposit, withdraw and transfer funds, etc. Services must meet customer's requirement through customization [21]. The service must be designed to attract for customers [23].

Customer service quality is expectations related before, during and after the service. Basically, when a user makes a transaction through electronic services, customers are concerned because of the uncertainty of the service. Customer feedback after the transaction is completed is essential. Customer service quality should include system-wide service support including various social networking channels [6] [17] [26].

In order to build trust for the users, technology support quality requires that electronic services system must be with secure, privacy guaranteed [6] [17] [21].

E-Tourism Marketing Management Quality

For E-tourism marketing management, the first factor is customer satisfaction and loyalty [24]. The most important marketing factor is pricing. Marketing research identifies price as the key factor of customer satisfaction [13]. When customers evaluate a service, they often consider the price. Unreasonable pricing or price changes create customer dissatisfaction. Reasonable price can be measured by the final result or service process that is considered fair [13]. If the customers receive the same level of satisfaction for what they pay, it is likely that a price increase is acceptable [9]. However, if the customers believe that the price increase is unreasonable for the level of the service. It affects satisfaction and loyalty [4] [13] [14].

Promotional strategy links price, promotional packages, advertising, branding of websites, and integration of communication channels to build a relationship with customers [2] [15] [18] [27] [5] [8].

Research Hypothesis

This study explores the differences in perception of E-Tourism Quality between Thai and International tourist. The T-test is used to analyze for the Null Hypothesis;

H0: Thai and Foreign Tourists don't have significant different perceptions on Website Design Quality, E-service Design Quality, Customer Service Quality, Technology Quality, E-Tourism Management Quality and Customer Relationship Enhancement.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach using questionnaire was designed. Thai and International Tourists in Thailand are surveyed. A survey was conducted to collect data on the difference perspectives in E-Tourism Quality and Customer Relationship Enhancements in Thailand. The questionnaire was developed from literature reviews and validated by E-tourism experts.

This study used 800 respondents. A purposive sample of 300 Thai tourists and 500 foreign tourists were identified. The reason to include more international tourists is that they generate more revenue and higher spending than Thai tourists. Data collection will be from interview which is the most comprehensive approach. The data is collected from visitors in Bangkok and other provinces. Interviews foreign visitors conducted in English. Out of 269 respondents from Thai tourist, 56.9% are female. For the 486 respondents from international tourists in Thailand, 40.9% are female. The majority of tourist respondents are in age group of 30-40 years old, Thai tourist 51.1% and international tourist 42.8%. The respondents education level is at the undergraduate level, Thai 56.1% and international 78.6%). Details of the sample characteristics are describe in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics of Thai and Foreign Tourists

Background Variables	Thai Tourists		International Tourists	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Gender				
Female	153	56.9	199	40.9
Male	115	42.8	287	59.1
Age				
Below 30	87	32.3	191	39.3

30 – 40	139	51.7	208	42.8
Above 40– 50	32	11.9	60	12.3
Above 50- 60	8	3.0	26	5.3
Above 60	3	1.1	1	0.2
Education				
Below Bachelor Degree	4	1.5	35	7.2
Bachelor Degree	151	56.1	382	78.6
Master Degree	103	38.3	43	8.8
Doctor Degree	8	3.0	4	0.8

Additionally, tourists were asked to specify the period and frequency per year that they used website to search for tourism information. International tourist used website to search tourism information at an average of 10.62 years, while Thai tourist start using website to search tourism information later than foreign tourists, the average is 5.1 years. For the frequency of using website for tourism information, the international tourists use website more frequency than Thai tourists, international tourists average used is 27 times/year and Thai tourist average used is 19 times/year (Table 2).

Table 2: Experience of Thai and International tourists using websites for tourism information.

Experience	Average	
	Thai Tourists	International Tourists
Durations that Tourists used website to search for tourism information (Years)	5.1	10.62
Frequency of using website to search for tourism information (Times/year)	18.86	26.73

DATA ANALYSIS

Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis was used to identify the components for E-Tourism Quality related to E-Tourism Service Quality and E-Tourism Management Quality. Variables were examined by using principle component factor analysis and varimax rotation. To derive a stable factor, each factor must have an eigenvalue more than 1.0 and loading of 0.5 or higher on all items. Table 3 shows the result from factor analysis.

Table 3 :Factor Analysis from the perspective of Thai and foreign tourists

Component/Indicators	Thai Tourists Factor Loading	International Tourists Factor Loading
Website Design Quality		
The website provides easy to understand tourism information	.810	.763
The website provides up-to-date tourism information	.773	.833
The website provides complete tourism information	.655	.842
The website provides multiple languages of tourism information	.656	.461
E-Service Design Quality		
The website is designed as a simple to use and make transactions.	.704	.850
The website is aesthetic.	.773	.759
The website is designed for easy searching to get related information.	.645	.841
E-Service Quality on Technology Quality		
The website provides good security technology.	.716	.782
The website supports large volume of transactions.	.556	.786
The website is fast to load.	.720	.800
The website upholds its privacy policy.	.734	.830
Customer Service Quality		
The website provides immediate response to customer after transaction finished.	.655	.863
The website provides 24/7 customer service.	.796	.898
The website provides social networks to communicate and share information with customers/between customers.	.712	.776
E-Marketing Management Quality		
The service provider uses lower price policy for transaction via website.	.648	.540
The service provider uses digital channel for promotion / PR e.g. website / social network.	.805	.784
The service provider uses digital channel to communicate with traveler /customer e.g. website / social network.	.791	.803

The service provider offers variety of tourism's products /services for target customers.	.731	.759
The service provider offers to customize tourism program for individual.	.722	.728

In addition, both types of tourists appreciate an e-service design which is easy to use, gives quick information that is relevant and looks good.

For customer service quality tourists want immediate responsiveness 24/7 with an opportunity to network with other customers. The Thai and international tourists want customization and variety of services at a good price with extensive networking potential. For customer relationship for both groups continued use and retention is enhanced by e-service and e-tourism marketing.

Two factors are most accepted. The alternative hypothesis applies International tourists significantly emphasize website design quality for E-tourism Services. Thai tourists require higher Technology Quality for E-Tourism Services (Table 4).

International tourists are more concerned with clear, updated, and easy to understand information that is available in a language they understand.

Thai tourists require guaranteed security and privacy with good technical specifications.

Table 4: Descriptive data analysis

Factors	Thai Tourist Mean	International Tourist Mean	Sig.
Website Design Quality	4.175	4.323	.000
E-Service Design Quality	4.151	4.159	ns
Technology Quality	4.175	4.073	.037
Customer Service Quality	4.013	4.027	ns
E-Tourism Marketing Management Quality	4.028	4.104	ns
Quality Enhanced Customer Relationship	4.159	4.184	ns

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Thai E-Tourism Service providers can benefit from the likelihood that Thai and International tourists mostly prefer the same level of E-Service Quality in terms of simple, easy to use, and attractive design. They want immediate and continuous customer support with opportunity to network with other customers. They expect the E-Tourism provider to offer customized products with variety and high value for money. If the E-Service provider can deliver this level of quality, both international and Thai tourists would continue to use this provider. The E-Service provider would achieve higher customer retention.

They are significant difference in preferences that E-Service providers need to consider. International tourists want a high level of quality in the kind of four related informative provided. It should be updated and complete as well as accessible in a variety of languages. E-Service providers need to focus on Web Design Quality. Thai tourists are mostly concerned with security, privacy spread and volume. E-Service providers need to emphasize Technology Design.

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