

## SERVICE QUALITY OF LODGES ON KHAO-SAN ROAD AND SURROUNDING AREAS

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### Abstract

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The research is about Service Quality of Lodges on Khao-San Road and Surrounding Areas. There are two objectives of the study; first, to study the relation of customer demography which focus on customer annual income, customer education and customer occupation, and service quality when customer lodges on Khao-San road and surrounding areas; second, to study the relation between service quality and customer satisfaction when customer lodges on Khao-San road and surrounding areas.

The research methodology was relied on five dimensions of service quality (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy), the number of returned questionnaires was 400 and the data was analyzed by frequency, percentage, ANOVA and Multiple regressions. The result of the research indicated that customer demography which focus on customer annual income, customer education and customer occupation all have no directly relation with service quality when customer lodges on Khao-San road and surrounding areas. Moreover, the lodge's customer concern about tangibles of service quality at the most which shows mean=3.92 and S.D=0.957, while they concern about reliability at least which shows mean=3.38 and S.D=1.003.

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## Introduction

### Introduction and problem statement

Since 1957, the travel sector has become a part of the hospitality industry, and it has taken an important role in Thailand's economy and society. It is also one of the fastest-growing industries over the past three decades. Based on the report from WTCC in 2014, the contribution of tourism to GDP (gross domestic product) was \$38.3 billion, or 14.1% of total GDP and it is expected to reach \$78.7 billion, or 15.4%, by 2018. Travel-sector employment is expected to rise from 3,911,000 jobs, or 10.6% of total employment and one out of every 9.4 jobs, to 4,856,000 jobs, or 11.9% and one out of every 8.4 jobs by 2018. The real GDP for the traveling economy is expected to rise to 5.9% per annum over the next 10 years (WTTC 2014 Report).

According to the forecast, a huge number of foreign tourists will come to Thailand. Khao-San Road is a short but well-known and popular destination for foreign tourists, especially for backpackers. This road and surrounding areas contain many accommodations of differing conditions, and most of them are very inexpensive. This road has been recognized as "a short road that has the longest dream in the world". To achieve business success,

organizations must be aware of the Perception of Service Quality as Gronroos (2001); which is the ability to create long-term competitive advantages and benefits through Positive Differentiation such as Ghobadian et al. (1994). Service Quality consists of five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Customers make decisions on service purchases based upon Service Quality as the main consideration as Aaker (1996).

In the end, in order to continue attracting a steady flow of foreign tourists, suppliers/owners must upgrade and maintain their service quality. Good service quality can help a hotel improve its market share and profitability such as Oh and Parks (1997). In a highly competitive hotel market, individual hoteliers must find ways to create products and services that stand above the competition in quality and value. To achieve this goal, hoteliers must understand the needs of customers, and then set out to meet or exceed their needs. Therefore, one of the most important developments in the tourism industry is to raise service quality to achieve customer satisfaction based on many criteria.

### Objectives of the study

- 1) To study the relationship between customer demographic variables and



service quality of lodges on Khao-San Road with its surrounding areas.

- 2) To study the relationship between service quality as classified by five dimensions and customer satisfaction of lodges on Khao-San Road and in surrounding areas.

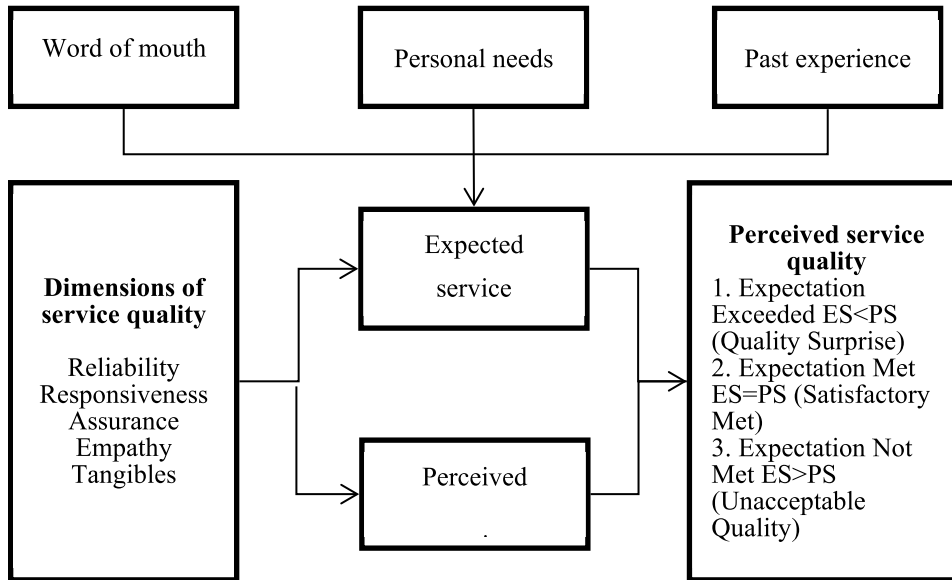
## Literature review

### Service quality

It is important to note that over the past decade, the service sector has assumed greater economic significance. The latest statistics show that the sector accounts for 60% of the value added in the European Economic Community. It states that “doing things wrong” typically accounts

for 30% to 40% of a service organization’s operating costs; therefore, eliminating waste and meeting customer needs, wants and expectations are major challenges to service industry management. This is why service quality is a crucial issue for a service organization (Abby Ghobadian, Simon Speller; Matthew Jones, 1994).

Parasuraman et al. (1988) declare that service quality has become a new area of interest in marketing research. Parasuraman et al. (1985) also propose a conceptual model concerning service quality that they developed as SERVQUAL with 10 dimensions, which were later reduced Parasuraman et al. (1995) to five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.



**Figure 1** SERVQUAL Model by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry

Source: *Perceived Service Quality*, (A. Parasuraman, V.A. Zeithaml, and L.L. Berry, "A Conceptual model of Service Quality and its implication for Future Research," *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49, fall 1985)

The SERVQUAL model has its detractors who consider it overly complex, subjective and statistically unreliable. However, the model is a simple and useful tool for qualitatively exploring and assessing customer service experiences, and it has been used widely by service delivery organizations. It is an efficient model to help an organization measure the gap between expected perceived and service levels.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry propose that service quality is the mean of the differences between expectations and performance, along with a quality

dimension that aims to measure customer expectations of the service and determine customer perceptions of the company providing the service performance. The score from this model is used to measure the perceived service quality to provide more accuracy to the overall service quality score.

## Customer demographics

Demographic is a scientific study of the characteristics and dynamics pertaining to the human population; it includes growth rate, size, density and distribution of a special group. A population census, vital



records and other data provide a source of information for study. If researchers want to study or record this data, referred to as demographics, they must understand how to scientifically obtain facts and how to define them relatively (<http://www.wisegeek.org>).

This research considers the customer demographic elements to consist of gender, nationality, age, marital status, education, occupation, annual income and purpose of visit.

### **Customer satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction is the degree of satisfaction provided by goods or services in an industry; it is generally measured by the existence and frequency of customer repeat purchases, which is important for an industry that wants to achieve high sales benefits. Meanwhile, customer satisfaction is an ambiguous and abstract concept; actual satisfaction with performance will differ from person to person, good to good, and service to service. Thus, the state of satisfaction depends on psychological and physical variables that correlate with customer satisfaction behavior, such as a customer's willingness to return and to recommend the vendor to someone else. Satisfaction levels can also vary based on a customer's ability to compare service delivery with other that of other vendors.

Understanding customer satisfaction can facilitate a company to maintain or improve satisfaction with its products/services. In addition, inferior products/services can be improved to create new and good impressions on customers.

### **Relationship between customer demographics and service quality**

Some studies investigate the effects of demographic factors on service quality in a variety of fields. According to many of these studies, service quality is perceived differently by a customer's demographic background, although some findings do not confirm the crucial role of demographic factors; for example, Ramez (2011) studied the service quality of Bahraini commercial banks and found no significant, overall relationship between customer demographic variables and service quality. Likewise, studies by Schwantz (1996) and Ilias, Hasan, Rahman and Yaso (2008) in the higher education services sector found no significant relationship between customer demographic variables and service quality.

### **Relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction**



Academicians give various definitions of quality. They state that customer satisfaction can be related to the perceived value or pricing of goods/services, but service quality itself isn't based solely on prices as Fornell, Anderson, and Lehmann, (1994).

Thus, a structure equation model provides the evidence that customer satisfaction has been considered as based on service quality Taylor (1992). Another researcher proposed that "definitions of consumer satisfaction relate to a specific transaction (the difference between predicted service and perceived service) in contrast with 'attitudes', which are more enduring and less situational-oriented," Lewis (1993, pp. 4-12). Moreover, customer satisfaction may be a result of service quality, as some researchers have found evidence to support of this point (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Fornell et al., 1996; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996). In short, a significant relationship exists between service quality and customer satisfaction, but it could be a complex relationship interrelated with customer satisfaction, service quality and

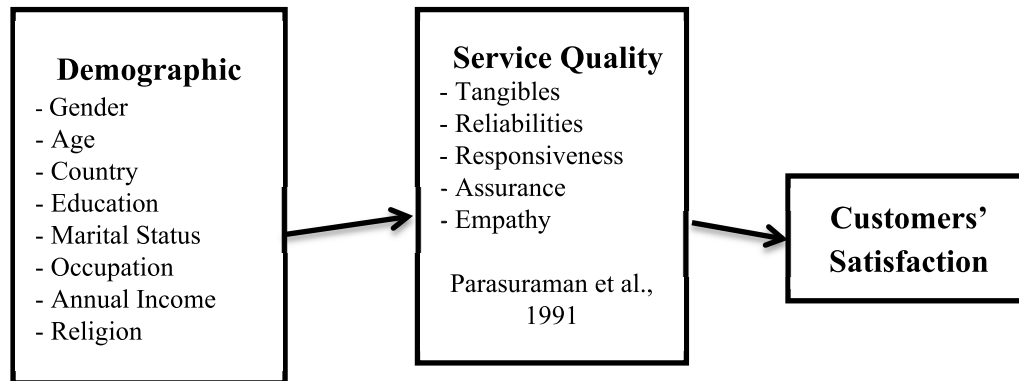
service quality dimensions. The point is, customers of service might be satisfied for reasons beyond service quality alone.

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## Conceptual framework

This research focuses on service quality and customer satisfaction toward lodging on Khao-San Road and in surrounding areas. The conceptual framework studied is based on SERVQUAL and its five dimensions as Parasuraman et al. (1991).

Furthermore, this research examines population demographics and critical factors of perceived service quality in evaluating customer satisfaction in accordance with the conceptual framework.



**Figure 2** Conceptual framework

- 1) Demographic Factors – independent variables.
  - 2) Service quality with five dimensions; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy in order to assess how the demographic factors effect to service quality.
  - 3) The effect of service quality to customers' satisfaction when they lodge on Khao-San and surrounding areas.
- 2) There is a significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

### Hypothesis 1

H0 1: There is no significant relationship between a customer's demographic characteristics and service quality; and

H1 1: There is a significant relationship between a customer's demographic characteristics and service quality.

### Hypothesis 2

H0 2: There is no significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction; and

H1 2: There is a significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

## Hypotheses test

This study sets the hypotheses to tourists in order to study two key factors as follows:

- 1) There is a significant relation between customer demographic characteristics and service quality when measured on five dimensions; and

# Results

## Hypothesis 1

**Table 1** Model summary analysis

R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the estimate
.545	.316	.311	.362

Table 1, Model Summary table, shows the R-squared at 31.6%, which means the service quality of the lodges can be explained by customer demographics. But the adjusted R-squared is 31.1%, which

means the value of the R-squared and adjusted R-squared are much closer because the number of observations is very large compared with the number of predictors.

**Table 2** ANOVA analysis

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	50.154	2	10.051	83.907	.063
Residual	74.555	397	.114		
Total	143.709	399			

*\*Significant at 95% Confidence Level*

Table.2, ANOVA table, shows a p-value of more than 0.05 at the 95% confidence level, which means the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Thus, there is no

significant relationship between a customer's demographic characteristics and service quality.

**Table 3** Coefficients analysis

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
Constant	1.298	.149			8.636	.072
Gender	.375	.048	.408		7.758	.053
Age	.157	.051	.174		3.039	.071
Country	.129	.046	.410		2.751	.058
Education	-.321	.047	-.332		-6.752	.081
Marital Status	.328	.043	.372		7.549	.065
Occupation	.377	.049	.310		7.760	.078
Annual Income	.160	.048	.146		2.753	.066
Religion	.334	.058	.443		6.763	.048

*\*Significant at 95% Confidence Level*

Table 3, the coefficients table, indicates that most of a customer's demographic characteristics bear no significant effect on the service quality of lodges on Khao-San Road and surrounding areas without the factor of a customer's religion, because religion is the only factor with a p-value less than 0.05 at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, only religion has a significant relationship with service quality when customers stay at lodges on Khao-San Road and in surrounding areas.

Meanwhile, from the coefficients table, the standardized coefficients column shows that, when comparing all factors of customer demographics, the level of a customer's religion is the highest, which indicates that religion is the most important factor that can influence service quality. In addition, a customer's nationality and gender are important factors influencing service quality for customers staying in lodges on Khao-San Road and in surrounding areas.

## Hypothesis 2

**Table 4** Model summary analysis

R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the estimate
.708	.502	.496	.425

Table 4, Model Summary table, shows the R-squared is 50.2%, which means customer satisfaction in lodges on Khao-

San Road and in surrounding areas can be explained by service quality, and the adjusted R-squared is 49.6%.

**Table 5** ANOVA analysis

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	72.924	5	14.584	80.051	.000*
Residual	71.782	394	.180		
Total	144.708	399			

*\*Significant at 95% Confidence Level*

Table 5, ANOVA table, shows a p-value at less than 0.05 at the 95% confidence level. The null hypothesis can be rejected. Thus,

there is a significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

**Table 6** Coefficients analysis

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
Constant	.896	.144			6.169	.000*
Tangible	.312	.042	.345		7.212	.000*
Reliability	-.003	.056	-.004		-.074	.939
Response	.142	.047	.160		2.953	.001*
Assurance	.156	.055	.161		2.751	.005*
Empathy	.168	.047	.175		3.464	.000*

*\*Significant at 95% Confidence Level*

Table 6, shows the coefficients of four dimensions (tangibility, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) of service quality with a positive relationship on customer satisfaction in lodges along Khao-San Road and surrounding areas, because these four dimensions all have a p-value less than 0.05 at the 95% confidence level, which means they have a positive relationship on customer satisfaction.

However, reliability of service quality has a negative relationship due to its coefficients, which are negative to customer satisfaction with a p-value above 0.05, so it means the reliability of service quality has a negative relationship to customer satisfaction among lodges along Khao-San Road and surrounding areas.

Therefore, from the coefficients table, at the standardized coefficients column, the tangible level is highest compared with all related dimensions, which means that tangible is the most important factor in a positive relationship with customer satisfaction in lodges along Khao-San Road and surrounding areas.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Customers Satisfaction} = & 0.896 + \\ & 0.312\text{SQ\_Tangi} - 0.003\text{SQ\_Reli} + \\ & 0.142\text{SQ\_Respo} + 0.156\text{SQ\_Assu} + \\ & 0.168\text{SQ\_Emp} \end{aligned}$$

These estimates tell the amount of increase in satisfaction that would be predicted by a one-unit increase in service quality.

## Conclusion

The main objective of the research is to investigate the relationship between customer demographic and service quality, and the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction of tourists who take up lodging on Khao-San Road and in surrounding areas. According to the findings, the frequency & percentage analysis, men comprise the largest percentage of respondents. The majority are 31-40 years old. Most come from China, which conforms to the literature review stating the (www.bangkokpost.com) Thai-Chinese Tourism Alliance Association's declaration in February 2013 that Chinese tourists are the main supplier of Thailand's tourism industry and 3.3 million Chinese tourists were expected in 2013. Likewise, 194 respondents have Bachelor's degrees and most respondents were divorced. The majority of respondents were company employees, with many earning annual incomes of

B900,001-1,200,000. Most respondents declared their religion to be Catholic.

Most owners see service quality as hard to define by customer demographics. However, among demographic data, most place greatest importance on religion, because they feel a need to respect a customer's beliefs and they try their utmost to respect any taboos. The results conform to the literature review in Chapter 2 (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985), which states that service is most difficult to define when it cannot be verified, inventoried, measured, counted and tested. On the other hand, the table also found that all owners admit customer satisfaction can be explained by service quality, especially on the factors of assurance, tangibles and empathy. The results conform to the Chapter 2 literature review stating that a structure equation model provides the evidence that customer satisfaction has been considered based on service quality (Taylor, 1992).

## Discussion

### The relationship between customer demographics and service quality

Table 1-3 reveal that almost all factors of customer demographic characteristics have no significant relationship with service quality among customers in lodges on Khao-San Road and in surrounding areas, which conforms to the Chapter 2 literature review in which Ramez (2011), studying the service quality of Bahraini commercial banks, finds no overall significant relationship between customer demographic variables and service quality. The studies by Schwantz (1996) and Ilias, Hasan, Rahman and Yaso (2008) in the higher

education services also find no significant relationship between customer demographic variables and service quality.

On the other hand, the results similarly conform to the literature review in which McDonald (1996) states that service is largely intangible, because some specifications concerning uniform quality can rarely be set; it is a performance piece rather than a physical object. Clow (1997) describes service quality as a customer's judgment about facilities and whether they are perceived as excellent or even superior; it relates to a customer's attitude, but not equal to a customer's occupation and results from a comparison of expectation with performance. Kurtz & Clow (1998) indicate that a result of measurement cannot depend on a customer's education. Likewise, the results indicate only one factor, religion, has a significant relationship with service quality for customers in lodges on Khao-San Road and in surrounding areas. In comparing all factors, a customer's religion is the most important potential influence on service quality, even above nationality and gender. Therefore, to gain greater credibility from customers and increase market share and benefits, lodging operators along Khao-San Road and surrounding areas need to pay more attention to these three factors (religion, nationality and gender) concerning their customers' demographic characteristics.

#### **The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction**

Table 4-5 indicates that that service quality has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction for guests along Khao-San Road and surrounding areas. These results conform to the Chapter 2

literature review in which Zeithaml et al. (2006, pp. 106-107) state that "Several definitions indicated that some factors such as goods/service quality and perceived service quality can affect to customer satisfaction." They provide evidence that service quality is a subordinate construct of customer satisfaction.

Meanwhile, most customers have a negative attitude toward aspects of reliability of service quality regarding the lodges. Regarding multiple regression analysis, the negative coefficient shows that customers have lower confidence and trust regarding reliability of service quality; thus, the lodge owners need to compare their levels of customer confidence and trust with lodges located in other renowned parts of Bangkok, where tourist services have been familiar for a longer time.

## **Implication**

Nowadays, 80 customer lodges are located on Khao-San Road and in surrounding areas. According to the findings herein, most lodging customers are 31-40 years old and come from China. Many are divorced men with incomes of Bt900,001-1,200,000 who have earned Bachelor's degrees and work for companies. The bulk of them are Catholic. All of these imply that the operators of lodges from Khao-San Road and surrounding areas need to pay more attention as to how can they effectively improve their service quality. The operators should start with their employees by focusing on teamwork, interpersonal skills, inter-departmental communication and coordination with each other. Meanwhile, the operators

also need to encourage employees to be active and enthusiastic team players in order to build a positive work attitude. If team work improves, service quality will improve as well and customers will be more satisfied.

## Limitations

The study is limited to guests in the lodges of Khao-San Road and surrounding areas; thus, the findings cannot be extended to other places. Sometimes, if respondents were in a hurry or did not pay close attention to the questionnaire, they may have answered inaccurately. Khao-San Road and the surrounding areas attract tourists who just want to have fun or relax; therefore, few tourists were willing to accept the questionnaire and complete it.

## Further research

1. This research limits the scope of study, so the data were collected only from lodges along Khao-San Road and surrounding areas. For further study, it is recommended that research should examine service quality and customer satisfaction at lodging near other renowned areas of Bangkok, such as the Rose Garden, Amphara Floating Market and Chao Phraya River.

2. This research studied only five dimensions of service quality affecting customer satisfaction. Therefore, further research is recommended that analyzes other factors, such as customer attitude and customer behavior, in order to gain a variety of elements to better understand customer satisfaction.

3. This research is limited to studying only the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction; thus, further research is recommended to study the relationship between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction so as to build repeat business.

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