

AN ANALYSIS OF SERVICE QUALITY FROM FOREIGN TOURIST FEEDBACKS IN USING SPA SERVICES IN BANGKOK

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ABSTRACT

Most spa studies were conducted through the primary data by focusing on the questionnaire surveys. However, the spa studies aiming to collect the information from the secondary data source in relation to service quality benefiting are limited. This study, therefore, had the objectives to 1) analyze customer feedback in using spa services in Bangkok through the secondary data and 2) to analyze those feedbacks in relation to the 5 dimensions of service quality. This study collected data from Trip Advisor as a main source of secondary data, and used content analysis to categorize the data as well as the frequency and percentage to simplify the quantitative data.

The results indicated that customer feedbacks can be grouped into 13 major subjects, and categorized into 10 positive and negative themes. With regard to an analysis of service quality dimensions, the study categorized positive customer feedbacks into 5 dimensions based on the frequency analysis, namely: 1) reliability 2) tangibility 3) empathy 4) assurance and 5) responsiveness. Meanwhile, the negative customer feedbacks were also categorized into 1) reliability 2) empathy 3) assurance 4) responsiveness and 5) tangibility. Interestingly, reliability was found to be the most cited dimension from both positive and negative feedbacks. The results of the study will provide the recommendations that benefit the spa business in Bangkok.

Keywords: spa, health tourism, tourist reviews

INTRODUCTION

The spa business has been gaining in popularity over recent decades (Han, Kiatkawsin, Kim & Lee, 2017) due to the increasing demand of consumers to enjoy a better quality of life and well-being (Quintela, Costa & Correia, 2016). The spa business offers specific water-based facilities which may include health, relaxation and beauty services (Hashemi, Jusoh, Kiumarsi, & Mohammadi, 2015). In Thailand, the spa market has grown rapidly owing to the increasing health-consciousness of Thai and international consumers (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017), the expansion of the spa businesses, the popularity of spa services, the welcoming hospitality, and the inexpensive cost (Ministry of Public Health, 2014). This phenomenon consequently makes Thailand one of the largest spa destinations in the Asia Pacific region (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017). In particular, the spa business is directly associated with wellness tourism in that tourists spend some of their free time (or leisure time) receiving services that enhance their physical and mental well-being. When tourists visit a destination, they may seek leisure activities that affect their health and well-being through physical, psychological, or mental activities offered by spa service providers (Dimon, 2013; Lo, Wu, & Tsai, 2015). In order words, tourists go to spas to pursue their wellness, which is a multi-dimensional state, and a sense of well-being through a wide range of spa services (Corbin &

Pangrazi, 2001). Today, the spa business is a major tourism product currently promoted by Thai government to stimulate economic growth (Klaysung, 2016; Ministry of Public Health, 2014).

One of the factors accelerating the growth of the spa industry is the Internet by offering wide range of services, sales promotions, and a relaxing environment (D'Angelo, 2010; Wisnom & Capozio, 2012). In particular, the Internet provides a suitable environment for customers to give feedback online and influence the travel and tourism industry (Buhalis & Law, 2008). The use of the Internet also provides customers with efficiency in the communication of information (O'Connor, 2010), and it is a fast and easy way to express opinions about products and services (Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015). Due to the growth of the spa businesses in Thailand's major tourism locations such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, and Phuket, many foreign tourists who visit Thailand use spa services in these cities. After using spa services, they may share feedback about their experiences using spa services through travel review websites (e.g. Trip Advisor).

There are two research problems associated with the current study. Firstly, a growing market of spa industry has motivated international scholars to pursue a wide range of related research in this area. A review of literature indicates that most spa studies

collected data through the primary method by using questionnaires as a major research instruments (e.g. Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Han et al., 2017; Hashemi et al., 2015; Tsai, Suh, & Fong, 2012). Little effort has used the secondary data (as another useful resource) to content analyze the service quality issues for the benefits of spa business in Thailand. Secondly, today, there is an increasing number of spa businesses in Thailand, and these businesses are competing on the services or service quality (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Sangpikul, 2019). Spa customers may share their opinions or feedback (after using the services) through online media. Good feedback can enhance spa business reputation and attract more customers, in contrast, the negatives ones can damage business reputation and decrease customer confidence. A spa business with more customer complaints may lose customers, and make less profit in the long run. This study, therefore, will review both positive and negative spa customer feedback to get deeper insight into the spa service quality for the benefits of spa businesses in Bangkok with the following research objectives to 1) analyze customer feedback (positively and negatively) in using spa services in Bangkok through the secondary data and 2) to deeply analyze these feedback in relation to the 5 dimensions of service quality. It is expected that the analysis of service quality through customer feedbacks will be an important and effective tool to inform the spa businesses about their services performances and customer experiences; leading to better service quality and higher customer satisfaction (Dawson & Titz, 2012; Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spa Definition and Types of Spas

Spa generally is referred to water-based facilities that offer diverse types of treatments and cares for health, relaxation and beauty. Spa business or usually called “day spas” are the establishments who provide services related to health promotion. Day spas usually provide customers with calm and nurturing environment to receive a personal service. Their main services are massages, facial treatments, and body treatments. People use the services of day spas to revitalize their physical and mental health. Day spas are a subsector of wellness tourism which is mainly concerned with physical and mental well-being.

According to International Spa Association (2012 cited in Quintela et al., 2016), there are 7 different types of spas: day spa, club spa, medical spa, mineral spring spa, resort & hotel spa, cruise ship spa, and destination spa. Day

spa, one of the most popular types for tourists, is a business that offers a variety of professionally administered spa services to day-use clients. Day spa is open to the public and offer a la carte spa service to customers who can enjoy one or two individual treatments or a full day treatment. Day spa is the focus of this study because it is the spa establishments that are widely found in major tourism cities and many tourists may have the experience of using the services of day spas. Learning what tourists review in websites (on-line reviews) will greatly benefit spa service providers.

The Importance of On-line Reviews

The widespread use of the Internet has led to a phenomenon known as eWOM or electronic word of mouth (Dawson & Titz, 2012, 67). According to Stass (2000), eWOM is defined as any positive or negative statement made by actual or former customers regarding a product or service, which is made available via the Internet. eWOM can take place in many ways such as customer reviews, web-based opinion platforms, discussion forums, news groups, blogs and other social media channels (Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). An issue for many tourism businesses is that online reviews can be made anonymously and easily by anyone (Dawson & Titz, 2012). Thus, online reviews can be made and spread the word-of-mouth without fear of identification (Black & Kelley, 2009). Online reviews can be both positive and negative messages about a specific service or product (Xie, Miao, Kuo, & Lee, 2011). However, scholars have not yet examined online reviews by spa customers. The online reviews will be a valuable tool for spa service providers to receive customer feedback, to improve their services, and to correct service failures (Wagner, 2008). And there should be more research to deeply analyze the service quality through the online media for Thailand’s spa business.

Previous Studies about Spa Business

Most scholars used questionnaire surveys to deeply investigated common spa topics such as customer motivation, satisfaction, and perception. For example, Mak, Wong, & Chang (2009) examined the factors motivating travelers to search for spa experiences in China. The study revealed the 4 important factors pushing travelers to go for spas which are: relaxation/relief, escape, self-reward, health/beauty. The study also disclosed that tourists with different backgrounds had different perceptions of spa experiences. For example, European tourists perceived spa mainly for curative

or therapeutic purposes while Americans perceived spa experience as a means of self-reward, and Chinese tourists used spa for the purposes of relaxation and escape motivations. Tsai, Suh, & Fong (2012) explored behaviors of male spa customers in Hong Kong and found that most respondents patronized a hotel spa due to relaxation purpose by mainly using body massage. The study revealed that Hong Kong hotel spas had performed up to customer expectation, except for the price of spa services, staff communication skills and knowledge, and security measures. Among the five services of spa hotels in Hong Kong, (environment, reliability, service experience, value and augmented service), the environment dimension was the important factor that significantly influenced respondents' satisfaction with hotel spa services. Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch (2014) examined customer expectation and perception of service quality for spa establishments in eastern region of Thailand. Their studies revealed that the level of actual service (perception) was higher than what customers expected (producing positive gaps). The study indicated that all of the gaps between customer expectation and perception were positive; suggesting satisfactory performance. Among the five dimensions of service quality, the tangible dimension showed the least positive gap. Regarding the perceived value dimensions, the study revealed that affective value was rated with the highest mean score, followed by in-use value and redemption value. A recent study by Rivero, Rangel, & Caldito (2016) segmented spa tourists' motivations in Spain by using a discriminant analysis. The study revealed three groups of spa tourists: un-motivated, multi-motivated, and half-motivated groups. Among the three groups, multi-motivated tourists (aged between 30s – 50s) represented less than one-fourths of the total samples but they showed higher motivation to spa tourism than other groups. They went to spa places to improve their physical condition, their health and to relax in a spa resort.

To conclude, although there are related studies in spa business relevant to Thailand and international contexts, the literature still lacks of the analysis of secondary data that are available in terms of customer reviews (feedbacks) for service business. These secondary data come from customers who shared, reflected or commented about their experiences or perceptions about the spa services they used. In particular, the examination of spa service quality is an important issue to the spa business because this is a highly service-oriented business focusing on the delivery of spa experiences and customer satisfactions (Sangpikul,

2019; Wuttke & Cohen, 2008). Service quality is, thus, one of the essential tools for spa business to provide customers with such experiences and meet their satisfactions.

Service Quality

As mentioned, service quality is important to spa business because the spas mainly sell an 'experience' that includes beauty care, massage services, and health-related treatments (Wuttke & Cohen, 2008). The spa experience does not only rely on physical services, but also includes mental well-being by including relaxation and resting activities (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008). As previously stated, the spa business is a service-oriented business in which the service is mainly delivered by people. Most spa products are services (e.g. treatments and beauty care). These services are highly related to staff performance. In this regard, customers perceive the quality of spa services through the assessment of how the services correspond to their needs and expectations. Due to these distinct features, service quality is important for spa service providers in understanding what customers need and expect.

One approach to gain deeper insights into spa services and their performance is through service quality. Service quality is a concept that describes the evaluation of how well a delivered service meets customer expectations. Service providers (e.g. hotels, spas) often assess service quality in order to improve their services and enhance customer satisfaction. Service quality is, therefore, an important issue for tourism businesses, including spa establishments, in order to understand how well their services meet customer expectations. Understanding these issues may help businesses to improve customer services as well as to enhance customer satisfaction and business performance (Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015; Lo et al., 2015). In order to measure service quality, SERVQUAL (or service quality dimensions) is employed. SERVQUAL is a multi-dimensional research instrument designed to measure consumer expectations and perceptions of the service in terms of 5 dimensions: 1) reliability, 2) responsiveness, 3) assurance, 4) empathy and 5) tangibility (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Previous studies have used SERVQUAL to examine spa service quality through the 5 dimensions (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Markovic et al., 2014; Lo et al., 2015). However, scholars do not often conduct analysis of service quality based on secondary sources. This study will apply the concept of SERVQUAL to analyze the

contents of spa customers feedback to further understand spa service quality with a secondary data approach. The review of spa service quality dimensions, therefore, serves as a main framework for this study. In particular, spa customer feedback will be reviewed and deeply analyzed if these feedback are associated with any one of the 5 dimensions of service quality; thereby providing a better understanding of what customers said or shared regarding the aspects spa service quality in Thailand.

METHODS

It should be noted that customer feedbacks regarding spa services in Bangkok were the focus of this study. These feedbacks came from foreign customers (mainly tourists) who had used or experienced Thai spa services in Bangkok. After experiencing the services, they may wish to write the reviews (or feedbacks) by sharing or reflecting on their experiences about the spa services on a travel review website (e.g. Trip Advisor). Before analyzing the reviews, spa business (spa establishments) was needed to be identified. In this study, spa business has to be registered with the Ministry of Public Health. These registered spas are the ones that have met certain standards required by the Ministry of Public Health, and they should be promoted for wellness tourism in Thailand. Spa establishments in Bangkok were a focus of this study because Bangkok has the highest number of registered day spas with 141 establishments (Ministry of Public Health, 2019).

Data collection was conducted during March - April 2018. Researcher as well as graduate students were employed to help to collect the data. The reviews were collected through the secondary source which was Trip Advisor. Trip Advisor, a famous travel review website (based in USA), is regarded as the important and useful travel review website because it provides the reviews of travel-related products around the world (Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015). However, the data from secondary sources may have some limitations when compared to a questionnaire survey method in terms of complete information, therefore, the criteria for data collection (selecting samples) in this study were set and based on previous studies (Au, Buhalis, & Law, 2014; Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015).

1. Name of the registered day spas should be found in Trip Advisor, and they will be counted for data collection.

2. Day spas with 5 or more foreign customer reviews will be collected to provide reliable data.
3. The reviews in Trip Advisor will be collected for a maximum of 1-year period based on past studies' conduct owing to sufficient information.

After gathering the data, the reviews (consisting of several comments/sentences) were firstly analyzed and identified (through content analysis) into an individual comment. It should be noted that one tourist may write one review about his/her spa experience. Inside one review, it may contain several comments about spa services. In this study, one particular comment would be counted for one frequency, and it would be later grouped into a similar subject (or topic). Secondly, each individual comment was further analyzed and classified into the positive and negative issues, and these issues were later categorized into different themes relating to spa services. Thirdly, the individual comment was analyzed to group similar content with the 5 dimensions of service quality. In addition to the content analysis, descriptive statistics were used to simplify the data in terms of frequency and percentage.

FINDINGS

General Information of Customer Feedbacks

According to the Department of Health Service Support (2019), Bangkok has the highest number of registered day spas with 141 day spas. However, only 95 day spas (or 68%) met the study's criteria. Based on 95 day spas, there was a total of 587 customer reviews which were later taken into data analysis. According to Table 1, an analysis of 587 customer reviews produced 2,746 comments regarding spa services in Bangkok. Following Memarzadeh & Chang (2015) using a frequency analysis, the 2,746 comments were ranked in terms of frequencies. These comments (frequencies) were later categorized into 13 major subjects: 1) services of spa therapists & staff, 2) staff hospitality, 3) products & treatments, 4) spa experiences, 5) decoration & environment, 6) rooms and facilities, 7) recommendations, 8) prices, 9) language & communication, 10) complimentary services, 11) location & accessibility, 12) booking & reservation, and 13) marketing & management.

Table 1: Customer reviews categorized by major subjects

Major subjects	Frequency
1. Services of spa therapists & staff	487
2. Staff hospitality (friendliness)	369
3. Products & treatments	324
4. Spa experiences	303
5. Spa environment	248
6. Spa facilities	232
7. Recommendations & non-recommendations	215
8. Prices	146
9. Language & communication	119
10. Complimentary services	95
11. Location & accessibility	87
12. Booking & reservation	58
13. Marketing & management	46
14. Others	17
Total	2,746

Based on the 13 major subjects of spa services as shown in Table 1, they were further analyzed based on positive and negative reviews (Tables 2 & 4) as well as analyzed their contexts into the service quality dimensions (Tables 3 & 5).

Table 2: Categorizing positive spa reviews into major themes

Themes	Frequency	Examples of statements
1. Good skills of spa therapists	302 (18.1%)	“The therapist was very skilled and made the whole experience relaxing” “They are skillful massage therapists and have high standards”
2. Friendliness of staff	278 (16.6%)	“Good serviced mind of staff” “The staff are friendly and made us feel so relaxed”
3. Relaxing experiences	236 (14.1%)	“I feel really relaxing and comfortable” “Massage is so relaxing for me”
4. Cleanliness	217 (13.0%)	“The facility is extremely clean” “The place was nice and clean”
5. Beautiful decoration & environment	208 (12.3%)	“The grounds and facilities are really beautiful and peaceful” “The spa has a nice tranquil environment and is well decorated.”
6. Recommendations	129 (7.6%)	“I would highly recommend this spa and will definitely be going back” “I would recommended my friend and I surely would visit again”
7. Complimentary services e.g. free refreshments, tea, snacks, desserts, and transportation	99 (5.9%)	“They provided a welcome drink for us” “You'll get a welcome-drink/tea as you arrive” “Pick-up and drop-off at your hotel is also complimentary within the city”
8. English language	78 (4.6%)	“We were greeted warmly by a receptionist who had great English” “Therapists here can speak and understand English well. I have no problem with the massage and foot spa”

Table 2: (continue)

Themes	Frequency	Examples of statements
9. Good services & operations	56 (3.3%)	“We did not have to wait long before we were asked to go to the room” “I was invited to sit and enjoy welcoming drink whilst my hostess ran through the procedures” “A big thanks to lady receptionist who helped to arrange my spa booking and transport to / from the spa”
10. Product knowledge	48 (2.8%)	“We were warmly welcomed and suggested various spa menus” “Receptionist was very knowledgeable and explained the various spa/massage packages” “Front staff tell me and explain about the different treatments which is very good”
11. Other subjects (e.g. compensation, marketing)	29 (1.7%)	“We got free points for using next time” “There is a promotion for using 2 treatments together”
Total	1,680 (100%)	

According to Table 2, the first theme of positive spa reviews that were most cited is “good skills of spa therapists” (18.1%) while the second theme is “friendliness of staff” (16.6%) and the third theme is “relaxing atmosphere” (14.1%). The fourth dimension is “cleanliness” (13.0%), followed by the fifth theme “beautiful decoration

& environment” (12.3%), and the sixth theme “recommendations” (7.6%). The seventh theme is “complimentary services” (5.9%), while the eighth theme is “English language” (4.6%), followed by the ninth theme “good services” (3.3%), and the tenth theme “product knowledge” (2.8%).

Table 3: An analysis of positive spa reviews and service quality dimensions

Service quality dimensions	Frequency	Examples of statements
1. Reliability: ability to perform services accurately/correctly (e.g., staff performance, work skills, and English proficiency)	305 (25.5%)	“The staff are professional and excellent in their services” “Therapists were extremely professional and courteous” “The masseur did a great job and made me feel relax”
2. Responsiveness: willingness to assist customers and provide prompt services (e.g. interaction with customers, friendliness/ politeness of staff, customer service, explanation, enquiry and answer)	269 (22.4%)	“The receptionist answer all questions I want, very great” “We did not have to wait long before we were asked to go to the room” “Once you tell them what package you would like, it takes 4-5 minutes to get well serviced”
3. Tangibility: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and environment (e.g. spa facilities, decoration, atmosphere)	234 (19.5%)	“The spa is nicely decorated with plants, incense and flowers” “The place is nicely decorated” “The facility is extremely beautiful and elegant”
4. Assurance: ability to convey trust and confidence (e.g. cleanliness, quality of products, value of product, privacy, safety)	223 (18.6%)	“Everything seemed so clean and hygienic” “The facility is generally clean” “They use quality products with organic ingredients” “Comfortable changing clothes and rooms in which you feel safe and comfortable to change”

Table 3: (continue)

5. Empathy: caring services or individual attention (e.g. caring staff, personalized services/treatments, understanding customers' needs)	168 (14.0%)	“Masseurs are always asking if their pressure is ok” “On arrival I was asked if there were any particular areas I wanted them to concentrate on” “I felt my therapist gave great attention to all my problem areas, especially my back” “Therapist will reconfirm on the area that you would like to concentrate before proceed with the massage which I personally think is really good and I had never experience before”
Total	1,199 (100%)	

Table 3 shows that most positive feedbacks are associated with reliability dimension (25.5%) while the second and the third ones are related to responsiveness dimension (22.4%) and tangibility dimension (19.5%), respectively. Assurance dimension (18.6%) and empathy dimension (14.0%) are ranked in the fourth and the fifth, respectively.

When considering in details, *reliability* received the most positive reviews which are related to work performance, work skills, and English proficiency of spa personnel (e.g. spa therapists were all very friendly & good at massage services) while *responsiveness* was positively cited with regard to customer

interaction, customer service, friendliness of staff, and answering customers' enquiries (e.g. we did not have to wait long before we were asked to go to the room). *Tangibility* was positively reviewed about decoration and spa facilities (e.g. the grounds and facilities are really beautiful and peaceful). For *assurance*, this dimension received positive reviews regarding cleanliness of place, treatment rooms, quality of products, privacy, and safety (e.g. everything seemed so clean and hygienic). And *empathy*, it was mainly reviewed relating to caring staff, personalized services, and understanding customers' needs (e.g. spa therapists are always asking if the pressure is ok).

Table 4: Categorizing negative spa reviews into major themes

Themes	Frequency	Examples of statements
1. Poor skills of spa therapists	189 (23.3%)	“The massage quality is not properly trained” “The therapists are not up to standard, the service is bad” “During the massage we asked for it to be stronger but didn't seem to help” “Their foot therapy is terrible. They pressed very hard on my foot and not worth for money”
2. Poor behavior or etiquette of spa therapists	155 (19.1%)	“The therapist was not nice from beginning to the end, no smile at all, no attention to details, the massage was rough and without passion” “Therapist is horrible. The lady rushed through the process and you can feel everything is done extremely quick” “My therapist didn't help me to get up and out of the massage table until I asked”
3. Non-recommendations for using spa services	91 (11.1%)	“I will not come back for sure” “I would not recommend this pricy spa” “Can't recommend this place and will not be returning” “Would not recommend to try this spa”
4. Noise disturbance	77 (9.5%)	“The masseur is very noisy, always talking to her co-worker on the other room, so it's very irritating” “The two ladies kept talking with each other for the whole time, making it a bit hard to relax completely” “Another bad thing is the masseurs talk a lot among themselves while giving massage which is very irritating at times”

Table 4: (continue)

5. Weak English language	61 (7.6%)	“Receptionists don't appear to speak much English” “The staff at this spa didn't understand English” “The two therapists we encountered hardly know English so we gave up to explain to them”
6. Poor staff/receptionists	58 (7.3%)	“Receptionists here lack of smiling face” “The lady at the front desk was condescending and rude” “The lady at the reception was a little rude and unwelcoming and mostly interested in getting the money and that's it”
7. Poor facilities and atmosphere	49 (6.0%)	“Bath and shower did not work very well” “The treatment room, ceiling and walls were full with molt” “The atmosphere of the spa is cold” “Room too cold and the music too loud”
8. High price	45 (5.5%)	“It is more pricy than the street spas and also worse than those, against our expectation” “However, I think the price is a little higher than other spas” “The price was super expensive too for 1 hour service”
9. Poor products	39 (4.7%)	“Facial cream and mask are not good quality products” “I don't know what massage oil they use, smells very awful” “We also feel the aroma oil used is not in good quality”
10. Uncleanliness	35 (4.3%)	“Towels are smelly and some spots on it” “The toilet had bad smell” “Bathrooms and shower need some improvements”
11. Others (e.g. limited products, marketing)	14 (1.6%)	“No choice of massage oil at all” “The manager tries to sell a high price package for me” “Front desk did not offer any discounts even we buy 3 packages”
Total	813 (100%)	

With regard to Table 4, the first theme of negative feedbacks that were most cited is “poor skills of spa therapists” (23.3%) while the second theme is “poor behavior or etiquette of spa therapists” (19.1%) and the third theme is “non-recommendations for using services” (11.1%). The fourth theme is “noise disturbance” (9.5%), followed by the fifth theme “weak English

language” (7.6%), and the sixth theme “poor staff/receptionists” (7.3%). The seventh theme is “poor facilities and atmosphere” (6.0%), while the eighth theme is “high price” (5.5%), followed by the ninth theme “poor products & treatments” (4.7%), and the tenth theme “uncleanliness” (4.3%).

Table 5: An analysis of negative spa reviews and service quality dimensions

Service quality dimensions	Frequency	Examples of statements
1. Reliability: ability to perform services accurately/correctly (e.g., staff performance, work skills, and English proficiency)	228 (40.0%)	“The massage started late 5 minutes and finished before 1 hour” “The massage was not consistent, sometimes too hard, sometimes too light” “Go there for a basic Thai massage but avoid facials as they do not seem to have the equipment nor skills to provide this treatment” “The massage was very hard which we never experienced that hard of a massage before” “The staff at this spa didn't understand English” “The two therapists we encountered hardly know English so we gave up to explain to them”

Table 5: (continue)

Service quality dimensions	Frequency	Examples of statements
2. Assurance: ability to convey trust and confidence (e.g. staff knowledge, cleanliness, quality of products, value of product, privacy, safety)	151 (22.6%)	“Staff seemed confused with the massages we wanted” “Therapists talked to each other often which was very annoying” “The two ladies kept talking with each other for the whole time, making it a bit hard to relax completely” “Another bad thing is the masseurs talk a lot among themselves while giving massage which is very irritating at times” “This spa used low quality massage oil and very smelly” “Cockroaches were walking in the massage room. I was really shocked especially when almost naked”
3. Responsiveness: willingness to assist customers and provide prompt services (e.g. interaction with customers, customer service, friendliness of staff, explanation, enquiry and answer)	122 (18.2%)	“Etiquette of the therapists were not good” “The lady at the front desk was condescending and rude” “Reception lady is very unfriendly and not helpful” “They couldn’t follow my instructions and did not respond to my requests” “I requested change of massage therapist but was told that service already started half way which unable to and afterward massage therapist used lots of strength focus on some area which caused bruise on my wife” “The receptionist says wait for the service around 5 minutes but I am waiting for the massage to be ready for 15 minutes”
4. Empathy: caring services or individual attention (e.g. personalized services/treatments, understanding customers’ needs)	106 (15.8%)	“I highlighted shoulders and legs to be massaged a bit more, but the lady didn’t seem to pay any attention to this” “Had requested for a shower after the whole services but was denied by the massager” “During the massage we asked for it to be stronger but didn’t seem to help” “The massage staff did not understand me when I told that the pressure was too hard and became painful”
5. Tangibility: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and environment (e.g. spa facilities, decoration, atmosphere)	64 (9.5%)	“Toilet paper holder and tap are broken” “Room too cold and the music too loud” “Bathrooms and shower need some improvements” “The massage room was too cold and too much light” “The air in the room smelled musty” “I was so disappointed with the condition and cleanliness of the place. The washroom floor was wet and lack cleaning service”
Total	671 (100%)	

Table 5 shows that most negative feedbacks are associated with reliability dimension (33.9%) while the second and the third ones are related to assurance dimension (22.6%) and responsiveness dimension (18.2%). Empathy dimension (15.8%) and tangibility dimension (9.5%) are ranked in the fourth and the fifth, respectively.

When considering in details, *reliability dimension* received the most negative feedbacks

regarding poor skills and unprofessionalism of spa therapists as well as poor English of spa employees (e.g. I were unhappy with the poor treatment and conduct of massage therapists) while *assurance dimension* received negative reviews regarding staff knowledge and privacy (e.g. staff seemed confused with the massages we wanted, and talk a lot to each other). *Responsiveness* was negatively cited with regard to unhelpful staff and poor customer service (e.g.

reception lady is very unfriendly and not helpful) while *empathy* was mainly reviewed relating to less caring staff and ignoring customers' needs (e.g. I highlighted shoulders and legs to be massaged a bit more, but the lady didn't seem to pay any attention to this. For *tangibility*, it received negative reviews mainly about uncleanliness of the place, atmosphere and room temperature (e.g. room too cold and the music too loud). Further section will be the discussion or justification of what this study has found regarding customer feedbacks and spa service quality.

DISCUSSIONS

With regard to the analysis of positive feedbacks and service quality dimensions, it was found that most positive feedbacks were associated with *reliability dimension* while the second and the third ones were related to *responsiveness* and *tangibility* dimensions. These findings are similar with previous studies indicating that reliability dimension was one of the most important factors contributing to customer satisfactions in spa industry. For instance, Lo et al., (2015) found that reliability and responsiveness dimensions were the most important factors affecting customers' positive emotions in spa resorts in southern China. Also, a study by Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch (2014) revealed that spa tourists had relatively high expectations on reliability and responsiveness dimensions when using spa services in Thailand. Thai spa is well known for the great services which include professional staff and friendly services (Sangpikul, 2018; Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017). These two dimensions (reliability and responsiveness) may be the two important factors that make customers satisfied or impressive about Thai spa services, and then they may wish to share or talk about them through an online review website. Tangibility dimension was also found to be commonly cited or discussed in the review website, probably because this dimension is mainly related to the basic components of spa business such as facilities, decoration, and atmosphere. Once tourists visit spa establishments, they may first experience or perceive this dimension before receiving core services. As this dimension is the basic element of spa business, many spa tourists may want to share or reflect their perceptions about it in the website.

In terms of negative spa feedbacks and service quality dimensions, it was revealed that most negative feedbacks were associated with

reliability dimension while the second and the third ones were related to *assurance* and *responsiveness* dimensions. This finding is relatively similar to the above discussion of positive feedbacks, especially the reliability and responsiveness dimensions. As previously addressed, past studies found that reliability and responsiveness dimensions were the important determinant factors contributing to customers' positive emotions and their satisfaction in using spa services (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Lo et al., 2015). If the spa service providers fail to meet customer expectations, it may be possible that they want to share their unfavorable experiences or give feedbacks to spa practitioners through the review website. In addition, *assurance* dimension was also found to be negatively cited in Thai spa industry. This dimension relates to the ability of business to convey trust and confidence for customers such as staff knowledge, cleanliness, quality of products, value of product, privacy, and safety. Based on the current finding, many negative feedbacks or complaints under assurance were about noise disturbance (from spa therapists) and spa cleanliness. In particular, noise disturbance (lack of privacy) from spa therapists (talking while giving services) seem to be more frequently criticized than spa cleanliness; leading to further attention from spa managers. Next part will be the recommendations based on the research findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are 2 parts of the recommendations for the positive and negative service quality dimensions.

For the positive service quality, the main recommendations for spa establishments are to keep and maintain the quality, standard, and performance of the services delivered to customers (as shown in Table 3). For instance, most positive feedbacks were associated with reliability; suggesting that reliability dimension is a key function in spa business. Spa establishments should pay attention to the skills and performances of spa therapists through the regular training and recruitment. A survey from customers may help the business to get helpful information about spa staff performance. For the responsiveness dimension, spa establishments should focus on the jobs of front desk staff to provide prompt, attentive, and friendly customer services, especially managing short waiting time for before and after services. Meanwhile, tangibility dimension (e.g. spa facilities,

decoration, atmosphere) should be regularly monitored to provide good spa experiences for customers. In addition, spa establishment should build customers' trust and confidence (assurance dimension) by monitoring hygiene & cleanliness, using quality products, maintaining customer privacy (reducing noise), and safety in spa establishments. To maintain empathy dimension, spa staff (receptionists/therapists) should be well trained to deliver personalized services, and understand customers' needs in order to provide customers with a pleasurable and relaxing experience.

Regarding the negative service quality recommendations, this is the focus of the recommendations due to the poor service quality (as shown in Table 5). Most negative spa feedbacks (customer complaints) were in *reliability dimension*, followed by assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibility dimensions. Most complaints in the reliability dimension were related to poor skills or unprofessionalism of spa therapists. Previous study indicated that spa customers consider the ability and skills of spa therapists particularly important in affecting their spa experiences and positive emotions (Lo et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important for spa establishments to recruit highly skilled therapists (with past experience and certified spa certificate) to provide customers with spa experiences. A regular training program for less skilled or new therapists is also essential to enhance reliability dimension.

For assurance dimension, many tourists complained about product knowledge and weak English language of front desk staff as well as spa therapists. Since most customers of spa businesses in major tourism cities are foreign tourists, it is important for spa establishments to recruit staff (both front desk and therapists) with proper qualification and good knowledge of English in order to communicate with foreign customers. In particular, front desk staff and spa therapists are in direct contact with customers. In addition, in-house trainings for English language, communication skills, spa education, and treatment consultation may be undertaken for spa personnel. These trainings for all spa personnel are essential to convey trust and confidence for customers. One important complaint under this dimension was about cleanliness (e.g. toilets, shower facilities, towels/sheets). As early discussed, a standard operating procedure (SOP)

can help to solve the cleanliness problem by indicating what procedures should be done for cleaning tasks (Wisnom & Capozio, 2012).

In relation to responsiveness dimension, this dimension was negatively cited about unhelpful staff and poor customer service. Spa is a service-based business and requires high service interactions between employees and customers. Spa treatments are expensive, and certainly customers expect to receive a high service quality and good spa experience. Front desk staff should be well trained to anticipate the right moment to provide the right and prompt services (Snoj & Mumel, 2002). According to Lo, Qu, & Wetprasit (2013), customers should not feel unattended or wait too long. In case a customer needs anything, there should be someone there to assist. A regular monitor from spa manager to supervise customer services and standardized service procedures should be attended.

With regard to empathy dimension, this dimension was mainly related to less caring services and ignoring customers' needs. Many spa customers may have different personal needs or health issues. They use spa services in order to relieve their health related issues and require individual attention. Spa therapists should be trained to provide personalized services or treatments that correspond to customers' needs. Each treatment should be provided according to customers' preference, physical condition or health issues. Customer consultation or communication (asking customers) may help to improve empathy dimension.

For tangibility dimension, many complaints were about spa facilities and room temperature. Although most items in tangibility dimension are common elements in spa establishments, they should not be overlooked because previous studies indicated that tangibility dimension (e.g. facilities, equipment, and atmosphere) was found to affect customers' positive emotions (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Lo et al., 2015). A regular check for spa facilities (showers, toilets) as well as a control of appropriate room temperature should be monitored. In particular, spa therapists may ask customers if the room temperature is comfortable for customers during the services. A regular attention from a spa manager in tangibility dimension will help to increase customer satisfaction of spa services.

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