An Evaluation of Service Attributes for Measuring American Tourists' Satisfactions: A Case Study of Pattaya City

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Abstract

The study based on two main models, SERVQUAL and Kano, for measuring and categorizing sub service attributes or customer requirements. The results are analyzed and applied to propose primary strategies. The samples are American tourists visiting Pattaya city during January to March 2006. The 15 sub service attributes are defined from 5 main service attributes based on SERVQUAL dimensions and past researches. The 5 sub service attributes are selected to study for finding their relationship with the samples.

The results of Kano model study point that the relationship of personal attention of drivers, variety of attractions and good communication skills in English of shopping service providers with the samples is indifferent. The relationship of providing customer’s best interest at heart by accommodation service providers with the sample is attractive. The relationship of politeness of food service providers with the sample is basic need. The results of SERVQUAL study point that 6 of 15 measured sub service attributes are strengths and the left are weaknesses which should be improved.

The recommendations for next studies concern the details of SERVQUAL gap, the sequence and methods of study based on integration of both models and identifying strengths and weaknesses of service performance based on SERVQUAL.

Key Words: tourism industry, service quality, Kano’s category
1. Introduction

Tourism industry has expanded widely and internationally since the termination of the world war II. The improved factors rise quality and quantity of demand and supply of tourism industry and other relevant industries. The roles of tourism industry effecting business and economic system of countries are as the following; tourism industry generates the high volume of revenue in foreign, revenue from tourism industry makes multiple economic activities effecting gross domestic product in various sectors, tourism industry causes income distribution and flow of consumption into rural areas, local raw materials and resources are applied for construction or souvenir products, tourism industry is a kind of industry which consume low volume of raw materials, reduce the unemployment rate which increases government revenue in forms of taxes, stimulate new business and infrastructure investments including marketing opportunities. The World Travel and Tourism Council claimed that tourism was the world's largest industry in 1991. Tourism industry has generated high volume of revenue for Thailand. The revenue from foreign tourists was 384,360 million bahts or 5.91% on gross domestic product in 2004. Pattaya city is one of the major tourists' destinations of Thailand. The total number of foreign tourists increasing every year. The total numbers of foreign tourists staying at Pattaya city's accommodations are 2,804,410 people in 2002 and 3,245,969 people in 2004 at higher average expenditure per person per day too. The total numbers of American tourists visiting Pattaya city in 2002 are 93,186 people and 98,073 people in 2004 or 2.5% annual growth rate. The American tourists is 3.02% of all foreign tourists in 2004 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2005).

Tourism industry is an important sector of business system, economic and social development. Decreasing the number of tourists effect value of industry. The study of tourists' satisfaction is a tool for monitoring which lead to maintain and improve service quality of service attributes as tourists predict (Rukphoa, 2000). The maintenance and improvement service quality of service attributes are planned and implemented through strategies managed by several organizations, such as government, business, non government, academic institutes and committee organizations (Panya Consultant, 2002).
2. Literature Review

Level of satisfaction is output of process and input. Outputs including performance, experience and level of satisfaction (Williams and Buswell, 2003). Tourists and service providers are interacted at the initial, such as marketing effort. After tourists make decision to buy service, the process or service encounter starts and carries on. Finally, tourists perceive real experience of service performance of service providers. Motivation of tourists is the starting point of customers' side. Customer expectations are a component of customer satisfaction. Customer expectations are what an organization should offer to customers. Factors that influence customers' formulation of their expectations are word of mouth, personal needs, external communications and past experience. The image of the organization also is a key part in the formulation of this judgment (Zeithaml, 1990). Expectations should be normative standards and identified two norms for customer expectation service standards, desired and adequate service (Parasuraman, 1995). Organization will manage these different norms based on resources. SERVQUAL or service quality. SERVQUAL, measurement tool is based on the theory that customers judge service delivery concerning the formula that customer perceptions should equal or exceed customers expectations to be satisfied with the service provided. Customer perceptions are based on the actual service delivered, while customer expectations are based on past experiences, word of mouth and personal needs. Expectations occur before experience perception (Zeithaml, 1990). The five dimensions of SERVQUAL as the following; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness and empathy (Buttle, 1996). Kano model categorized the requirements of product or service into six characteristics which have different influence to customer satisfaction (Kano, 1984). Developed by Professor Noriaki Kano, the model is based on the concepts of customer quality and provides simple category which distinguish between essential and differentiating attributes (see Figure 1).
The model is an effective way of visualizing product or service characteristics and stimulating debate within the product or service design team and planner. According to Kano, the characteristics of product or service can be classified as the following: Must-be or Basic Needs: the requirements are those that must be present and functional or else the customers will not consider the product or customers become dissatisfied. One-dimensional or performance needs: the requirements increase customer satisfaction as they become more functional. Attractive or excitement need: the requirements increase satisfaction as they become functional, but unlike one-dimensional requirements, customers do not become dissatisfied if the feature is dysfunctional. Indifferent: the customer does not really care about these requirements. Questionable: the respondent’s answer to paired questions do not make sense. Reversal: the customer actually prefers the dysfunctional attributes of a requirement (Center for quality of management, 1996). Setting priority of categories for maintenance and improvement based on M>O>A>I Rule (Sauerwein, 1996). M>O>A>I, Must-be > One-dimensional > Attractive > Indifferent, rule means setting “Must-be” as the first priority to maintain and improve and “Indifferent” means the last priority to
maintain and improve. SERVQUAL and Kano model are applied for different roles which are on the same process of measuring of customer satisfaction. SERVQUAL determines average satisfaction of customers. According to rank of satisfactions, sub service attributes are identified as strengths and weaknesses. Priority of strength and weaknesses are ordered prior as number of customer satisfaction. Kano model is not used for measuring of customer satisfaction, but for categorizing sub service attributes into one of six categories as described on the previous section. SERVQUAL and Kano model are joined at setting priority of strengths and weaknesses to maintain and improve them.

3. Methodology

The conceptual framework is adapted from Tan and Pawitra (2001) and Tobgay (2005) who integrated two main models, SERVEQUAL and Kano. The five main service attributes of destination are based on Panya Consultant (2002) and Tobgay (2005). The figure 2 exhibits diagram of conceptual framework of this study.

4. Results

This study found that the relationship between American tourists visiting Pattaya city and sample service requirements of destination as the following: personal attention of drivers is indifferent relationship for American tourists although this service requirement is performed functional or dysfunctional or not. Variety of attractions is indifferent relationship for American tourists although this service requirement is performed functional or dysfunctional or not. Good communication skills in English of shopping service providers is indifferent relationship for American tourists although this service requirement is performed functional or dysfunctional or not. Providing the customers' best interest at heart by accommodation service providers is attractive relationship for American tourists. This service requirement should be performed functional although tourists will not dissatisfy when it is performed dysfunctional. Politeness of food service is must-be relationship for American tourists.
This service requirement should be performed functional only because tourists will dissatisfy when it is performed dysfunctional.

For evaluation average satisfaction, the satisfaction identified as SERVQUAL are as below:
1. Security of transportation
2. Willingness to answer about products of shopping service providers
3. Efficiency of electricity and sanitary systems of accommodation service
4. Politeness of food service providers
5. Interest of attractions
6. Willingness to help any problems of accommodation service providers

The dissatisfaction identified as SERVQUAL are as below:
1. Personal attention of drivers
2. Short time delivery of food service
3. Providing the customers’ best interest at heart by accommodation service providers
4. Cleanness of food
5. Variety of attraction
6. On time delivery of transportation service
7. Providing information of attractions
8. Accessibility for desired products
9. Good communication skills in English of shopping service providers

The integration of both models is applied for setting priority of 5 sample service requirements. The priorities for improvement are providing the customers’ best interest at heart by accommodation service providers, personal attention of drivers, variety of attraction and good communication skills in English of shopping service providers. Politeness of food service providers is categorized as must-be and identified as satisfaction based on SERVQUAL.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

To study tourists’ satisfaction lead to maintain and improve service attributes of destination leading to maintain and gain number of tourists. Tourists are customers of destination and country. The recommendations are as the following:
1. Maintain positioning of city destination.
2. Manage image and reality of night entertainment attractions.
3. Do researches concerning considered sub service attributes.
4. Design and implement transportation service for tourists who stayed out of main service routes and modify mini-van taxi for increasing level of personal attention of drivers.
5. Establish and distribute an up dated and standardized source of information for providing complete information of all attractions.

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