

THE CAUSAL RELATIONSHIPS OF SERVICE MARKETING TO PERFORMANCE OF RESTAURANT ENTREPRENEURS TO SUPPORT 'FIT' TOURISTS WITH SERVICE QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the consistency of structural equation modeling showing the hypothesis of the influence of service marketing mix on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality and empirical data. The sample group consisted of 230 entrepreneurs of small food and beverage businesses in Thailand, serving Chinese "FIT" tourists. A questionnaire was used to collect data as well as statistical analysis, mean, standard deviation, and creating a causal relationship model of service marketing mix affecting the business performance of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand through service quality with linear structural relationships. The relationship was tested at statistical significance of 0.05.

The results revealed that restaurant entrepreneurs had an overall potential of their service marketing mix at a high level, had an overall level of service quality at the highest level, and had opinions on the overall performance at a high level. The hypothesis test results demonstrated that the developed model was consistent with the empirical data, and all variables can explain the variance in business performance, accounting for 55 percent. The service marketing mix had no direct influence on entrepreneurs' business performance, but the service marketing mix had an indirect influence on entrepreneurs' business performance through service quality with statistical significance at .01.

Keywords: 1) service marketing mix, 2) service quality, 3) Chinese "FIT" tourists, 4) Performance

1. INTRODUCTION

Smart Tourism was applied to tourists supported by Internet of Things and Cloud Computing[1]. This resulted in smarter connectivity changing tourists' patterns and behaviors to fit in the era where smartphones and applications emerge. The technological advancement of social media on the Internet created a sharing of experiences [2], which helps tourists to search, organize and share their experiences through social media, such as sharing sites so that others can compare, choose a

service provider, book transportation, accommodation or restaurants, and use mobile apps to set a destination [3]. This is an important opportunity to attract foreign tourists to visit Thailand, affecting the growth of Thailand's tourism.

"Thai tourism industry" is a significant part to drive the country's economy. The Second National Tourism Development Plan prioritizes driving the economy by technology and digital system to deal with changing tourists' behaviors. Considering the challenges in the development of the tourism industry based on demand, it was found that there has been an increase in the growth of Gen Y and Z tourists who travel by themselves, need convenience in transportation that comes with speed by booking in advance via applications, love to travel to explore authentic delicious food, and share restaurant's location and menu on social media [4]. Moreover, Wi-Fi is the most important thing during travel, and it was found that social media is an online medium that relatively affects travel [5]. This is consistent with the Tourism Authority of Thailand's quality-oriented policy (TAT). The market structure has been restructured from group to FIT or Free and Independent Traveler.

From data in 2019, Chinese tourists mostly visited Thailand with 11.14 million people with an increase of 1.07% and expense of 530 billion baht, accounting for 27.80% of the total income from foreign tourists. When considering the ratio of overseas travel among Chinese, it only accounted for 8-9% of all population according to population's passports with only 10%. This revealed opportunities for growth in the Chinese tourist market and Chinese tourists' changing behavior. They used more internet. In China, social media for Chinese people include "Youku," similar to YouTube, and "RenRen," a Chinese version of Facebook. "Baidu" is a popular search engine that Chinese people use to search for travel information. [6]found that the most popular search terms for foodies included "Local dining options", "Thai food tips", and "What to eat in Thailand". This information is useful to entrepreneurs to select products or services. Therefore, it is a good opportunity to focus on Chinese "FIT" tourists (Free and Independent Traveler), which is a high quality of tourists from China.

Due to the growth of tourism, the business competition has become more intense. Service business entrepreneurs should improve quality and find a target group based on the current trends. Learning Chinese social media is important to enhance the efficiency of communication channels that promote marketing to reach the target group as well as promotion in service marketing and development of travel products to meet the target customers.

The tourism sector plays a key role in supporting the expansion of the food and beverage businesses. In 2019, many cities such as Pattaya hosted the Fifth Amazing Pattaya Seafood Festival 2019 to show the potential of a world-class tourism city, ready to serve tourists with outstanding variety of seafood, service standards, hygiene, and food safety Chonburi Province [7, 8].

Since 2020, the impact of COVID-19 has blocked foreign tourists from traveling in Thailand. As a result, the number of Chinese tourists visiting Thailand has greatly decreased. However, many tourist well-known spots such as Phuket, Samui island, and Pattaya is ready to reopen for foreign tourists especially about vaccination against COVID-19 [9-11].

The policy of opening the country to welcome Chinese tourists. which is considered as one of the risk-free countries under the terms [12], which is a good opportunity, in line with the project plans and budget for organizing events in Thailand. This will be carried out in accordance with the Ministry of Public Health terms and conditions. To reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19. This is an opportunity to motivate Chinese tourists to come back to visit Thailand again.

From changing behaviors and the growth of Chinese "FIT" tourists along with the average spending of tourists and the competitive situation of entrepreneurs. As a result, there was a question of how entrepreneurs of small tourism businesses in food and beverage distribution businesses find an approach to improve tourism potential to achieve the business's goal, create a competitive advantage to be superior to

competitors, and grow continuously. From above, the researcher is interested in studying the approach and the causal relationship model of the development of smart tourism potential of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand to accommodate Chinese "FIT" tourists. This study only focused on entrepreneurs of small restaurants in food and beverage businesses in Thailand that serve Chinese "FIT" tourists.

This study examined the marketing strategy based on a concept of [13] which can consider factors of service quality based on the concept of [14] and the business performance of entrepreneurs' small tourism businesses in Thailand can be considered from the integration of [15] to measure and evaluate the results of the activities of the organization from customers' perspective to develop new knowledge for the development and enhance the tourism model by utilizing technology as well as having approaches for enhancing tourism potential that is useful for restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand. The results of this study can be used as approaches for planning, applying, or improving strategies to build competitive advantages to accommodate Chinese "FIT" tourists [7, 8, 14, 16-19].

This study aims (1) to study the service marketing mix that influences service quality and business performance of restaurant operators in Pattaya. And (2) To study the congruence of the structural equation model showing the assumptions of the influence of the service marketing mix on the business performance of restaurant operators in Pattaya through service quality and empirical data.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examined the marketing strategy based on a concept [13] about 7 elements as tools in formulating an organization's service marketing mix which can consider factors of service quality in 5 areas based on the concept of [20-22] that modified theory was presented by [23], which explains the ability to provide quality service that meets customers' expectations to differentiate a business over competitors. This can be measured by a tool called SERVQUAL, and the business performance of entrepreneurs' small tourism businesses in Thailand can be considered from the integration of [15] that modified theory was presented by [9] to measure and evaluate the results of the activities of the organization from customers' perspective. Gaining market share and having more channels to reach new Chinese tourists can create satisfaction in products and services, and Chinese tourists came back to buy products and services again with loyalty to the enterprise for the success of the organization. Literature review and related studies are below [2, 17, 20, 24-27].

From related studies between service marketing mix and service quality, the research by [14] found that the perception of marketing mix of spa business had a direct relationship with service quality perceived by customers. This is consistent with the research by [28] finding that the perception of marketing mix of place and marketing promotion was mostly related to assurance. In addition, the research by [29], Abstract) found that word of mouth in terms of persuasion affected the customer's assessment of premium restaurant service quality in Bangkok the most. These factors together could explain the customer's assessment of premium restaurant service quality in Bangkok at 54 percent. From the above reasons, the first hypothesis (H1) is that service marketing mix has a direct influence on service quality.

When reviewing research related to service marketing mix and business performance, [11] found that factors of the marketing mix affected the organization's business performance. The research by [30] confirmed that elements of the service marketing mix influenced customers' loyalty to Umrah travel agents in Malaysia. Besides, [31] found that a location of a hotel was the most key factor affecting the decision-making, followed by the staff, hotel rooms, and facilities. From the above reasons, the second hypothesis (H2) is service marketing mix has a direct influence on business performance.

Conducting research related to service quality and business performance, [25] found that product quality and service quality affected behavioral brand loyalty. This

explained how important product quality and service quality were in the restaurant industry and fast-food restaurants. [6] found that foreign tourists' perceived service quality in all 5 aspects of service quality had average more than the expectation towards service quality. This reflected that the customer perceived service to meet or exceed the expectations that the customer needed. From the above reasons, the third hypothesis (H3) is that service quality has a direct influence on business performance [5, 21, 28, 32-34].

Conducting research related to service marketing mix and business performance through service quality, the research by [35] found that marketing mix had a significant positive impact on direct and indirect tourists' satisfaction through service quality. This is consistent with [36], finding that the marketing mix of Spa business service was related directly and indirectly to service quality of customer's perception and satisfaction which prompted users' intention of returning to use services. From the above reasons, the fourth hypothesis (H4) is that service marketing mix has an indirect influence on business performance through service quality.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for approaches and a causal relationship model of service marketing mix on business performance of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand through service quality from related research represents structural equation modeling and the influence between internal latent variables of structural equation modeling by the conceptual framework of the influence of variables of the service marketing mix [13] on business performance of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand [15], both directly and indirectly, through service quality [24] to examine theoretical models and empirical data.

Therefore, External latent variables are service marketing mix (SERM) including Product (PROD), Price (PRIC), Place (PLAC), Promotion (PROM), People (PEOP), Physical Evidence (PHYS), and Process (PROC). Attribute variables are service quality (SERQ) including Tangibles (TANG), Reliability (RELI), Responsiveness (RESP), Assurance (ASSU) and Empathy (EMPA). And Internal latent variables are business performance (PERF) including Chinese tourists had more satisfaction towards products and services (SATI), Your enterprise gained more market share (SHAR), Your enterprise could find more channels to reach new Chinese tourists (REAC) and Chinese tourists came back to buy products and services again and had loyalty to your products and services (LOYA).

4. METHODS

This study to examine the causal model of the causal relationship of service marketing mix on business performance of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand through service quality and empirical data. Methods are as follows. Population is 1337 entrepreneurs of small food and beverage businesses in Thailand, serving Chinese "FIT" tourists between January 1, 2021 to April 30, 2021. The researcher determined the sample size of 10 times the observed variable [37]. Therefore, the sample size was 230 people, distributed in Thailand by convenience sampling.

In this study, a questionnaire was used as an instrument, and related variables were developed from concepts, theories, and related research, which can be classified into 4 parts. Part 1 is a questionnaire about entrepreneurs' characteristics. Part 2 is a questionnaire about service marketing mix (7Ps), the questions were applied from concepts and theories of the service marketing mix (7 Ps) based on [13]. Part 3 is a questionnaire about service quality, applied from SERVQUAL of [20, 21, 32]. Part 4 is a customer perspective questionnaire, and the questions were integrated from [15]. Questionnaires were tried out with 20 entrepreneurs of small food and beverage businesses, serving Chinese "FIT" tourists in Bangkok, and content validity was tested by Item-Objective Congruence Index or IOC to check the accuracy of the measure whether it was a measure of the variable that needed to be measured by 6 experts in

related fields with criteria of not less than .80 on all items for the reliability of the questionnaire whether each question was consistent or not by finding Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire ranged from 0.710 - 0.860, and the total reliability (Alpha) was .933, which had an alpha coefficient of not less than 0.70, resulting in a reliable questionnaire [37].

Preliminary data analysis was done by a number, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. There was a creation of a causal relationship model of service marketing mix on business performance of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand through service quality by defining structural equation modeling (SEM) with a ready-made program. Multivariate statistics were integrated by 3 analytical techniques, including confirmatory factor analysis, regression analysis, and path analysis to find the causal relationship of external and internal latent variables in structural equation modeling to identify the straightness of the pattern, magnitude, and causal influence characteristics between variables in the model as well as reducing preliminary statistical agreement. The research process was divided into 2 phases. Phase 1 includes the development of conceptual frameworks based on concepts and theories. Phase 2 includes the examination of the consistency of hypotheses and empirical data.

5.RESULTS

The results met research objectives as follows:

The first objective is to study service marketing mix that influences service quality and restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand. And the second objective is to examine the consistency of structural equation modeling showing the hypothesis of the influence of service marketing mix on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality and empirical data.

Before confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling analysis, variables' suitability was tested by the distribution of variables by analyzing skewness and kurtosis. It was found that all variables had skewness between -.488 to .838 and kurtosis between -1.255 to 1.042, meaning that all variables had a normal distribution since none of the variables had skewness greater than 3 and had kurtosis greater than 10. Then, a correlation was analyzed between constituent factors of the causal relationship for the development of smart tourism potential of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand to accommodate Chinese "FIT" tourists. Due to correlation, all observed variables had a correlation coefficient between .312 to .884. The highest correlation coefficient was less than .90, there would not be a problem of multicollinearity. In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was used to examine KMO (Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin) and found that Chi-square value was 3021.410 (df was 140 and p was less than 0.001), meaning that this correlation matrix differed statistically from the identity matrix at 0.001. This is consistent with the results of KMO, which was close to 1 (KMO= .951), meaning that variables were sufficient and correlated, and they were appropriate to examine the consistency with empirical data.

5.1 Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to analyze construct validity of the service marketing mix, service quality, and restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in as follows:

Construct validity analysis of service marketing mix (SERM) was found that service marketing strategy (SERM) measurement model was consistent with empirical data based on Chi-square value of 12.349, a degree of freedom (*df*) of 14, *p* – value of .578, goodness of fit index (GFI) of .985, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.000. When considering factor loading, it was statistically significant at .01 for all factors as shown in Figure 1.

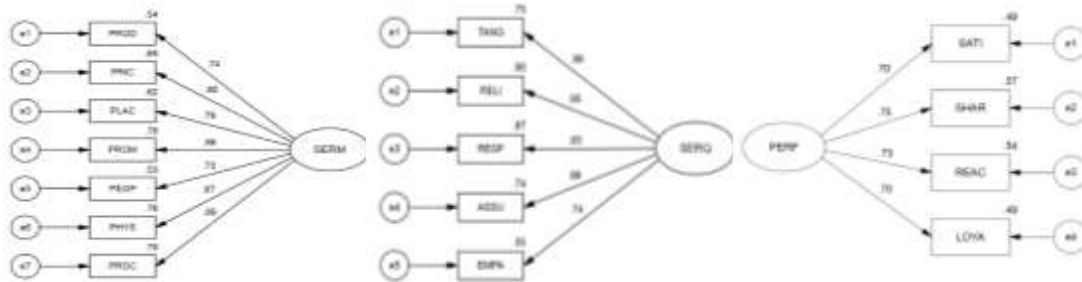


Figure 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Variables in Service Marketing Mix Measurement Model

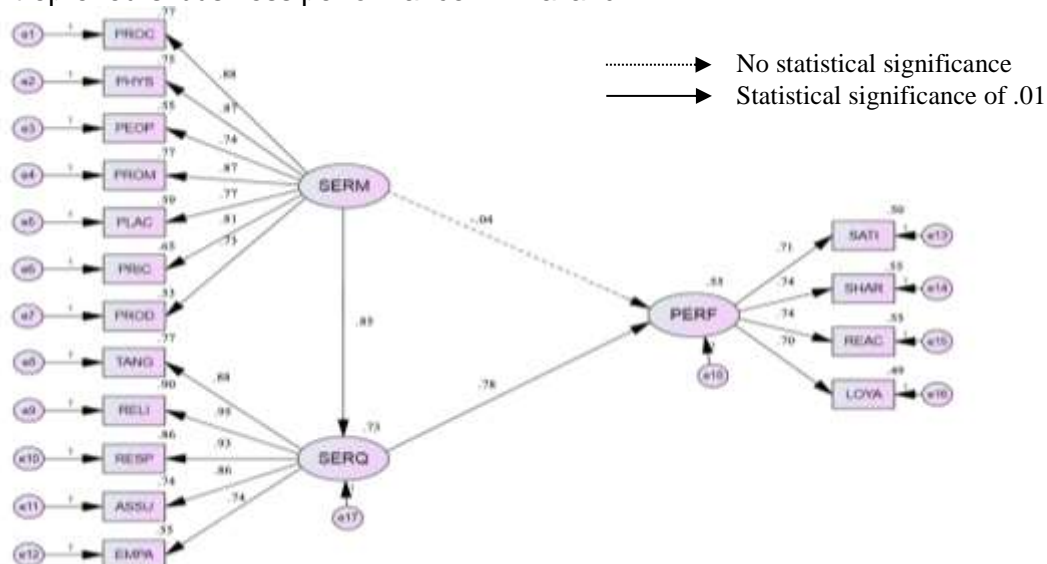
Figure2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Variables in Service Quality Measurement Model

Figure3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Variables in Business Performance Model

Construct validity analysis of service quality was found that service quality measurement model was consistent with empirical data based on Chi-square value of 2.732, a degree of freedom (*df*) of 5, *p* – value of .741, goodness of fit index (GFI) of .995, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.000. When considering factor loading, it was statistically significant at .01 for all factors as shown in Figure 2.

Construct validity analysis of restaurant entrepreneurs’ business performance in Thailand (PERF) was found that restaurant entrepreneurs’ business performance in Thailand (PERF) was consistent with empirical data based on Chi-square of .215, a degree of freedom (*df*) of 2, *p* – value of .898, goodness of fit index (GFI) of 1.000, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.000. When considering factor loading, it was statistically significant at .01 for all factors as shown in Figure 3.

5.2 The analysis of structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the relationship of variables in the causal model to see whether they were consistent with empirical data, and the analysis results were used to explain direct and indirect influences of the service marketing mix and service quality on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand.



Chi-square = 93.257, *df* = 93, *p* = .473, GFI = .953, RMR = .011, RMSEA = .003

Figure 4: Structural Equation Modeling Analysis (SEM)

The researcher adjusted the service marketing mix's structural equation modeling affecting restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality to accommodate Chinese "FIT" tourists based on modification indices, which allowed measurement errors to be correlated. As a result, the service marketing mix's

structural equation modeling affecting restaurant entrepreneurs' business equation modeling affecting restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality to accommodate Chinese "FIT" tourists was consistent with empirical data based on Chi-square of 93.257, a degree of freedom (*df*) of 93, *p* – value of .473, goodness of fit index (GFI) of .953, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .003, and relative chi-square (x^2/df) of 1.003, as shown in Figure 4.

Table 1
The Analysis of Factors Directly and Indirectly Affecting Effect Variables

Cause Variables	Effect Variables					
	SERQ			PERF		
	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
R2			0.73			0.55
SERM	.852**	-	.852**	-.044	.662**	.618**
SERQ	-	-	-	.777**	-	.777**

** Statistical significance of .01

From Figure 4 and Table 1, service marketing mix had a positive direct influence on service quality with statistical significance of .01 according to H1 with an influence coefficient of .852, being able to explain the variance in service quality by 73%.

Service marketing mix had no direct influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand with statistical significance. This is not consistent with H2, while service quality had a direct positive influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand with statistical significance of .01 according to H3 with an influence coefficient of .777. Moreover, the service marketing mix had a positive indirect influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality with statistical significance of .01 according to H4 with an influence coefficient of .618, being able to explain the variance in business performance by 55%.

6. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results can be discussed as follows:

Service marketing mix had a positive direct influence on service quality with statistical significance of .01 due to service marketing mix, namely product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and presentation, and service process. They were all key tools for businesses to formulate the service marketing mix to differentiate the business from competitors and to enhance business capacity to have service quality that meets clients' expectations. This is consistent with [35]. Moreover, [28] found that the perception of the service marketing mix including place and promotion were the most important values for service quality in terms of assurance, followed by empathy while people were a factor that Chinese tourists prioritized and directly and positively affected service quality of spa and Thai massage.

Service quality had a direct positive influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand with statistical significance of .01 due to service quality in terms of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. They were all key tools for the business to measure and evaluate the results of activities from customers' perspective. This is in line with [38], who analyzed the causal factors and found that service quality had a positive direct influence on the growth of the organization, and [25] found that service quality influenced behavioral brand loyalty. This explains how important service quality is in the restaurant industry and in fast-food restaurants.

Although some parts of the findings may contradict many concepts and theories that the service marketing mix had no direct influence on business performance, the researcher inferred that those theories were developed during normal conditions. Unlike this study, the study was conducted during the COVID-19 epidemic. As a result, it was found that the service marketing mix had no direct influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand. However, the study also found that the service marketing mix had a positive indirect influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality with statistical significance of .01, meaning that the enterprise of a good service marketing mix focusing on price, process. A system to support payment that is convenient, fast, and safe. Setting up a service process to deliver accurate, fast, modern. Would result in good service quality. This leads to better business performance. This is in line with [36] who found that the marketing mix of Spa business service was related directly and indirectly to service quality of customer's perception and satisfaction which prompted users' intention of returning to use services and [35], who found that the marketing mix had a significant positive impact on tourists' satisfaction indirectly through service quality.

Based on the study results, the policy recommendations and implementation can be summarized as follows:

1. The priority should be on enhancing service quality by providing assurance to clients, encouraging employees in the enterprise to work according to service standards, and enhancing restaurant measures to the highest level against Covid-19 based on the Ministry of Public Health. The service fee must be clearly notified with professional services.

2. The enterprise should mainly focus on formulating the service marketing mix in terms of price and process. Price tags must be displayed to easily and clearly understand. A system to support convenient, fast, and safe. Moreover, there should be a service process to deliver accurate, fast, modern, and interconnected services, resulting in service quality and customers' satisfaction, and come back to buy products and services again with loyalty to the enterprise.

However, The researcher has proposed recommendations for future research. As this study is a quantitative study, therefore, a qualitative study should be conducted to confirm the results of further quantitative studies. And the smart tourism potential of restaurant entrepreneurs in Pattaya mid- and post-coronavirus situation should be studied and compared.

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