

The Conceptual Framework: Effect of Expectations, Quality of Service and Perceived Values towards Satisfaction of Tourists Visiting National Parks in the Upper Northern Region of Thailand

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Abstract : *The purpose of this research was to examine the expectations and level of satisfaction with the quality of service and perceived value of national parks in the upper northern region of Thailand. The research framework was drawn from theories about customer satisfaction and tourists' views on national parks, which were regarded as pristine and ecologically-diverse. It was thought that these parks should have been preserved as sanctuaries and by doing so, it would help create jobs for people in the local community by attracting local and international tourists. This research employed mixed methods with 500 Thai and foreign tourists visiting 31 national parks in 8 provinces in the upper northern region of Thailand that acted as research participants. The research tools were questionnaires and interviews developed from perceived values and image theory. The data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, inferential statistics and path analysis, and the results were disseminated for academic and commercial purposes.*

Index Terms : *Effect of Expectations, Quality of Service, Perceived Values, Satisfaction of Tourists Visiting*

I. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is a large industry which is related to many businesses according to the research of World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) who stated that in 1998, the tourism industry caused approximately 231 million direct and indirect employments around the world. Thailand is a country which has been generating a lot of income since 1982, especially the northern region of the country could generate 190,558 million baht in 2018 with the amount of 53,593.6 million baht (28.12%) from foreign tourists and 136,964.4 million baht (71.88%) from Thai tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018). The survey found that as Thailand is a center for economic and social development, there is a large number of both Thai and foreign tourists that come into the country every year including visits and staying at various national parks. As a result, it leads to a better economic system of Thailand, such as high rate of employment and resources usage to benefit societies. In addition, the Department of National Parks implied that more and more tourists came to visit national parks from 2014 to 2018 at the number of 19,640,382, generating the income of 2,664.35 million baht (Department of National Parks, 2019)

Thailand has national park areas, both land and sea, at a total number of 148 sites equaling to approximately 60,000 square kilometers or about 11 percent of the country area (Year 2018 data). The national park system of Thailand has determined that a national park with a territory covering coastal areas, islands, waterways, and sea as marine national park which has gathered ecosystems of various living organisms on land, near the coast, and in the sea. This type of park also has beautiful natural resources that are suitable for relaxing and studying for knowledge. At present, there are 19 national marine parks in Thailand with a total area of approximately 5.34 square kilometers, covering areas along the coastline in the central region, eastern region, and southern regions and there are still 5 national parks that are being prepared for supporting Thai tourism.

However, the northern region of Thailand has 8 provincial parks among them are Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Nan, Phayao, and Uttaradit. These provinces are rich in biodiversity resources starting from the diversity in ecosystem with some resources occur naturally, the uniqueness as one in the world, or resources that are unique to the landforms because the role of national park is to preserve natural environment including plants and wildlife which are living things in nature that are genetically diverse. These parks may benefit people in the aspects of agriculture, medicine and other factors of life, and education as students and researchers can study through making experiments endlessly. At the same time, people can go to study nature by doing different activities, such as trekking, bird-watching, butterfly-watching, etc. because there are nature study paths for people to walk around and easily study nature as well as being a recreation and stress relief from everyday life. Tourism in national parks also contributes to the tourism business and services that can distribute money to both public and private sectors, especially to local people.

However, when conducting an eco-tourism at national parks in the north, it found out that some places were not as ready as they should have been especially in the quality of service provided by employees because these parks had insufficient wildlife and plant species. As a result, both Thai and foreign tourists were not satisfied and at the end there was no loyalty in tourist attractions of the national parks. Therefore, creating satisfaction in service is a success and national parks must preserve nature to maintain its beauty to impress tourists. The researchers then became interested in finding ways to study the satisfaction and the patterns of tourists' loyalty to the national park tourism for the benefits of those interested and involved.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

A. To study expectations, perceived values, quality of service, and satisfaction of tourists visiting national parks in the upper northern region of Thailand.

B. To study effects of expectations, perceived values, and quality of service towards satisfaction of tourists visiting national parks in the upper northern region of Thailand.

III. RESEARCH SCOPE

In this research, the researchers determined the scope of the study in 4 aspects: (1) content: emphasize on education, service quality, satisfaction, image, and attitude towards loyalty and behavioral loyalty. (2) population: both Thai and foreign tourists who come to use the service of the national parks in the northern region of Thailand [2] (Bureau of National Parks, 2562, online). (3) area: tourist attractions in 8 the upper northern provinces: Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Nan, Phayao, and Uttaradit [2] (National Park Office, 2562, online), and (4) duration: one year from November, 2018 to October, 2019.

A. Tourist Expectations

Vroom (1964) stated that whatever a person will do, there is an expectation of success in return, as a result, he proposed the concept of expectancy theory which implied that what a person will do depends on 4 following factors: (1) the appropriation of the return regarding the situation (2) Satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the results to be obtained (3) when compared to others, it must be a beneficiary (4) service recipients will have the opportunity to receive returns as expected because expectations of people are the motivations that make them try to do what they want to fulfill their expectations. Therefore, expectation is an idea or imagination of tourists prior to their visits by themselves, with the different expectations towards the environmental management at each tourist

attraction according to their experiences and quality of service received and personal factors as hypothesized in H1 and H2

H1: Expectations influence the service quality.

H2: Expectations influence the perceived value.

B. Quality of Service

Service is an act or activity that cannot be tangible, but happens between the service provider and the service recipient which may further lead to satisfaction. Service is therefore an abstract activity which requires a seller and a buyer who does not possess those services in a concrete form. The service process may be provided with the sale of products or not, [4] (Kotler, 2000, p.36) and can create satisfaction for the customers or consumers [5] (Stanton, Etzel and Walkenr, 1976, p. 537). When there is a need of service recipient, service provider must be ready to service at all time and do not evade to provide services [6] (R. Nuanchawee, 2000, p.43). Service is to provide assistance or take action for the benefit of others or for the convenience of the clients, but after receiving the service, they may be satisfied or not impressed with the service received depending on the service provider whether the service is done quickly, conveniently, accurately, or not taking any advantage and seeking benefits from clients in every situation. The service provider should also be willing to comply with the conditions as promised with the service recipient, resulting in the perceived value of tourists which will be important in the re-purchase of the client in the next time [7] [8] (N. Chittinan, 2008, p.13; T. Danai, 2000, p.26) as hypothesis 3.

H3: Service quality influences the perceived value.

C. Perceived Value

Perception of customer is important because different customers have different evaluations regarding the value of service or product, in addition, they agree to pay for products/service differently. Entrepreneurs must use marketing tools, such as advertising, packaging, continuous public relations until they are well-known and become famous which help them have more value to be perceived than a service without marketing. If the value is presented to the customers, they may consider the benefits to be received and re-purchase as stated by Kotler and Keller in 2009 [9] that “the perceived value or the value received by the customer is occurred from the difference between the total benefit received by the customer and the total cost”. Lovelock also said that the perceived value may be a good indication of a re-purchase which could be more than a satisfaction or perceived value quality rather than the satisfaction and the purchasing behavior [11] (Cronin, Brady and Hult, 2000, pp. 193-218) as shown in the hypothesis 4.

H3: Perceived value influences the satisfaction.

D. Satisfaction

In the present, satisfaction is the level of feelings of the service users resulting from the comparison between the benefits received and the impression that occurs after being served with the expectations of customers [12] (Kotler, 2000, p.553). These expectations are occurred from the attitudes, experiences, and feelings from the past of the customers as the service providers try to create satisfaction for customers through value creation by working with various parties according to the principle of total quality and competitive differentiation. The value delivered to customers must be greater than the cost spent by the customers since the cost of most customers is price. When customers are satisfied with products and services they receive, it will greatly affect the repeat purchase [13] (Ostrom and Iacobucci, 1995, pp. 17-28) and they may continue to spread to other people which leads to loyalty as shown in the hypothesis 4.

H4: Perceptual value influences the satisfaction.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research is a mixed-methods research using both quantitative research and qualitative methods by collecting data from the questionnaires filled out by Thai and foreign tourists who came to visit the national parks in the northern region of Thailand. The qualitative research method was applied to support findings after obtaining the results from the quantitative research done by conducting an in-depth interview. The researchers have reviewed the literature to develop a conceptual framework and related theories which can be divided into 2 types of research as follows:

A. Quantitative Research: there is a sequence of steps to develop the measurement of relevant variables by using research tools, such as questionnaire, descriptive statistical process, and structural equation model (SEM). Then, the results were discussed, summarized, and received additional suggestions from the research after the interviewees had completed the close-end questionnaires. Lastly, the qualitative research was used to compare with the quantitative one.

B. Qualitative Research: the semi-structure in-depth interview was used according to the literature reviewed in order to cover the research on the relationship between expectations, perceived values, quality of service, and satisfaction of tourists who had visited national parks in the northern region of Thailand. The researchers conducted an examination of the completeness of the data with a triangulation [14] (Denzin, 1970) and finally, the results from the structural equation analysis were discussed, summarized, and received additional suggestions.

V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

After reviewing the literatures, the researchers could summarize the conceptual framework as below:

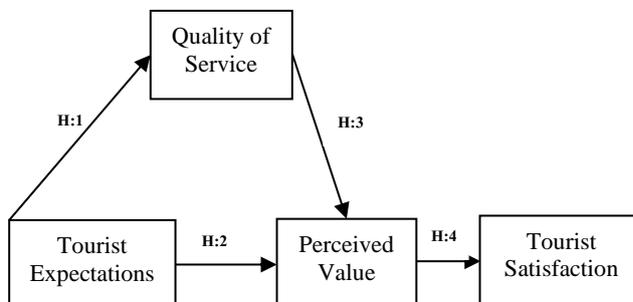


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This research is an integrated research which was done to support both quantitative and qualitative data under the concept of resource base theory of Barney (1991) [15] which concluded that if any organization has readiness of resources in the organization those are important factors and are being possessed, it can bring competitive advantage or the operation of the tourism industry. Therefore, the park administrators should consider the resources available in each area that have potential to create value-added products or attractions and readiness of communities instead of considering the cost of competition of the products that would be different from others. Wernerfelt (1984) [16] agreed that

the resource base concept meant assets, capabilities, organization process, firm attributes, information, knowledge, wisdom, way of life, and culture of community. Consequently, the national park administrators should have a strategic plan to enhance service quality and develop a plan on existing resources with employees in order to properly respond to changes in the environment through job creation and income generating for people in the communities to support the economic foundation of Thailand.

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