

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BANGKOK SUBWAY'S EXPECTED AND PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY: A COMPARISON BETWEEN THAI AND NON-THAI CUSTOMERS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Bangkok Subway's expected and perceived service quality between Thai and non-Thai customers from either a European or North American country. Five dimensions of service quality including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy as well as the demographic characteristics were analyzed. Data were collected from 396 respondents in 9 train stations. The analyses found that overall expectation is higher than perception at a similar level for Thai and non-Thai respondents. The demographic characteristics showed that a significant difference existed, especially in age, education and income.

INTRODUCTION

Bangkok has been long waiting for the introduction of the first subway route. The impact traffic has on people's lives is tremendous causing physical and mental stress. The first subway system helps all those living and working near the route to improve their quality of life. To ensure the subway system is used to its full capacity and that people driving cars along the route are switching to the train service, it is essential that service quality provides maximum satisfaction to customers. This will enable the highest possible economic return in order to ensure future expansion which is necessary to cover more than just a small part of the inner city. Thailand is moving towards globalization and foreign influence becomes more and more important. Therefore service quality is essential not only to Thai customers but also to foreigners.

A variety of research has been conducted on service quality (Bitner and Hubber, 1994; Bitner, 1990; Bolton and Drew, 1991a; Bolton and Drew, 1991b; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Gronroos, 1990; Gronroos, 2000; Oliver 1980; Oliver, 1993; Parasuraman and Berry, 1990).

The SERVQUAL instrument, an instrument for measuring service quality developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988, 1990) was used to capture the five dimensions of service quality of Bangkok Subway.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985, 1988) pointed out that perceived service quality is

viewed as the degree and prediction of discrepancy between customer's expectations and perceptions. Perceived service quality comes from customers' comparison of what they perceive actual service performance is. If performance equals or exceeds expectations, then the perceived service quality is satisfactory, otherwise it is unsatisfactory. Moreover, Oliver (1980) explained that customer satisfaction involved an evaluation and included an affective or emotional response. Even though alternative definitions exist, most definitions of customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction indicate that if customers perceptions meets expectations, the expectations is said to be confirmed and the customer is satisfied. If the perceptions and expectations are not equal, then the expectation is negatively disconfirmed. Bitner and Hubber (1994) indicated that service quality is the customers' overall impression of the relative inferiority or superiority of organization and services. The focus was on meeting of customers' expectations to perceptions of services actually received.

Parasuraman et.al.(1985) defined service quality as an overall evaluation of a specific service firm that results from comparing that firm's performance with customers' general expectations of how firms in that industry should perform. Through focus group interviews, the authors initially identified ten dimensions of service quality. The ten dimensions are access, communication, competency, courtesy, credibility, reliability, responsiveness, security, tangibles and understanding/knowing the customer. Through empirical validation and rigorous scale-development procedures, the researchers later