

Service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction for golf tourism in Thailand

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Abstract

This study used qualitative research to investigate the four main units of service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction for golf tourism in Thailand. Statements from experts in the golf tourism industry and university educators who responded to open-ended questions helped to clarify the meaning of the four main units which were service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction of the qualitative research for golf tourism in Thailand. The results indicated that golf course image was the major difference between golf tourism in Thailand and golf tourism in other countries, golf course image was the major reason given for why golf tourists play golf in Thailand. The service quality was the critical qualification for the components of competitive advantages, and service quality was the most important point for the improvement of golf tourism in Thailand. The results of the interrelationships among service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction indicated that 1) Service quality had a direct and positive effect on the golf courses image 2) Service quality had a direct and positive effect on perceived value 3) Golf course image had a direct and negative effect on perceived value 4) Golf course image had a direct and positive effect on golfer satisfaction. And 5) Perceived value had a direct and positive effect on golfer satisfaction.

Keywords: Service quality; Golf course image; Perceived value; Golfer satisfaction;
Golf tourism in Thailand

Introduction

The information from TAT during the event of Thailand Golf Travel Mart 2019 stated that Thailand is among the top destinations in Asia for golf with number about 700,000 golfers coming to Thailand each year which generated 3.3 billion baht in revenue for Thailand tourism industry in 2018 (TAT News, 2019). Thailand has become one of the top golf destinations in Asia. There are a large number of world class golf courses throughout the country that welcome tourists as well as golfers seeking temporary or permanent membership. The recent applauses given to the country has been an award by the World Golf Travel Agents Association or WGTA to Thailand as the best up and coming destination for golf vacations. Also Chiang Mai was voted The Next Golf Destination of the Year for Asia

and Australasia 2017 by International Association of Golf Tour Operators or IAGTO. And Thailand Best Golf Destination in Asia Pacific (First Runner Up) from the event of 13th Asia Pacific Golf Summit 2019 in India (Thai News Agency, 2019). Overwhelming golfer demand for golf products and services has become increasingly evident in recent years. The golf tourism industry in Thailand has been considered to be one of the main approaches to influencing market position strategy in an extremely competitive tourism market and for golf businesses to distinguish themselves. Therefore, in the academics, they have begun to pay more attention to golfer satisfaction and golfer loyalty in the golf tourism industry.

Golfer satisfaction has been viewed as an important issue for the golf tourism industry because of its impact on repeat business and word of mouth reputation. In reality, the golf tourism industry in Thailand has not always responded satisfactory to the golfers' demands for improvement. It is important to understand the elements of service quality and other factors that influence a golfer's satisfaction in order to keep existing golfers. Anderson, Fornell, Lehman (1994) stated that there are large economic benefits of measuring and understanding customer satisfaction including increased revenues and decreased marketing cost. This study will help to understand golfer satisfaction with the service quality, golf course image, and perceived value according to the literature review and the analysis of the interrelationships among them.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the important levels of service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction for golf tourism in Thailand by using qualitative research method.
2. To analyze the interrelationships among service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction for golf tourism in Thailand.

Literature Review

Golf market is like many niche tourism products that can play an important role in positioning a destination. The main of the literature that considers customers equivalent to tourists is focused on satisfaction and value (Petrick, Backman, Bixler, & Norman, 2001; Petrick, & Backman, 2002). Intentions to visit a destination of the customers are also take part into a destination's brand which is the perceived in the tourist memory (Cai, 2002).

The results from the research on understanding golfing visitors to a destination by Hennessey, stated that “the value and satisfaction with the golf courses played were high and consistent across the three golf categories of frequency of golf played was infrequent, moderate, and dedicated but there is no indication that this result would hold for other golf destinations, so this would be an interesting way to extend the research to other golf destinations. Do feelings of value and satisfaction vary across the three golf categories at other golf destinations? If so, that would be very useful for designing a satisfaction strategy for other golf destinations”.

Service Quality, Corporate Image, Perceived Value, and Customer Satisfaction in Tourism Industry Exploration customer satisfaction as a form of consumer purchasing behavior is corresponding with a framework for understanding customers’ wants and needs. The framework of customer satisfaction includes important components that must be described as a basis for this study. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1996) indicated that five attributes including physical environment, contact personnel, quality of service, corporate identity, and accessibility determine corporate image.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) indicated that service quality is the difference between consumer expectations of service and perceived service. Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham (1995) demonstrated that customer satisfaction indices offer possibilities to value the profitability of various satisfaction attempts. Therefore, the potential relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction may be expected.

The perceived value is related to the price paid. The basic prediction is that when service providers increase their price to improve on service quality, they expect that consumer satisfaction will increase at the same time. Oliver (1980) demonstrated that these expectations are disputed to positively affect customer satisfaction because they serve in the evaluation process.

Influence of image on perceived value and customer satisfaction

Image refers to the brand name and the kind of relatedness customers get from the product, brand, and company (Johnson, Gustafsson, Andreassen, Lervik, & Cha, 2001). This construct was first introduced in the Norwegian Customer Satisfaction Barometer (NCSB) model (O’Loughlin, & Coenders, 2002; Andreassen, & Lindestad, 1998a; Andreassen, & Lindestad, 1998b). Martensen, Gronholdt and Kristense (2000) indicated that image is an

important component of the customer satisfaction model and expected that image would have a positive effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In the research of the corporate image, Lee (2003) indicated that organizations should set standards that help to create a positive image with five factors including physical environment, contact personnel, quality of service, corporate identity and accessibility, to have a positive impact on repeat business.

Influence of service quality on perceived value and golfer satisfaction

Quality has been shown to be a preceding of perceived value (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002). Value is positively affected by perceived quality (Anderson, & Sullivan, 1993; Fornell, 1992). Service quality has become an important topic because of its explicit relationship to customer satisfaction (Bolton, & Drew, 1991). Both perceived quality and perceived value are expected to have a direct and positive effect on overall customer satisfaction (O'Loughlin, & Coenders, 2002).

Influences of perceived value on golfer satisfaction

Howard and Sheth (1969) have demonstrated that customer satisfaction is dependent on value and perceived value is the perceived level of product or service quality relative to the price paid. Previous research has demonstrated that the measurement of consumer satisfaction should be used in association with the measurement of perceived value (Oh, 2000; Woodruff, 1997). Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha and Bryant (1996) found that price perceptions affect customer satisfaction. Their study indirectly used a ratio of value and equality perceptions rather than a direct measure of price perceptions. Value is expected to have a direct impact on customer satisfaction (Anderson, & Sullivan, 1993; Fornell, 1992).

Research Method

Qualitative Research

The purpose of using qualitative research for this study was to identify the important levels of components in service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction based on the perceptions of an expert in the hospitality and tourism industry.

The open-ended questionnaire was designed to be self-administered. Eleven faculty members from department of Hospitality and Tourism Management and nine faculty

members from School of Management were asked to respond to the questions. Eighteen faculty members gave the verbal agreement to complete the open-ended questionnaire. Thirty experienced golf course managers were selected from a list of the golf courses that have an agreement with the university. Twenty three golf course managers agreed to participate in this qualitative research.

First, the fifty potential guests have been contacted through telephone and face to face meetings (n = 50). After receiving their verbal agreements, the open-ended questionnaire has been hand delivered to each of them. A follow up was made by telephone to increase the response rate. Eighteen from the university faculty members in hospitality and tourism management and twenty three from the experienced golf course managers, total of forty one completed questionnaires were returned. The response rate was eighty two percent.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a qualitative classification of a given body of content, in terms of a system of categories created to yield information relevant to specific items (Kaplan and Goldsen, 1965). The technique of content analysis should indicate the frequencies of elements of such attributes with a high degree of accuracy. Content analysis allocates numerical value to such frequencies (Marris, & Thornham, 2000).

In addition, words, phrases, and sentences used by guests to describe an experience and procedure were considered as units of data. A coding guide was prepared for classifying guests' responses for the four open-ended questions based on a framework used by Marris and Thornham (2000). According to the guidelines for conducting a content analysis referred here, responses were categorized based on the four main units which were service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction.

Content Validity

Content validity refers to how the instrument measures the research theories and concepts. Content validity means that the measurement instrument adequately covers the most important aspects of the construct that is being measured (Churchill, 1996). The validity and reliability of the survey for this study was improved by completing a content analysis of responses to four open-ended questions. Therefore, the six experts, three faculty members

of the Hospitality and Tourism Management and three managers of golf courses have been invited to analyze the guests' responses.

Data was collected to test six hypotheses for the interrelationships among service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction as below.

Hypothesis 1: Service quality has a direct and positive effect on golf course image.

Hypothesis 2: Golf course image has a direct and positive effect on perceived value.

Hypothesis 3: Golf course image has a direct and positive effect on golfer satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4: Service quality has a direct and positive effect on perceived value.

Hypothesis 5: Service quality has a direct and positive effect on golfer satisfaction.

Hypothesis 6: Perceived value has a direct and positive effect on golfer satisfaction.

Research Results

For question one “In your opinion, what are the differences between golf tourism in Thailand and golf tourism in other countries?” the top five attributes for the differences between golf tourism in Thailand and golf tourism in other countries were “number of locker rooms”, “additional amenities, such as Jacuzzi, spa and massage”, “service quality”, “style of architecture”, and “effective organizing and planning”. In turn, number of locker rooms was categorized into the construct of service quality, additional amenities such as Jacuzzi, spa and massage was categorized into the construct of golf course image, service quality was categorized into the construct of service quality, style of architecture was categorized into the construct of golf course image, and effective organizing and planning was categorized into the construct of golfer satisfaction.

For question two “In your opinion, what are the reasons why golf tourists play golf in Thailand”, the top five attributes for the reasons why they play golf in Thailand were “service quality”, “convenient location”, “architecture represent traditional culture”, “natural attraction”, and “brand recognition”. In turn, service quality was categorized into the construct of service quality, convenient location was categorized into the construct of golf course image, architecture represents traditional culture was categorized into the construct

of golf course image, natural attraction was categorized into the construct of golf course image, and brand recognition was categorized into the construct of golf course image.

For question three “What are the advantages / disadvantages of golf tourism in Thailand?” the top three attributes for the advantages were “service attitude”, “service quality” and “facility / interior remodeled”. In turn, service attitude was categorized into the construct of service quality, service quality was categorized into the construct of service quality, and facility / interior remodeled was categorized into the construct of golf course image.

The top three attributes for the disadvantages of golf tourism in Thailand were “caddie quality”, “language abilities”, and “appearance of staff”. In turn, caddie quality was categorized into the construct of service quality, language abilities were categorized into the construct of service quality, and appearance of staff was categorized into the construct of golf course image.

For question four “What is the most important point for the improvement of golf tourism in Thailand, in your opinion?” the top three attributes were “language abilities”, “golf course need remodeling”, and “caddie training”. In turn, language ability was categorized into the construct of service quality, golf course need remodeling was categorized into the construct of golf course image, and caddie training was categorized into the construct of service quality.

Compared to the frequency of each construct in the qualitative research (see Table1), the golf course image construct (frequency = 37) was the major difference between golf tourism in Thailand and golf tourism in other countries. The golf course image construct (frequency = 49) was the major reason given for why golf tourists play golf in Thailand. The service quality construct (frequency = 55) was the critical qualification for the components of competitive advantages, referring to the advantages and disadvantages of golf tourism in Thailand. The service quality construct (frequency = 46) was the most important point for the improvement of golf tourism in Thailand.

Table 1 Construct and Frequency of Four Questions

Questions	Construct	Frequency
Q1: In your opinion, what are the differences between golf tourism in Thailand and golf tourism in other countries?	Service Quality	30
	Golf course Image	37
	Golfer Satisfaction	8
Q2: In your opinion, what are the reasons why golf tourists play golf in Thailand?	Service Quality	36
	Golf course Image	49
	Golfer Satisfaction	3
Q3: What are the advantages / disadvantages of golf tourism in Thailand?	Service Quality	55
	Golf course Image	30
	Golfer Satisfaction	3
	Perceived Value	3
Q4: What is the most important point for the improvement of golf tourism in Thailand, in your opinion?	Service Quality	46
	Golf course Image	22
	Golfer Satisfaction	1

Note. The frequency on Q3 was to combine the amount of advantages and disadvantages.

The results of the interrelationships among service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and golfer satisfaction were 1) Service quality had a direct and positive effect on the golf courses image. 2) Service quality had a direct and positive effect on perceived value. 3) Golf course image had a direct and negative effect on perceived value.

4) Golf course image had a direct and positive effect on golfer satisfaction. And 5) Perceived value had a direct and positive effect on golfer satisfaction.

Discussion of Research Results

From the findings revealed that service quality had a positive effect on the image of golf courses in Thailand. Caddies service' attitude is the critical factor for improving the golf course image. Caddies' on the job training, especially focusing on the delivery of promised service and courtesy to the customers is needed because service has an intangible quality, golf course managers should build an open organizational culture to encourage caddies to share their knowledgeable regarding service skills and to help to avoid the customer complaints.

From the service quality had a positive effect on perceived value. The customization is recommended for the managerial implication. Customization is also trend for the golf tourism industry. Golf course managers might choose to set up a systematic customer history tracking for tracking customers' consuming behaviors.

The negative relationship between golf course image and perceived value demonstrated that customers believed that golf courses did not reach a standard compare to the price they pay. First, customers believed that golf courses in Thailand were the world standard golf courses and will provide outstanding service and facilities. However, when golfers played golf in Thailand, they often feel disappointed in the service and facilities provided.

Golf course image had a positive effect on golfer satisfaction. Golf course image is the overall impression made in the minds of the public about golf courses, including the impressions of the architecture, services, and food. For example, the Phoenix Gold Golf and Country Club emphasizes its unique and temple styled architecture to attract golfers. When golfers enter to a golf course, golf course caddies greet them with a smile and Sawasdee. The Thai Sawasdee action shows the sincere warmth of the welcome.

Perceived value had a positive effect on golfer satisfaction. Golfers can pay more for better services and facilities and got a high level of golfer satisfaction in this study. Moreover, golfers thought that they made the right decisions when they chose to played golf in Thailand and their experiences were enjoyable.

Suggestions

Suggestions of Research Results

A foundation for the preliminary research has been provided in this study. There are many constructs of the customer satisfaction models, such as, customer expectations, perceived value, service quality, customer satisfaction, complaint behavior, and customer loyalty. In this study has been focused on four constructs of service quality, golf course image, perceived value, and customer satisfaction, to measure the golfer satisfaction for golf tourism Thailand. However, adding or discovering other potential constructs, such as, customer-oriented, employment, environmental, organizational or cultural issues for the golf tourism industry in Thailand is recommended.

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