Impacts of Service Quality on Tourists' Selection of Lodging in 4-5 Star Hotels in Thailand

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Abstract

Tourism has been classified by World Trade Organization (WTO) as one leading revenue in a country's service sector and widely recognized as one of the key factors in international business. As seen in Thailand as a key engine of economic growth, international tourists were recoded at 39.8 million with their total spending at 2.21 trillion baht (US$70 billion) in 2019. The lodging is certainly an essential resource in the tourism sector and the service quality is of prime importance in determining customers' decision on the selected hotel. The researcher therefore investigated impacts of service quality on tourists' selection of lodging of 4-5 star hotels in Thailand. This research was to find out about customers' different attitudes toward service quality they experienced inside 4-5 star hotels in Thailand, and whether the customers' expectation exceeds the levels of the perceived service. The researcher used a survey questionnaire to collect both quantitative data, followed by qualitative data provided by 478 respondents in the study. The results pointed to the significance of the gap between customer expectation and perceived service in five dimensions of service quality: (1) reliability, (2) assurance, (3) tangibles, (4) empathy, and (5) responsiveness. It was expected that obtained findings would shed light on the gap in the service quality determinants to identify restraints to remedy and strengthen the identified dimensions of service quality for consumers' greater satisfaction.

Keyword: Service quality, service expectation, service perception, tourist lodgings,
4-5 star hotels, tourism in Thailand

1.Introduction

The statistics in 2018 from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand reported 38.3 million international arrivals in Thailand as the second tourism destination in the Asia-Pacific region after China (TAT Intelligence Center (2019). The revenue was approximately 60.67 billion US dollars, and this resulted in several million direct and indirect employments. Such statistics has positioned tourism as a significant sector for Thailand's economic growth. In the tourism sector, lodging or accommodation is one of the most important factors for travelers to lodge for

comfort with quality ssevice. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (http://www.thaiwebsites.com/tourism.asp, 2019) recorded 18,863 tourism accommodations throughout Thailand in 2019, of which 70 percent categorized as hotels and resorts, and noted that the number of hotels has increased every year, especially in the tourism zone (TAT Intelligence Center, 2019).

Table 1: The Statistics 2019 of tourists' Accommodation in Thailand

Regions	Number of Accommodations	Number of Rooms
Bangkok	641	90,275
Center (except Bangkok)	789	38,944
West	2,080	55,001
East	2,521	126,806
North	3,761	107,110
North-East	2,871	84,015
South	6,200	241,572
Total	18,863	743,723

Source: TAT Intelligence Center (2019).

The focus of this research was on service quality and customer selection. Lewis & Booms (1983) defined service quality (SQ) as an evaluation of perceived expectations (E) of a service with perceived performance (P), giving rise to the equation SQ=P-E. Five dimensions of the service quality encompass *reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness*—all known as vital factors in service quality or SERVQUA (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1991). The service quality is one of the mechanisms to drive the hotel to realize its position by strengths and weaknesses, and to improve its service quality in required dimensions accordingly. Customer selection of or decision on service is determined by factors, such as recommendations, personal needs, and past experiences or terms that constitute customer's expectations of the service perceived at the level probably different from that actually promised. The gap in service quality as perceived by customers is vitally important in that the hotel needs to recognize customers' consummation and satisfaction in order to do well in the tourism and hospitality industry.

This research was meant to examine customers' selection of 4-5 star hotels in Thailand as determined by service dimemsions of the service quality. The results of the study were expected to identify advantages and disadvantages of the service quality rendered. The five dimensions of the service quality--reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness—are for hotels to

create the service quality to satisfy their customers. The subjects of this research were 478 customers of 4-5 star hotels in Thailand. The survey questionnaire for data collection was constructed after literature review of major research works.

2. Literature Review and Related Research

This section covers literature review in various aspects: service quality, service expectation, perceived service, dimensions of service quality: SERVQUAL Model, tourists lodging, hotel rating, tourism and hospitality in Thailand, followed by related research in the areas of tourism and hospitality, service quality and customers' selection of accommodation.

2.1. Literature review

2.1.1 Service Quality

As for the definition of *service*, Kotler (1997) put it as *an action or an activity which can be offered by a party to another party, which is intangible and cannot affect any ownership.* Service may be related to a tangible product or intangible product. On the other hand, Zeithaml (1984) mentioned that *service quality is a focused evaluation that reflects the customer's perception of specific dimensions of service,* namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles. Lewis & Booms (1983) defined service quality (SQ) as *a comparison of perceived expectations (E) of a service with perceived performance (P), giving rise to the equation SQ=P-E.* Service Quality is therefore an assessment of how well a delivered service conforms to the client's expectations. Service business operators often assess the service quality provided for customers to improve their service, to quickly identify problems, and to better assess client satisfaction (Mmutle, 2017; http://www.businessdictionary, 2019).

Service quality can be referred to as *attainment in customer service.* Customers form service expectations from past experiences, word of mouth, and marketing communications (Parasuraman, 1991). Normally, customers compare perceived service with expected service, and if the perceived service exceeds expected service, the customers are disappointed. Service quality counts as the most important influence for customers' buying decisions and contributes to market share and returns on investment.

2.1.2 Service Expectation

Customer expectations refer to the perceived value or benefits that customers seek when purchasing a good or service. It is the result of the 'learning' process and can be formed very quickly because the first impression matters a lot. Customers' expectations influence over decision-making processes and are unlikely to change. For example, branded items are often

related to quality. Most customers expect that well-known brands are of high quality and thus tend to evaluate the product's performance higher than that of an identical product of a less-known brand. This is one of the reasons new brands find it difficult to catch customers' attention in presence of superior products. Most successful companies therefore turn to service of that particular new product or brand for added value. Managing and fulfilling customer expectations are of vital importance to the success of any brand/company. Customers often want more, better, and faster of a product or service. Expectations of high-performing products are always rising (hppts://www.mbaskool.com, 2019). Archerybusiness (https://www.archerybusiness.com, 2019) defined expectations as *a combination of beliefs and assumptions about what is likely to happen in the future.* Perceptions are very subjective and based on personal interpretations of information collected during one's experience. Perceptions vary by spending experience, current mood and emotions. Between each customer's *expectations* and *perceptions* is a gap. The larger the gap, the more likely for a product/ service provider to create unsatisfied customers. If customers have low expectations, it is not difficult to satisfy them. If their expectations are high and a product/ service provider is not able to handle the latter's expected perceptions, they are likely to go elsewhere.

2.1.3 Perceived Service

Perceived quality can be defined as the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives. Perceived quality is a perception of customers and cannot necessarily be objectively determined because of subjectivity embedded in perception. Perceived quality is an intangible, overall feeling about a brand. However, it usually will be based on underlying dimensions regarding reliability and performance (http://www.studymarketing.org, 2019). Aaker (1991) identified *five dimensions of perceived quality of the service concept: (1)tangibles, (2) reliability, (3) competence, (4) responsiveness, and (5) empathy.*
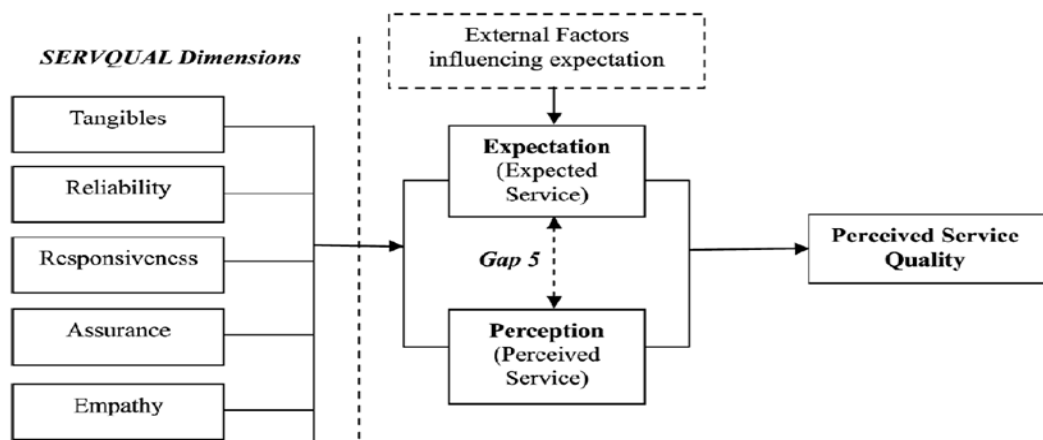
2.1.4 Dimensions of Service Quality: SERVQUAL Model

According to Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml (1991) and Parasuraman (1985, 1991), the quality of services is assessed for customers' satisfaction. Service satisfaction can be seen from comparison between customers' perceptions of service received and expectations of service desired. In other words, service quality is considered unacceptable when expectations are not met. Quality is satisfaction with perceived service and confirmed expectations. Besides, Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml (1991) introduced five dimensions which led to the development of SERVQUAL as follows:

1. Tangibles: The appearance of employees, physical facilities being offered, and equipment which forms part of the service experience.

2. Reliability: The way the service is being delivered, that is, the ability to deliver the promised service precisely and consistently.

3. Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers, respond to their queries, and also to provide rapid service to them.

4. Assurance: Understanding and courtesy of the staff and their capability to inspire trust and confidence.

5. Empathy: Helpful, care about the customers' requirements and the firm provides individualized attention to its customers with sympathy.

Figure 1: The Five Dimensions of Service Quality (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml,1991)

SERVQUAL is a multi-dimensional research instrument, designed to capture consumer expectations and perceptions of a service along the five dimensions that form service quality (Parasuraman, 1985, 1991). SERVQUAL is built on the *expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm*; service quality is understood as the extent to which consumers' *pre-consumption expectations* of quality are confirmed or disconfirmed by their *actual perceptions of the service experience*. Businesses use the SERVQUAL instrument (questionnaire) to measure potential service quality problems and the model of service quality to help analyze possible causes of the identified problems. The model of service quality is formed on the *expectancy-confirmation paradigm* which suggests that consumers perceive quality in terms of their perceptions of how well a given service delivery meets their expectations (Oliver, 1994). Service quality can be conceptualized as a simple equation: $SQ = P-E$ where SQ is service quality, P is the individual's perceptions of given service delivery, E is the individual's expectations of given service delivery, (Lewis & Booms, 1983). When customer expectations are higher than their perceptions of received delivery, service quality is considered low; when perceptions exceed expectations, then service quality is high.

2.1.5. Tourists Lodging

There are more than 25 subsectors in the tourism industry, especially three sectors--food services, air travel, and accommodations--accounting for over 45 percent of the total output. The largest of the three--the accommodations subsector--accounts for over 19 percent of total travel and tourism-related spending. In 2016 travelers spent more than US$293 billion on traveler accommodations and they supported more than 1.4 million U.S. jobs. The Air Travel subsector is the second largest and accounts for nearly 15 percent of total travel and tourism-related spending. In 2016 travelers spent nearly $227 billion on passenger air transportation services; this supported 895,000 U.S. jobs. The third largest subsector--the Food Services--accounts for more than 11 percent of travel and tourism-related spending at nearly $174 billion in 2016, and the revenue supported nearly 1.9 million U.S. jobs (https://www.archerybusiness.com, 2019).

Accommodation is one of the basic needs of tourism activities. Travelers and tourists need lodging for relaxation, while they are on a journey. All the major tourist destinations tend to provide for tourists low budget lodges/hotels to world-class luxury hotels. Travel agents and tour operators usually include accommodation in the itinerary (TAT Intelligence Center, 2019). Lodging or a holiday accommodation is defined as a type of residential accommodation (http://www.businessdictionary, 2019). People who travel and stay away from home for more than a day need lodging for sleep, rest, food, safety, shelter from cold weather or rain, storage of luggage, and access to common household functions. Lodgings may be self-catering, in which case no food is provided, but cooking facilities are available, such as Bulverton House in Sidmouth (UK), a self-catering establishment, proposing a range of flexible accommodation, with high energy efficiency, high specification fittings, and features and designated parking permanently lit overnight.

Poudel (2013) clarified that accommodation is a fundamental element of the tourism product. Tourism, in a broad sense, is dependent on the quality and quantity of accommodation facilities available. It is a very vital factor in tourism development. The development of accommodation should be considered a core factor of the tourism planning aimed at successful tourism development. In other words, accommodation is a *matrix of tourism*, and consequently, the appropriate choice of accommodation is required to expand and develop the tourism industry.

Tourist accommodation establishment indicates a local kind-of-activity unit providing as a paid service (although the price might be partly or fully subsidized) short-term or short-stay accommodation services. Tourism accommodation establishments are classified and described in groups: hotels and similar accommodation, holidays and other short-stay accommodation, and

camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks, and trailer parks.

2.1.6. Hotel Rating

Hotel rating is referred to as the concept that categorizes hotels in terms of 'grading', 'rating', and 'classification' in quality. The initial purpose is to inform travelers on basic facilities that can be expected, and later expanded into a focus on the hotel's experiences (Hensens, 2015). Food services, entertainment, view, room variations, such as size and additional amenities, spas and fitness centers, ease of access, and location may be considered in establishing a standard. Hotels are independently assessed in traditional systems and rest heavily on the facilities provided. Some consider these as disadvantages to smaller hotels whose quality of accommodation could fall into one class but the lack of an item, such as an elevator would prevent it from reaching a higher level of categorization, Poudel, 2013).

Hotel classification systems are used in the accommodation sector as providing an indicator to both consumers and intermediaries on the standards to be found at individual establishments. It is vital in the accommodation sector where the product (accommodation) is bought/listed sight-unseen (consumers/intermediaries are not able to see or test the product offering before the purchase/listing is made). Besides, hotel classifications can afford advantageous marketing platforms for individual hotels and for destinations desiring to promote the quality of their offer. However, establishing a classification system for tourism accommodation is a complex undertaking due to the variety of both accommodation types and of the cultural, environmental, and economic contexts in which the systems are embedded (Keshavarz, 2015; https://www.hotelstars.eu, 2019)

Table 2: Criteria for Hotel Stars

Hotel Star	Excerpt from the Catalog of Criteria
☆ Tourist	- Shower/WC or bathtub/WC for 100% in room - Cleaning daily in room - Color-TV together with remote control for 100% in room - Table and chair - Body wash or soap - Reception service - Facsimile at the reception - Publicly available telephone for guests - Extended breakfast - Beverage offer in the hotel

Hotel Star	Excerpt from the Catalog of Criteria
	- Deposit option
☆S Superior Tourist	The Superior flag is provided when the additional service and accommodation provisions are not sufficient for the next Hotelstar. The bathroom facilities are usually at the same level as for two-star hotels but built from cheaper materials. The cost for regular inspection by independent associations is waived as well.
☆☆ *Standard*	In addition to the single star (*) hotels: - Breakfast buffet - Reading light next to the bed - Bath essence or shower gel - Bath towels - Linen shelves - Offer of sanitary products (e.g., toothbrush, toothpaste, shaving kit) - Credit cards
☆☆S *Superior* *Standard*	The Superior flag is provided when the additional service and accommodation provisions are not sufficient for the next Hotelstar. The Standard-Superior does usually offer the same service level as three-star hotels but the interiors of the hotel are smaller and cheaper so that the three stars were not to be awarded by the inspection body. A two-star superior does not require mystery guesting.
☆☆☆ Comfort	In addition to the standard star (**) hotels: - Reception opened 14 hours, accessible by phone 24 hours from inside and outside, bilingual staff (e.g. German/English) - Three-piece suite at the reception, luggage service - Beverage offer in the room - Telephone in the room - Internet access in the room or the public area - Heating facility, hair-dryer, cleansing tissue in the bathroom
	- Place to put the luggage/suitcase, dressing mirror - Sewing kit, shoe polish utensils, laundry, and ironing service - Additional blanket and pillow on demand - Systematic complaint management system
☆☆☆S Superior Comfort	The Superior flag is provided when the additional service and accommodation provisions are not sufficient for the next Hotelstar. The accommodation facilities for a superior hotel need to be on a modern level and fully renovated which is checked regularly.
☆☆☆☆ First Class	In addition to the comfort star (***) hotels: - Accessible by phone 24 hrs from inside and outside, reception opened 18 hrs

Hotel Star	Excerpt from the Catalog of Criteria
	- Lobby with seats and beverage service
	- Breakfast buffet or breakfast menu card via room service
	- Minibar or 24 hours of beverages via room service
	- Upholstered chair/couch with side table
	- Slippers and bathrobe on demand
	- Cosmetic products (e.g. shower cap, nail file, cotton swabs), vanity mirror, the tray of a large scale in the bathroom
	- Internet terminal and internet access
	- "À la carte" –restaurant
☆☆☆☆S First Class Superior	The Superior flag is provided when the first-class hotel has a proven high quality not only in the rooms. The superior hotels provide additional facilities in the hotel like a sauna or a workout room. The quality is checked regularly by mystery guesting of external inspection service.
☆☆☆☆☆ Luxury	In addition to the first-class (****) hotels: - Multilingual staff, reception opened 24 hours - Doorman-service or valet parking - Concierge, page boy - Spacious reception hall with several seats and beverage service - Personalized welcome for each guest with fresh flowers or a present in the room - Minibar and food and beverage offer via room service for 24 hours - Personal care products in flacons - Offer Internet-PC in room - Room is safe - Shoe polish service, ironing service (return within 1 hour) - Turndown service in the evening - Mystery guesting
☆☆☆☆☆S Superior Luxury	Luxury star hotels need to achieve high expectations of international guest service. The Superior Luxury star is only awarded a system of intensive guest care.

Source: https://www.hotelstars.eu (2019).

The Hotelstars Union enhances the reputation and quality of the hotel industry in the participating countries by creating transparency and security for the guests and thereby encouraging hotel marketing.

2.1.7. Tourism and Hospitality in Thailand

In Thailand, the number of tourist arrivals has still been on the rise even it passed several unpleasant happennings from floods, bombings, coups, political upheavals to a few unsolved, mystery murders. In 2016 Thailand registered 32.6 million visits. The number of tourists visiting Thailand increased from 35.35 million in 2017 to 38.28 million in 2018 (http://www.thaiwebsites.com/tourism.asp, 2019). Tourism plays an important role in the Thai economy as stated by the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDB) that tourism accounted for 18.4% (or close to one-fifth) of the GDP of Thailand. It has risen from a level of 14.2% of GDP just four years earlier. A recent development is the increasing number of Chinese mainland visitors that surpassed 10.5 million visitors in 2018, making up 27.5% of the total (http://www.thaiwebsites.com/tourism.asp, 2019).

Table 3: The Statistics of Tourism Arrivals from 2010 to 2019

Year	Number of International Arrivals (million)
2010	15.9
2011	19.2
2012	22.4
2013	26.5
2014	24.8
2015	29.9
2016	32.6
2017	35.4
2018	38.4
2019	39.8

Source: http://www.thaiwebsites.com/tourism.asp (2019).

World Travel and Tourism Council reported the case of Thailand that the direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was 36.7 billion USD; the tourism sector represented 9.2% of total GDP in 2016. It directly supported 2,313,500 jobs (6.1% of total employment) in 2016 and rose to 6.3% in 2017 and then 5.0% to 4,009,000 jobs (10.4% of total employment) in 2027. The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry was 15.1% of total employment (5,739,000 jobs) in 2016. In 2017, it grew up 6.9% to 6,137,500 jobs and 4.6% to 9,599,000 jobs in 2027 (24.9% of total). Visitor exports generated 53.7 billion USD, 19.2% of total exports in 2016. In 2017, it rose by 10.3%, and grew by 7.3% from 2017 to 2027, and generated 4, 210.2 billion baths (119.5 billion USD) in 2027, 29.7% of the total. This sector investment in 2016 was 7.1% of the total investment of 7.0 billion USD. It raised by 10.3% in 2017, and 5.5% over the next ten years to 13.1 billion USD

in 2027, 10.0% of the total investment (TAT Intelligence Center, 2019).

Table 4: The Statistics of Hotel and Resort 4-5 Stars in Thailand in 2016

Hotel 4 Stars	Hotel 5 Stars	Resort 4 Stars	Resort 5 Stars
39	26	52	39

Source: http://www.thaihotels.org (2019).

Thai tourism has been flourishing with Chinese tourists as the key driver augmenting the hotel industry's occupancy rate and receipts. Investments in the hotel industry are expected to continue in (1) major tourist areas following the investment plans of Thai and foreign hotel chain operators, and (2) provinces that are regional growth centers and other tourist destinations –the implementation of the AEC, as well as, the increasing popularity of traveling to secondary destinations. The expansion of the hotel industry is mostly centralized in top destinations for international tourists. The performance of hotel businesses directly correlates with tourism conditions. More precisely, the revenues are related to the number of guest arrivals at the accommodation, lengths of stay, and room rates. In recent years, the number of rooms has been growing faster than the number of guest arrivals and it has caused room oversupply in certain areas. Also, there are still competing products, such as apartments and condominiums for daily rental services (even though it is illegal, but punishment is not strictly imposed). This makes the occupancy rate in Thailand each year stay at an average of 60-65%, not as high as Hong Kong (80-85%) and Singapore (80-90%) (http://www.thaiwebsites.com/tourism.asp, 2019).

2.2 Related Research

This section reports findings from research related to hotels' service quality, consumers' satisfaction, and issues of concern for hoteliers.

Mmutle (2017) studied customers' perception of service quality and its impact on reputation in the hospitality Industry. Customer satisfaction and the management of their expectations are a strategic component to the sustainability of any organization. In the hospitality industry, hotels are attempting to obtain augmented customer satisfaction by concentrating on the quality of service they provide to guests. The researcher examined the customers' perception of service quality and its impact on a selected hotel's reputation. The findings indicated that service quality has an impact on hotel reputation as a poor or good service provider, and that the customers and service providers have more or less similar notions of what service quality entails. The hotel departments have mechanisms and strategies for meeting

11

and exceeding customer satisfaction and .especially of dealing with customer complaints in sustaining organizational stability.

Markovic et al. (2010) measured perceived service quality using SERVQUAL: A Case Study of the Croatian Hotel Industry. The purpose of the study was to examine customers' perceptions of service quality in the Croatian hotel industry. The researcher assessed the perceived service quality of hotel attributes to determine the factor structure of service quality perception. The study results indicated the rather high expectations of hotel guests regarding service quality. 'Reliability', 'empathy and competence of staff', 'accessibility' and 'tangibles' are the key factors that best explained customers' expectations of hotel service quality. The findings can be used as a guide for hotel managers to improve the crucial quality attributes and enhance service quality and business performance.

Tabaku (2016) examined the service quality in the hotel sector in the Albanian context. The service quality is considered an important factor in generating customer satisfaction and repurchase intention. The researcher assessed the quality of the service offered by the hotels in the Albanian coast to identify the effect of service quality on the satisfaction of hotel customers. The findings showed the significance of the tourists' perceptions about the service quality and the impact of the perceived service quality on customer satisfaction for hotel guests. Businesses and institutions in the hotel sector have a better understanding of the factors from the customer's point of view to create and maintain high service quality for customer satisfaction.

Keshavarz (2015) investigated of the hotels' service quality and its effects on tourist loyalty in the Malaysian hotel industry. The population was international tourists in 4- and 5-star hotels located in Kuala Lumpur; the sample was selected based on the cluster sampling method. The result pointed to the significant effect of pricing on tourists` expectations of hotels. Moreover, tourists` expectation had a significant influence over perceived service quality but did not influence their satisfaction. This study supports tourist satisfaction and perceived service quality as having a significant effect on tourists` loyalty toward hotels. This research is helpful for hoteliers to plan new strategies for attracting more tourists to boost economic development in Malaysia

Burhan (2018) analyzed the service quality and satisfaction of tourists in Tanzania's hotel industry to find out how consumers (tourists) perceive service quality and whether they are satisfied with services offered by hotels in Tanzania. The study was conducted in tourist hotels from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to determine the overall service quality perceived by tourists in Tanzania hotels and identify dimensions that bring satisfaction to the tourists. The research findings revealed the overall service   quality perceived as low

(-17.4)--meaning expectations exceeded perceptions of services. Thus, the actual hotel services offered to tourists in Tanzania are less than what was expected because most dimensions of service quality pointed to the tourists' dissatisfaction. Thus, the Tanzanian hotels have to improve performance on all dimensions of service quality regarding tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and pricing in order to increase tourists' satisfaction and enable them to maintain their competitiveness with other countries.

Muslim et al. (2013) examined the relationship between the service quality dimension and customer satisfaction in the Malaysian hotel industry. A nonprobability sampling technique with a convenient sampling approach has been used in the study. The majority of the hotel customers were satisfied with the overall quality of the service provided by their hotels. The findings suggest that the service quality dimension makes a significant contribution to the prediction of customer satisfaction.

The study of Wiriyakitjar & Wonglorsaichon (2013) compared the differences of the desired service quality expectations of hotel customers, as well as classified the service features most relevant to hotel guests. A modified SERVQUAL scale was employed as the research instrument to achieve the result, and the five-dimension scale was used: confidence, professionalism, empathy, tangibles, and competitiveness. The study sample involved family-run and owner-operated hotels in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The findings indicated that "competitiveness" is the highest rank among the five service dimensions expected by hotel customers. This signifies that the hotel customers are concerned with service standards in the hotel industry. Inferential analyses showed that there are significant differences among hotel customers in their service expectation dimensions with different variables of visit, age ranges, and levels of income.

3. Research Methodology

This research used a questionnaire as the main tool to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data dealt with the relationship between one aspect (an independent variable) and another (a dependent variable) and the service quality in five dimensions: (1) reliability, (2) assurance, (3) tangibles, (4) empathy, and (5) responsiveness. The researcher tried to quantify the relationship between variables featured in this study like demographic profile, customer behavior, and service expectation and perceived service in 4-5 star hotels inside Thailand. Qualitative data were obtained from the respondents' viewpoints as hotel customers regarding their expectation and perception of service quality.

3.1 The Respondents

Tourism Authority of Thailamd reported in 2019 the number of tourists and 4-5 star hotels: 41 million international tourists and 120 million domestic tourists, and 156 4-5 star hotels/resorts on the list of Hotel Association of Thailand (Virtual Open Schooling, 2019). The researcher used purposive sampling technique to collect data from 478 respondents/ customers of the 4-5 star hotels in Thailand.

3.2 Research Instrument

The study used both primary and secondary data to understand consumer behavior toward service products in tourist lodging or to identify the customers' different attitudes toward service quality inside 4-5 star hotels in Thailand whether their service expectation is higher than the perceived service. The survey questions were in four sections: (1) demographic profile, (2) tourists' behavior in the 4-5 star hotels in Thailand, (3) service quality from service expectation and perceived service in 4-5 star hotels in Thailand, and (4) recommendations from the respondents via the open-questionnaire.

The survey questionnaire examined the respondents' satisfaction with service quality on a Likert scale to measure responses on service quality, ranging from 1= not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important, 5 = extremely important. This was to assess the factors of service quality of tourism accommodation in 4-5 star hotels in Thailand. The researcher wanted to assess service quality in terms of service expectation being compared with perceived service in five dimensions of SERVQU: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness.

3.3 Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the obtained data by descriptive statistics: frequency, percent, mean, and standard deviation, along with inference statistics: paired-sample t-test by the computer software for Windows.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Variables

The respondents' demographic variables are presented in Table 5 as shown below.

Table 5: The Respondents' Demographic Variables

Variables	Details	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	239	50.0
	Female	239	50.0
Age group	Less than 18	100	20.9
	19-30	158	33.1
	31-40	123	25.7
	41-55	71	14.9
	Older than 55	26	5.4
Marital status	Single	256	53.6
	Married	177	37.0
	Divorced/Widowed	45	9.4
Level of education	Lower than bachelor degree	217	45.4
	Bachelor degree	199	41.6
	Higher than bachelor degree	62	13
Occupation	Student	149	31.2
	Officer	75	15.7
	Business owner	127	26.6
	Employee	103	21.5
	Retiree/Unemployed	23	4.8
	Others	1	.2
Monthly income (baht)	15,000 or less	177	37
	15,001-25,000	61	12.8
	25,001-35,000	145	30.3
	35,001-45,000	38	7.9
	45,001-55,000	37	7.7
	More than 55,000	20	4.2

4.2 Customer Behavior

Customer behavior in terms of decision is shown in Table 6. The respondents made their decision on selecting the 4-5 star hotels in Thailand: 66.5 percent decided to use the hotel by themselves, 20.3 percent depended on the family like father, mother or relative, 12.6 percent selected the hotel by recommendation from their friends or girl/boyfriends, and less than 1 percent made their selection by suggestions from other persons.

Table 6: Customer's Decision on Selecting 4-5 Star Hotels in Thailand by Frequency and Percent

Customer's decision	Frequency	Percent
Own self	318	66.5
Father/Mother/Relative	97	20.3
Friends/Boy-Girl fiend	60	12.6
Others	3	.6

Table 7: Types of Hotel Rooms Selected by Customers

Types of Rooms	Frequency	Percent
Standard/Superior room	163	24.2
Deluxe (pool view, grand view, family)	199	41.7
Suite and executive floor (executive, business, honeymoon, family)	111	23.3
Others	4	.8

Table 8: Customers' Selection in 4-5 Star Hotels in Thailand

Factors	Frequency	Percent
Location	125	26.2
Facility for the service and comfort	96	20.1
Extra function (spa, swimming pool, fitness, executive lounge, etc.)	99	20.8
Price	47	9.9
Security	36	7.5
Quality and standard of Food & Beverage	36	7.5
Environment (garden, luxury building, green, etc.)	38	8.0
Others	-	-

Table 9: The Period of Stay in 4-5 Star Hotels in Thailand

Period of Stay	Frequency	Percent
Normal day (Monday - Thursday)	105	22.0
Weekend (Friday, Saturday, Sunday)	122	25.5
Holiday (New year, etc.)	142	29.7
A special day (Honeymoon, Birthday, etc.)	103	21.5
Others	6	1.3

Table 10: The Selection of 4-5 Star Hotel Location by Region in Thailand

Region	Frequency	Percent
Center	156	32.7
East	116	24.3
North	65	13.6
North-East	77	16.1
South	63	13.2

Table 11: Selection of 4-5 Star Hotel Location by Planning/Unplanning

Travel Planning/Unplanning	Frequency	Percent
Planning before using the hotel product	337	70.5
The unplanned or abrupt decision	140	29.3

4.3 Service Quality (SQ), Service Expectation, and Perceived Service

The service quality was compared between service expectation and perceived service in five dimensions of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. As shown in Table 12, the mean of the respondents' service expectation is higher than that of perceived service. The approximate mean of service expectation is 4.95 and perceived service is 4.3527, suggesting the customers' service expectation in 4-5 star hotels quite high. The perceived service reveals descending scores of five dimensions of service quality: reliability = 4.40, assurance = 4.36, responsiveness = 4.34, tangibles = 4.34 and empathy = 4.31. As shown, the perceived service quality in this study was an expectation not being met in which ES > PS (unacceptable quality).

Table 12: Service Expectation and Perceived Service in 4-5 Star Hotels inThailand

Service Quality	Service Expectation		Perceived Service	
	Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.
Reliability	**4.9464**	**.24665**	**4.3977**	**.50583**
Staff ability to solve problems and help customers.	4.95	.254	4.42	.609
The employees are honest in their work.	4.95	.250	4.40	.602
Service is a clear procedure, rapid and accurate.	4.95	.250	4.37	.607
Assurance	**4.9477**	**.25149**	**4.3648**	**.56474**
The good image of the hotel.	4.95	.246	4.36	.611

Service Quality	Service Expectation		Perceived Service	
	Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.
The staff has a professional service personality.	4.95	.269	4.37	.651
The staff gives advice and replies to the request correctly.	4.95	.246	4.36	.647
Tangibles	**4.9430**	**.25804**	**4.3413**	**.55963**
The hotel has received awards/certifications at the national/international level.	4.94	.257	4.37	.643
Various facilities and services (swimming pool, room service, coffee shop, bars, spa, etc.).	4.94	.261	4.34	.655
The environment and security systems are proper.	4.95	.269	4.32	.643
Empathy	**4.9477**	**.23948**	**4.3079**	**.59281**
Caring and pay attention to customers with individual services expectation.	4.95	.246	4.31	.652
The staff is sympathetic to the customers.	4.95	.242	4.31	.691
The customer/staff has the opportunity to express their opinions to improve service competence.	4.95	.250	4.30	.702
Responsiveness	**4.9491**	**.24446**	**4.3435**	**.59273**
The staff has good human relations and willing to deliver services.	4.95	.250	4.36	.643
The staff has a personality /enthusiasm for problem solving and assistance.	4.95	.246	4.36	.675
Service delivery is quick and accurate.	4.95	.243	4.30	.719
Total	**4.9468**	**.23926**	**4.3527**	**.48314**

4.4. Comparison of Service Quality by Paired t-test Analysis

From Table 13, the researcher compared the dimensions of service quality in the hotels; the result showed the comparison of service expectation (E) with perceived service (P) as significantly different at 0.05. The results revealed that the clients of 4-5 star hotels in Thailand found service expectation (E) and service perception (P) in 4-5 stars hotels were different in five dimensions of service quality.

Table 13: Mean, S.D and Paired Sample t-test of Service Quality

Dimensions of Service Quality	Service Quality		T	P
	Mean	S. D		
Reliability	.54786	.50768	23.912	.000
Assurance	.57687	.57999	22.017	.000
Tangible	.60014	.57626	23.077	.000
Empathy	.63747	.61154	23.098	.000
Dimensions of Service Quality	Service Quality		T	P
	Mean	S. D		
Responsiveness	.60692	.60763	22.133	.000
Total	.59388	.49652	26.476	.000

* Significance level = 0.05

5. Conclusion and Future Research

5.1 Conclusion

The study investigared impacts of service quality on tourists' selection of lodging of 4-5 star hotels in Thailand. For a tourism destination to reach achievement in attracting customers to spend time in selected accommodation, hoteliers need to recognize the target markets to be able to customize their service products to suit needs of different customers. Service Products play an important role in 4-5 star hotels in Thailand regarding service standards. This research showed five dimensions of service quality as an essence of good management and customer service implementation for success. The findings of this research showed that most respondents have their own decision on the selected hotel and its location to spend time on their holiday. The market segment also accounts for tourists' accommodation in the 4-5 star hotels at a reasonable price for weekdays and weekends. Hoteliers need to be well aware of the gap between customers' expectation and service perception toward service quality in five dimensions as studied and reported in this study. This is meant to create customers' satisfaction in the long run and attract them to come back as loyal clients of hotel products and services.

5.2 Future Research

This study identified the gap between customers' expectation and service perception of service quality experienced in lodging at 4-5 star hotels in Thailand. The researcher found that the gap as such existed as informed by the respondents in the study. In addition to the issues on service quality, it would be possible to investigate further into other related

areas in 4-5 star hotels, particularly crucial determinants, such as *service management*, *staff competency*, and *work quality*. Future research could be carried out in different tourist destination contexts of major cities, outer provinces, or regions in the country. This is to have a comprehensive picture of customers' choice of accommodation for their varied needs so that hoteliers can adjust their service provision management effectively.

6. The Author

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