



THE ROLE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION OF HOTEL CUSTOMERS IN THAILAND AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN SERVICE MARKETING MIX (7PS) AND CUSTOMER BRAND TRUST

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Abstract

The hospitality industry is one of the very important industries to generate income for Thailand. As Thailand has so many famous tourist attractions such as beautiful beaches, mountains, temples, archeological sites, and so on. The hotel business is one of the main businesses to support the hospitality industry. There are many hotels in Thailand that are ready for tourists and visitors to choose and stay. However, as the number of tourists visiting Thailand has significantly increased, the number of hotels has expanded and the competition is very high and fierce. Customers expected to receive a good and high standard of service. This research focused on the level of customer brand trust in the hotel in Thailand via other 2 factors: service marketing mix 7Ps and customer satisfaction as a mediator. The data was collected from customers who stayed at the hotels in 4 main tourist cities in Thailand (Bangkok, Pattaya, Hua Hin, and Chiang Mai province). A total number of 435 participations gave their opinion on this study. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data. Later on, the conceptual framework of this study was presented to explain the relationship between each variable. Results showed that the service marketing mix 7Ps plays an important role and influenced the brand trust of the hotel while customer satisfaction is a significant mediator that strongly influenced the service marketing mix 7Ps and brand trust. This research suggested hotel owners and management focus on the quality of their hotel conditions and services to increase customer satisfaction because a high level of customer satisfaction is a high chance of trust including positive profitability and positive performance of the business.

Keywords: Service marketing mix 7Ps, Customer satisfaction, Brand trust, Mediator factor, Hotel industry in Thailand

Introduction

The importance of hotel industry was perceived as one of the main sources of income for many countries around the world (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). The



revenue generated by the hotel industry does not just help to stimulate the economics of the countries but it has also come back to be the income of employees that they could receive salary and take care of the family or pay a tax back to the government (Harelimana and CômeNahimana, 2021). The places that are full of tourists required good quality hotels to support many customers but on the other hand, if any places that having many low-quality hotels and accommodations, it would be so difficult to bring success to that area (Jasinskis et al, 2016). For Thailand, the tourism industry is one of the very significant revenue, even during the Covid 19 in 2019 the Phuket sandbox project could generate 272.56 billion THB (~8.26 billion USD) only from the first half of the year (Klinsrisuk and Pechdin, 2022). At present, Leelawat et al, (2022) found that the revenue from tourism could generate around 12% of the GDP and the hotel industry plays a major role to welcome all customers to enjoy their trip in Thailand.

The hotel business emerged a long time ago. In England, the English lodging industry from an inn-keeping model existed since late 1700 while the hotel business started around the end of the eighteenth century but it was just a simple and basic accommodation just for a short stay (Bowie, 2018; Borer, 1972). Until the end of the nineteenth century, a professional English hotel industry had emerged which provided a greater range of good and better facilities/services and catering for a wider range of customers (Bowie, 2018)

Research gap and research objective

Results from several literature reviews and marketing studies showed the influence of customer satisfaction plays an important role to increase the level of trust in the brand of business and help to create a positive performance of the organization. However, quite a few researches attempt to study the role of customer satisfaction as a mediator between marketing mix and brand trust especially about the hotel in Thailand. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to study the influence of customer satisfaction as the mediator between the service marketing mix 7Ps and the brand trust of hotel customers in Thailand.

Literature review and theoretical conceptual framework

Service marketing mix 7Ps

The marketing mix is the concept that attempts to collect the controllable factors in the marketing field in order to find the most efficient methods to produce high-quality products and services to serve the customers. Mucai, et al. (2013) stated that to mix all marketing factors together company could see the overview of the business and it seems like a toolkit to produce an effective marketing plan for the

company (Gronroos, 2005). Originally, the concept of the marketing mix was introduced by Neil Borden in 1949 but later on, Professor McCarthy presented 4 common variables that could apply to the marketing mix concept namely products, price, place, and promotion (McCarthy, 1964). Later on, Booms and Bitner (1980) proposed a new marketing mix by adding three more important variables, which are people, process, and physical evidence. From that time, the marketing mix 7Ps became one of the widest-spreading marketing concepts for service sector companies. Wirtz and Lovelock (2013) have written the essentials of service marketing academic book stated about the marketing mix 7Ps as a strategic level of service marketing to elaborate 4 main central and interrelated roles of management functions which are marketing, operations, human resources, and information technology (IT). Some marketers apply the marketing mix as one of the company's performance evaluation tools of the company because it is covered almost every core business performance and marketing controllable variable. Therefore, following the strategic marketing mix plan could assist the company in going in the right direction and achieving the objectives of sales and profitability. (Garavand et al, 2010) Finally, this research defined the service marketing mix (7Ps) as mixed tools of the hotel to help owners or management to create and provide a high-quality service to meet the needs and satisfy the customers

Customer satisfaction

The hotel industry is a service business that focuses on offering high-quality service to customers and fulfilling their needs and wants (Rao and Sahu, 2013). How to make customers satisfied with their service is one of the biggest question marks for hotel owners and management (Sharma and Srivastava, 2018). Because even the great services that hotels provide could not satisfy the customer or they are unhappy with the services that they received, that service could not count as a good service at all. Baquero, (2023) studied customer satisfaction in hotel facilities in Spain and found that there are 3 main elements that could bring a higher level of customer satisfaction which are business organization, quality of facilities, and personal service. If these 3 factors could be able to corporate with each other well then it could be able to increase the level of customer satisfaction and successful business performance. Gupta and Srivastava, (2011) presented American Customer Satisfaction Index Model (ACSI model) which was founded by Dr. Claes Fornell in 1994 (Figure 1) in their study about customer satisfaction in hotel service described 3 elements that bring satisfaction to customers. There are customer expectations, perceiving quality, and perceiving value.

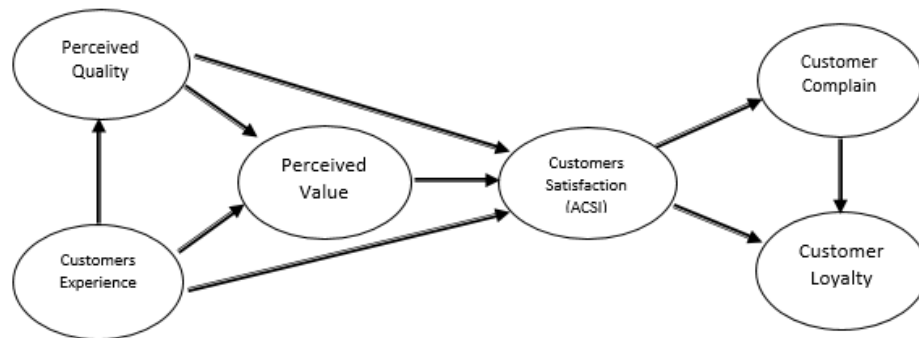


Figure 1: American Customer Satisfaction Index Model (ACSI)

According to the ACSI model, if these 3 elements are aligned together in the right way, it could be able to create customer loyalty which help to enlarge the profit and positive performance of the hotel. While on the other hand if the customers are not satisfied and the hotel could not handle it, then these customers tend to expand more negative feedback and have no intention to come back to the hotel again in the future (Jahani, 2014).

Brand trust

Brand trust is the positive relationship and reliability between consumers and companies that produced products or provided services. Chen et al. (2022). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) studied 146 products about the aspect of customers to their brand and found that brand trust and high-quality products play a very important role to stimulate customers to become brand loyalty and purchase loyalty. Later on, it will lead these purchase loyalty customers to agree purchasing products and services provided by the brand that they trusted at a higher price. Eventually, companies could be able to charge higher prices and increase their profitability and market share beyond other competitors. Krishnan and Hartline (2001) stated that customers perceived lower risk and stress when they purchase products and services from companies that they trust, while the perceived risk would be increased when they have to purchase from a company that has a lower trust in their perceptions.

Hypothesis and conceptual framework

According to the literature reviews of each variable, the relationship between each variable will be described. Next, the conceptual framework and hypotheses will be formed and presented to interpret how the brand trust of the hotel could be influenced by the service marketing mix (7Ps) and customer satisfaction. Moreover, this research has intend to explore the mediator effect of customer satisfaction between service marketing mix (7Ps) and brand trust. The following conceptual framework in Figure 2

depicts the relationship between the service marketing mix 7Ps and brand trust by the mediating effect of customer satisfaction.

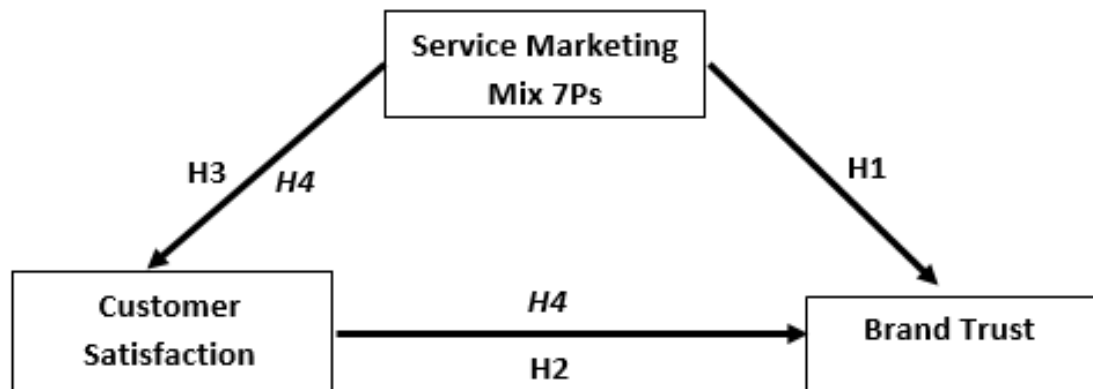


Figure 2. The conceptual framework of this research

Relationship between service marketing (7ps) and brand trust

The service marketing mix (7Ps) is a powerful marketing tool that has been used by a lot of marketers around the world. It consists of 7 controllable realms of marketing activities by aiming to generate good quality products and services for customers and gain more competitive advantage in the market (Loo and Leung, 2018). Shirin & Puth (2011) studied passenger vehicle owners in South Africa who purchased a new vehicle from one of the franchised dealerships of any manufacturer selling and found that whenever the customers could receive good quality from the products or services that they purchased, it could be able to improve the trust of that particular brands. Furthermore, they tend to return to consume the same products and services again until eventually; they will have the intention to become a loyal customer. Following these literature reviews, the hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Service-marketing mix (7Ps) has a direct positive effect on brand trust

Relationship between customer satisfaction and brand trust

Customer satisfaction is one of the highest objectives of every business owner and management because the result from several researches showed that a high level of customer satisfaction could increase the intention of more purchases, return to the hotel again, and trust in the brand. Happy customers mean they were satisfied with the products and services that they expected before purchasing. Agustin and Singh (2005) stated that customers' previous experiences and prior interactions with brands will be the sources of customer satisfaction and these factors will lead to the customer brand trust. However, brand trust is a process that occurs once customers perceive and consider their long-term experience with the brand (Guan et al, (2021). The study of Kaveh et al, (2012) in five-star hotels in Shiraz, Iran found that customer satisfaction has



a direct impact on trust. According to the previous studies, the second hypothesis was proposed:

H2: Customer satisfaction has a direct positive effect on brand trust

Relationship between service marketing (7ps) and customer satisfaction

The good quality of products and services, which is unique and different from other competitors is a key to the success of the business (Maleewat and Banjongprasert, 2022; Gupta and Srivastava, 2011). The marketing mix concept could be able to combine the controllable variable and important marketing activities together in order to produce that good quality products and services (Mucai et al, 2013). WHDP, (2014) studied the service quality and customer satisfaction in Sri Lanka and found that the high quality of service could help customer to gain confidence in the hotel and it will lead to a higher level of customer satisfaction. Following the former research that emphasized the relationship between service marketing mix 7Ps and customer satisfaction, the third hypothesis was presented:

H3: Service-marketing mix (7Ps) has a direct positive effect on customer satisfaction

Mediating effect

Trust is the personal emotion and feeling of confidence, security and a key indicator to inform the quality relationship between buyers and sellers (Setiawan et al, 2020; Kotler, 2011). Tatar and Eren-Erdoğan (2016) mentioned trust as a belief of customers to the business owner or company to be able to provide good products and services as they expected. Therefore, the brand trust could be indicated as an expectation and confidence of customers in the brand to receive good service and it could result in brand loyalty (Shirin & Puth, 2011). To receive the trust of the hotel business, they must be able to provide services that meet the customer's needs and satisfaction. Service marketing mix 7Ps could support the hotel to generate a good quality service because it consists of 7 significant elements in service marketing. Once the great service is provided and served to the customers, the level of customer satisfaction would be increased and this factor plays an important role as a mediator between the service marketing mix 7Ps and brand trust. Prameka, et. al. (2017) have done their research at three-star hotels in Malang, Indonesia concluded that customer satisfaction has a direct positive effect on brand trust and fully mediates the relationship between service quality created by the effective service marketing mix and brand trust (Yarimoglu, 2014). The study of MalaysMalaysia's tourism by Osman and Sentosa (2013) found that customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between service quality and trust, similar to the study of Kim, et. al. (2014) that found the positive effect of the marketing mix to brand trust by having the customer satisfaction as the mediator. Therefore, this research hypothesizes that:



H4: Service marketing mix (7Ps) has a positive effect on brand trust through customer satisfaction

Research methadology

Sample and data collection

The number of tourists that want to visit Thailand has significantly increased every year. By comparing to a decade ago when Thailand has only about less than 20 million tourists visited Thailand, this number has increased to 30 million since 2000. In 2016 more than 33 million tourists were here in Thailand before this amount dropped in 2019 when the Covid 19 pandemic was spreading before come back again in 2022. It was an important reason that supported and forced in the same time to the government and private sector in Thailand to awaken and provide more hotels and other accommodations to support this growth. The revenue from tourism and the hotel industry is the main source of income for Thailand. In 2018, the hospitality industry including tourism, hotel, restaurant and other business generated more than 2 trillion for this country. Thailand has several famous cities for tourists to visit. Bangkok as a capital is the first town that tourists always visit. Rather than having many beautiful places, there are 2 huge international airports located in this capital city. The beautiful beaches lined up in the East and South of Thailand such as Pattaya, Huahin, Phuket, Koh Samui, and Koh Kradan in Trang city which just had the majority votes from the World Beach Guide website of the United Kingdom (www.worldbeachguide.com/top-100-beaches-earth.htm) to be the most beautiful beach in the world in 2023. The North of Thailand has plenty of gigantic mountain ranges and waterfalls.

The sample of this research is the customers that stay in the 3 to 5 hotels in 4 cities namely Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiang Mai, and Hua Hin because there are important tourist destinations which recommended by the Research and Development Institute, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok (Angsukanjanakul, 2017). This quantitative research is applying the purposive sampling method to collect the data and used structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the data received from the questionnaires. The Google Form 7-point Likert scale questionnaire was designed and sent to the hotel lobby or reception. Researchers and teams who can speak both Thai and English language approached customers, and introduced and explained the reason for this research before asking customers to fill out the questionnaire. Before the data collection begin, researchers contacted the hotel manager or human resource depart of every hotel to ask for permission to conduct the data collection. For SEM analysis, the suitable sample size is a very important issue because smaller samples can easily cause sampling errors. According to Hair, (2010) the suggested sample size should



be in the range of 100 to 400 or larger because it could make the goodness of fit measurement, and any difference could be easy to be detected. This research has 435 sample despondences, which is enough amount for SEM to analyze.

Result

The findings of this study have been reported in Table 1 Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity Result, Table 2: Discriminant Validity, Table 3: Absolute Model Fit Indices, Table 4: Hypothesized Relationship Results, Table 5: Mediating Effect Results and the last one is Table 6: Total effect, direct effect and indirect effect from The SEM. For direct effect in terms of how service marketing mix 7Ps impact brand trust, how customer satisfaction impact on brand trust, and service marketing mix 7Ps on customer satisfaction of the hotel customer in Thailand. For indirect effect included how service marketing mix the 7Ps on brand trust through customer satisfaction as a mediator.

Construct reliability, convergent, discriminant validity

In qualitative research construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity are very important measurement scales to be established and function correctly in order to test the relationships between constructs under investigation (Farrell and Rudd, 2009). Normally the value of average variance extracted (AVE) scales should be higher than 0.50 while composite reliability (CR) of all measurement scales should be higher than 0.60 and are considered satisfactory for CR (Grassegger and Nedbal, 2021). Fornell and Larcker, (1981) recommended that discriminant validity is used to test the distinction between each construct in the model and it should be lower than the square root of AVE. The Cronbach alpha is the tool used to compute the internal consistency of each factor. Nunnally, (1978) proposed Cronbach alpha should be at least 0.7 or higher, however later on the majority of an exploratory study deemed 0.6 as acceptable reliability (Hair et al, 2006). Hair et al., (2010) suggested the normal and good standard of factor loading of every variable should not be lower than the recommended value of 0.50.

Results in this research showed that the construct reliability and convergent validity of the content of service marketing mix 7Ps have shown in Table 1 ($\alpha = .741$, AVE=.575, CR=.640), customer satisfaction ($\alpha = .738$, AVE=.563, CR=.632), and brand trust ($\alpha = .719$, AVE=.646, CR=.694). According to the result, all factor loadings were being between .67 and .86. Eventually, the reliability of all variables and the convergent validity were accepted. Moreover, the discriminant validity result of this research was presented in Table 2.



Table 1: Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity Result (n=435)

Construct and Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	CR
7Ps (Service Marketing Mix 7Ps)		.741	.575	.640
P1 Product	.67			
P2 Price	.76			
P3 Place	.66			
P4 Promotion	.79			
P5 People	.83			
P6 Process	.78			
P7 Physical evidence	.80			
SAT (Customer Satisfaction)		.738	.563	.632
SAT1	.78			
SAT2	.71			
BR (Brand Trust)		.719	.646	.694
BR1	.86			
BR2	.74			

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

Constructs	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	7Ps	SA	BR
7Ps	6.538	.7170	0.6402	0.5751	0.6521		
SA	6.588	.6565	0.6318	0.5632	0.689	0.7042	
BR	6.470	.7556	0.6937	0.6462	0.663	0.658	0.7105

Note: values in *italics* represent the square root of AVE

Structural equation model (sem report)

This research used structural equation modeling or SEM to test the overall fit of the structural model, which examined the outcome of the hypothesis testing. According to Hair et al. (2010), the criteria of model fit should have $\chi^2/df \leq 3.00$, GFI ≥ 0.90 , CFI ≥ 0.90 , NFI ≥ 0.90 , AGFI ≥ 0.90 , RMSEA ≤ 0.07 , and RMR ≤ 0.08 . This is a criterion of good model fit value that can be statistically accepted (Hair et al, 2017), Following the results in Table 3 the model fit indices were demonstrated following; firstly, the initial model showed moderate fit ($\chi^2=226.387$, $\chi^2/df=5.552$, $p=.000$, GFI=.805, CFI=.828, NFI=.814, AGFI=.848, RMSEA=.106, RMR=.033). After modification the model showed good fit ($\chi^2=38.735$, $\chi^2/df=1.120$, $p=.000$, GFI=.983, CFI=.997, NFI=.985, AGFI=.964, RMSEA=.023, RMR=.016). The results shown in Table 3 and Picture 2 present the structural equation modeling model results.



Table 3: Absolute Model Fit Indices

Model	Absolute Model Fit Indices							
	χ^2	χ^2/df	GFI	CFI	NFI	AGFI	RMSEA	RMR
Criteria	-	≤ 3.00	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≤ 0.07	≤ 0.08
Initial model	226.387	5.552	.805	.828	.814	.848	.106	.033
Final model	38.735	1.120	.983	.997	.985	.964	.023	.016

Note: χ^2 = chi-square, χ^2/df = relative chi-square, GFI = goodness of fit index, CFI = comparative fit index, NFI = normed fit index, AGFI = adjusted goodness of fit statistic, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, RMR = root mean square residual

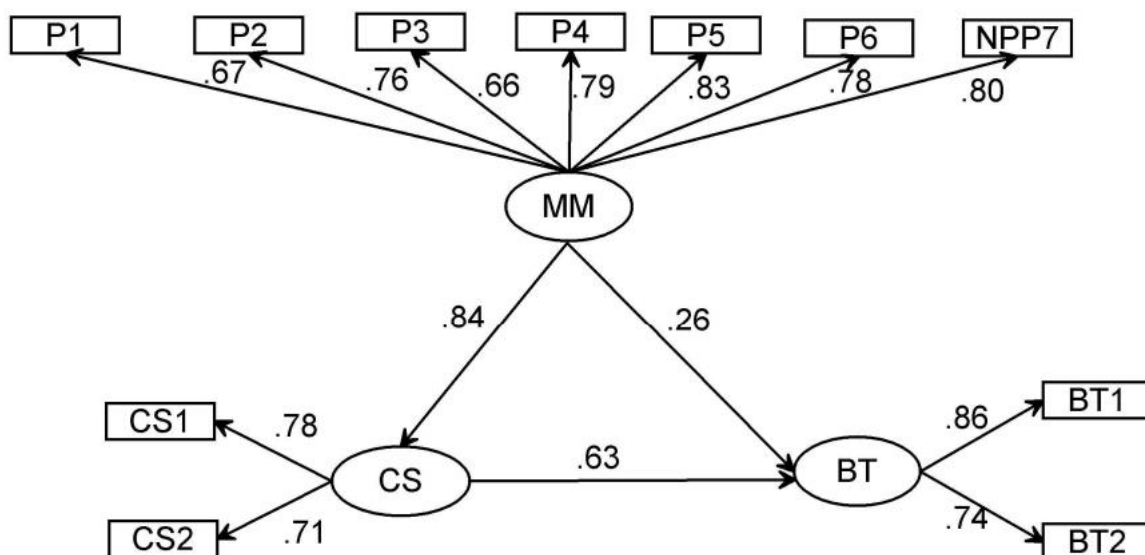


Figure 3: Structural Equation Model Result

Hypothesis results

In total, the 3 hypothesis results were presented in Table 4. The first hypothesis proposed that the service marketing mix (7Ps) has a direct positive effect on brand trust. The first hypothesis was significantly supported, which can explain that the service marketing mix (7Ps) could help the hotel provide high-quality services to serve their valued customers. This high quality of service is the key to the success of the business because “service” is the intangible product that customers will use their feeling and emotions based on their expectations and experience to evaluate the level of quality. There are several studies that insisted on and emphasized the importance of high-quality service because it could lead to a higher level of trust in the hotel brand. These results referred that brand trust in the hotel could be influenced by the use of 7 elements of the service marketing mix namely high-quality products, reasonable prices, good



location, attractive promotion, knowledgeable staff, flowing process of service, and impressive decoration of the hotels. The second hypothesis proposed that customer satisfaction has a direct positive effect on brand trust. It results significantly supported, describing if a hotel could satisfy their customer, it could have a positive effect on brand trust because brand trust means a positive feeling of security to stay at the hotel. Both factors customer satisfaction and brand trust are the psychological factors of an individual and the subjective feeling of customers toward the hotel, and results of this hypothesis clearly displayed that customer satisfaction affects brand trust and it implies the hoteliers focus on making and satisfying their customers before, during and after stay. Lastly, the third hypothesis proposed that the service marketing mix (7Ps) has a direct positive effect on customer satisfaction. The result showed the third hypothesis was also significantly supported, which explained that customers are pleased and satisfied once they received the good services they expected before purchase. Service marketing mix could stimulate the level of high-quality products and services of the hotel and it has a positive effect on customer satisfaction of the customers which later on the higher level of satisfaction will lead to the positive performance and profitable of the hotel in the long run.

Table 4: Hypothesized Relationship Results

Hypothesized relationship	Results	P-value
H1: Service marketing mix (7Ps) has a direct positive effect on brand trust	supported	.05
H2: Customer satisfaction has a direct positive effect on brand trust	supported	.001
H3: Customer satisfaction has a direct positive effect on customer satisfaction	supported	.001
H4:Service marketing mix (7Ps) has a positive effect on brand trust through customer satisfaction	supported	.001

The mediating effects of customer satisfaction, between service marketing mix (7ps) and brand trust

Table 5 and Table 6 illustrate the results of the mediating variables of the fourth hypothesis, which proposed that the service marketing mix (7Ps) has a positive effect on brand trust through customer satisfaction. The results supported this hypothesis and indicated that customer satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between the service marketing mix (7Ps) and has a significantly positive effect on brand trust ($P < 0.001$).



Results implied that the service marketing mix 7Ps covered all important controllable variables that assist the hotel to create a great quality of their services. High-quality service plays an important role to increase customer satisfaction. Consequently when customers are satisfied with the services that they received from the chosen hotel. These customers tend to have the intention to spend more money on the other services and also would like to return to stay at the same hotel again because they trust the hotel that will be able to offer the same or better services again when they come back. Moreover, satisfied customers who trust in the hotel's brand will inform other people to come and stay at the hotel and receive the great services they received before. This word-of-mouth marketing could reduce the cost of marketing, increase the marketing opportunity and generate more profit for the hotel. On the other hand, if the hotel could not provide good service, the customers will be disappointed and unsatisfied, later on, they will also inform this bad attitude to others including through social media which will bring huge trouble to the hotel and destroy the image of the organization. Therefore, these 3 variables of the service marketing mix (7Ps), customer satisfaction, and brand trust must be focused on by the owner and management of every hotel. Finally, this empirical finding shows that the service marketing mix (7Ps) is a significant aspect of customer satisfaction that affects niche strategy performance.

Table 5: Mediating Effect Results

Mediating effect	IV-M-DV		Mediation type
	direct	indirect	
7Ps → SAT → BR	.790 (p=.001)	.557 (p=.001)	Full mediation

Table 6: Total effect, Direct effect, and Indirect effect of

Path	Path coefficient	SE	t-value	P-value
Total effect				
7Ps → BR	.790	.042	5.441	.001
Direct effect				
7Ps → BR	.261	.139	2.32	.05
SA → BR	.628	.172	6.437	.001
7Ps → SA	.844	.065	7.321	.001
Indirect effect				
7Ps → BR	.557	.142	5.771	.001



Conclusion and discussion

The hotel industry is a promising industry for Thailand. More and more tourists still would visit Thailand because this country has a lot of beautiful natural resources, culture and friendly people. The requirement for good accommodation is the positive pressure of Thailand's government and private sector to expand provide and promote the new hotel and also help the existing hotel to improve their quality (Pholphirul et al, 2022). According to the information and results from this research. It could clearly imply the 3 significant variables to help the hotel industry to be successful which are service marketing mix (7Ps), customer satisfaction, and brand trust. If any hotels could be able to integrate these three variables together that could initially guarantee success and positive performance, conversely if any hotels could not align three variables together, they tend to face trouble with their business either.

The service marketing mix (7Ps) is the improved version of the previous marketing mix 4P which was created by McCarthy, (1964) and the marketing mix 4P became a famous strategy for product-centric companies. Chong, (2003) stated that the first P in the marketing mix is "price" as it originated from microeconomic theory until other variables "P" were added. While service-centric organizations required more details to offer their service as it is an intangible product. Booms and Bitner's (1980) then suggested the additional 3 new variables namely people, process and physical evidence could strengthen the quality of service to be more robust. The outcome of this study hinted that 7 controllable variables of the service marketing mix could be able to help the hotel to provide a great service to their customers and it could increase the level of both customer satisfaction and brand trust. Customer satisfaction is the psychological factor that customers could inform after receiving the service. The hotel owner will never know if their service could satisfy the customers or not until customers have used those services. However, to increase the opportunity of making good service, hotels should apply the service marketing mix strategy (7Ps) into their organization because following and focusing on these 7 variables could be initially a clue of success in their service.

The conclusion of this research would like to emphasize the importance of a service marketing mix (7Ps) to produce high-quality products and services that hotel owners including other business owners need to focus on as the first priority. Because if any hotel or organization could able to produce great quality service, it could easily lead to successful customer satisfaction. The result from this research is also appropriate for hotel owners and those who will open the business. Including the government can use the data to standardize hotels across the country to increase the number of tourists. Lastly, happy and satisfied customers will trust the hotel and be ready to spend, return and announce the word of mouth of the high-quality service to other people. If these



3 factors could align together effectively, this could be a positive clue to the success of the hotel in the long run, in terms of both financial and non-financial performances.

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