THE EFFECT OF MARKETING MIX (7Ps) THROUGH CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND BRAND TRUST IN ORDER TO INCREASE THE LEVEL OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY: A CASE STUDY OF HOTEL CUSTOMER IN THAILAND

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Abstract

The hotel industry is one of the very fast-growing businesses in Thailand. It is a part of the hospitality industry together with other businesses such as tourism and restaurants. The hotel industry generates a tremendous income for Thailand. According to the information from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the demand for traveling is still increasing, and the hotel industry could be growing and developing. As the demand increases, more customers will visit the hotel and they require a good standard hotel with great service. Nowadays, the competition of hotel is very fierce then every hotel need to prepare their properties and produce a great service for their customer. This research aimed to investigate the loyalty of customers to the hotel that they stay in via the other 3 variables namely marketing mix 7P, customer satisfaction, and brand trust. The sampling technique in this study applied purposive sampling. The data collection was from filling out the questionnaire, which was distributed to the customers at the hotels in the 4 famous tourist cities in Thailand which are Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, and Huahin. The SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) with the help of the AMOS program was used to analyze the data and path analysis. The result showed that marketing mix 7Ps, customer satisfaction, and brand trust were the significant factors that could help to develop customer loyalty to the hotel.

Keywords: Marketing mix 7P, Thailand hotel, Customer satisfaction, Brand trust, Customer loyalty, Hospitality and hotel industry in Thailand

Introduction

The hospitality industry always plays an important role in producing income for many countries around the world including Thailand. This industry includes many kinds of businesses together such as tourism, hotel, restaurant, travel agent and etc., (Martínez-Ros and Orfila-Sintes, 2009). According to the information from World Tourism Organization, (2021) presented the hospitality industry generated 8.9 trillion US dollars to global GDP, or about 10.3% of income around the world received from this industry

(World Tourism Organization. 2021; Chancharat and Meeprom, 2022). Not only the significant for the world or country level, but the hospitality industry also generates a lot of income for the company or organization as well, then the competition for this industry is very high (Oke et al. 2008; Kara et al, 2012). As this industry is the service segment to be successful in the hospitality industry, companies or organizations need to require a high potential employee to prepare and offer a great quality of services to meet the needs of their customer. When the customers are satisfied and enjoyable with the services, then it will increase their satisfaction, which will lead to the loyalty of these customers as well (Mmutle and Shonhe, 2017; Kuruuzum and Koksal, 2010).

The hotel industry is one of the major elements and core competencies of the hospitality industry (Zumitzavan and Udchachone, 2014; Yoopetch et al, 2021) and will be the area of study for this research. Hai-yan and Baum, (2006) studied the hospitality and hotel industry in China and stated that the hotel industry is a business that has high competition and requires a high quality and skill of their employee in order to provide a great service for their valued customers. Grzinic, (2008) studied the hotel business in 33 European countries and mentioned that the hotel industry is very significant and generates a huge income for every country, especially in top famous tourist destinations such as Spain, Italy, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom and the number of overnight hotel is still increasing. Woods, (2003) also found that training programs for hotel employees are very important methods to increase the quality of hotel employees, especially the employees who need to contact with the customer directly. For example, front office staff or F&B service but unfortunately this issue was regretted or overlooked by many management and the hotel and it led to the lower quality of their performance (Zhang et al, 2005).

The hospitality industry In Thailand is one of the most important incomes in the country. Zumitzavan and Udchachone, (2014) studied the hospitality industry in Thailand and found information from the Bank of Thailand and the Ministry of Commerce that about 52% of Thailand's GDP in 2012 was from the service sector. Liu, (2022) studied the economic growth rate and impact on hospitality in Thailand and found that the number of tourists and visitors in Thailand increased from 15.9 million in 2010 to 39.9 million in the year 2019 and became the 8th largest global destination by visitor arrivals and 4th in tourism receipts in 2019 (UN WTO 2020). The popularity of the hospitality industry in Thailand especially hotel, restaurants, and tourism tend to increase in the future.

Research Objective

1. This research aims to analyze the association of each factor (marketing mix 7Ps, customer satisfaction, brand trust, and customer loyalty) by using structural equation modeling (SEM).

2. This research aims to find the relationship between each variable and present the conceptual framework according to the topic.

Literature Review

Marketing Mix 7Ps

The marketing mix is a powerful marketing concept that helps the company and the marketer handle the marketing tasks easily (Jain, 2013). It could also help to separate the marketing issue from the other activities of the organization, moreover, when the company is clear about what are they going to focus on to succeed then that organization will become and better specialist for their marketing. Grönroos, (2000) stated that a successful marketing mix strategy could change the marketing position of the organization to be better and help increase the competitive advantage of the firm as well. Jain, (2013) also presented that the marketing mix offers 2 main benefits to the company. The first benefit is to help the marketing department understand their job and to be clear about their duties, while another benefit is to assist the marketing manager to be able to relocate organizational resources to the right place and serve the various needs of every department.

The marketing mix 4P concept originally consisted of product, price, place, and promotion but it was still uncertain about the starting of this concept but it seems to be not enough information and detail to meet the needs of their customer, especially in the service sector. To solve this problem in the service marketing field. Booms and Bitner, (1981) expanded the original marketing mix 4P by adding 3 more elements for the service sector which are people, process, and physical evidence to increase to efficiency of this marketing concept. This new service marketing mix concept has changed from marketing mix 4Ps to marketing mix 7Ps. Since then, it began to receive widespread acceptance in the services marketing academic, literature, and also in real workplaces (Grădinaru et al, 2016; Kusdiana and Yulita, R. (2024).

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is one of the most important priorities that owners and managers need to receive from their customers. It is the attitude that meets between company service and customer expectations (Rao and Sahu, 2013). Kotler, (2000) defined customer satisfaction as "a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or

her expectation". To receive satisfaction from their customer company need to be concerned about several factors for example Hokanson (1995) suggested that customer satisfaction factors include friendly, courteous, knowledgeable, and helpful employees, accuracy, clarify and timeliness of billing, competitive pricing, service quality, good value, and quick service. When customers receive a good service, then they would be happy and enjoyable which could help increase the desire to come back to receive this service again in the future. Customer satisfaction in this research will focus on the quality of service in international hotels in Thailand for both tangible and intangible factors to meet or exceed the expectations of customers including the intention to return to the hotel again in the future (Rashid and Rasheed, 2024).

Brand Trust

Trust is a word or concept that is difficult to explain because it is an emotional state (Lee, 2018). Simpson, (2012) stated trust that refers to 3 mental states which are cognitive, conative, and affective. There are many scholars and researchers who were interested in the concept of trust and attempted to apply it in many disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics, management, and the marketing field (Delgado and Luis, 2005). In marketing, trust is used for branding because when customers have a great feeling with some brands then they tend to retain and use or buy that brand again. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) presented the definition of brand trust as "a consumer's willingness to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Alhaddad, 2015). Brand trust in this research is the customer who stays at the hotels because they have a good attitude toward this brand, are satisfied to stay, and trust that it can offer a good quality of service during their stay until check out.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is one of the most important goals of marketers and companies (Watson et al, 2015). Even though this topic has been discussed and debated among scholars and authors for a long time it is still in the spotlight of many journals in the marketing field (Brown 1952; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Many times the word customer loyalty was confusingly applied to brand loyalty, even though both of them are different. Ishak and Abd Ghani, (2013) studied the difference between brand loyalty and customer loyalty and suggested that brand loyalty focuses mostly on the positive perception by consumers towards the brand. On the other hand, customer Loyalty focuses on the spending power of customers, which was induced by several loyalty programs.

Loyal customers are the group of customers who always buy and use the products and services, and then they will become highly demanding and high-expectation customers because they have perceived the products and services before

and are satisfied (Makasi and Saruchera, 2014). Therefore, these customers will come back again and would like to receive the same quality of products and services or even more. It is the responsibility of the company to produce the products and services to serve customers. Customer loyalty in this research will emphasize the intention of customers who would like to use the products and services because of their expectations and good experience with the quality of the brand and would like to pay money to get or use it again.

Conceptual Framework

According to the research background and research objective of every factor namely marketing mix 7Ps, customer satisfaction, brand trust, and customer loyalty. The hypothesis and conceptual framework were formed accordingly
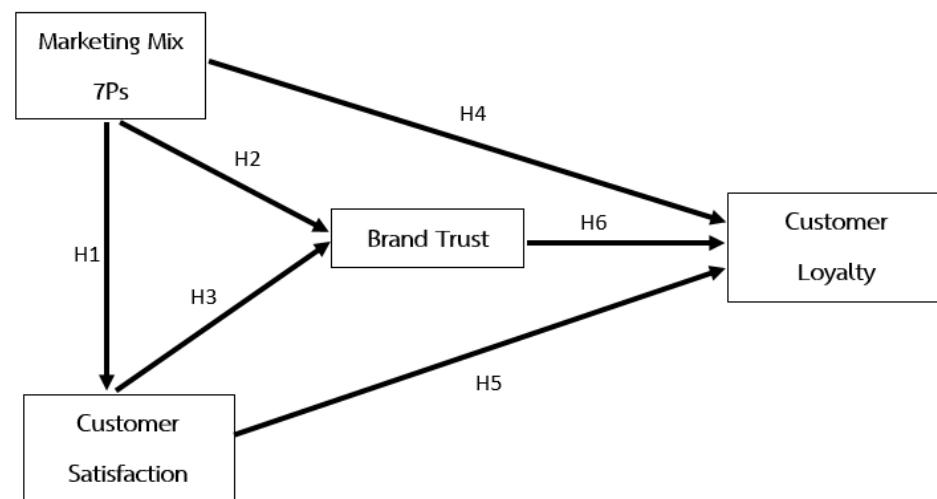

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of this research

Relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and customer satisfaction: Marketing mix 7Ps strongly focus on the high quality of service rather than normal products. As service is an intangible product, It deals directly with the feelings and emotions of each customer. Sudari et al, (2019) studied SME products in Malaysia and found the quality of the marketing mix could be able to increase customer satisfaction (Bawa et al., 2013; Kadhim et al., 2016; Mustawadjuhaefa et al., 2017). Following these previous studies, the hypothesis of this research is developed as:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and customer satisfaction Relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and brand trust: According to Kotler (2011) which once stated that marketing mix is a systematically developed strategy through tactical marketing in order to produce the desired response from their customer

(Simanjuntak et al, 2020). Brand trust is a psychological variable of the customers that mirrors a set of accumulated presumptions via some factors such as reliability, intention, and integrity (Keller, 2001). Madhunimasha and Pathmini, (2021) studied the green marketing mix policy in a hotel in Sri Lanka and found the positive effect of marketing mix with brand trust. While, Loo and Leung, (2018) studied the service of hotel staff in Taiwan and found that the failure of service could lower or destroy the brand trust of their customers to the hotel. Therefore, this research will study the relationship between marketing mix and brand trust through the following hypothesis;

    - H2: There is a positive relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and brand trust Relationship between customer satisfaction and brand trust**:** Customer satisfaction is a psychological state of customer emotion with the expectation before making a decision to purchase products and services (Rather et al, 2019). Brand trust is one of the very important items that help customers loyal to the brand (Ahmed et al, 2014). It is a promise of the company via branding to fulfill the expectations of its customers. Maghzi et al, (2011) studied the brand trust of hotel services in Dubai by investigating 100 local and international customers who stayed at the hotel and found that customer satisfaction has a very positive influence on brand trust. To this end, the third hypothesis in this research was developed.

    - H3: There is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand trust Relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and customer loyalty**:** Marketing mix is one of the significant forms of marketing strategy that combines many marketing activities to create the most satisfying result (Luckyardi et al, 2022). The study of Othman et al, (2021) on pilgrimage-driven travel services marketing mix 7Ps toward Umrah travel agents in Malaysia found that marketing mix 7Ps has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty especially when it passes through customer satisfaction in both direct and indirect ways. Following these literature reviews the hypothesis is proposed

    - H4: There is a positive relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and customer loyalty Relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty: Customer satisfaction is a topic that has been discussed by several authors and researchers for more than 2 decades as one of the very significant factors, which help the company to increase their level of advantage in the intensive competitive market (Leninkumar, 2017). On the other hand, customer loyalty refers to the customer that has the highest acceptance level of the brand, which could be normally observed by their buying behavior. Othman et al, (2020) found a positive effect of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty from their study of Islamic religious tourism toward Umrah travel agents in Malaysia. As an outcome of the above discussion, the following hypothesis is presented;

- H5: There is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty Relationship between brand trust and customer loyalty**:** Kotler, (2011) mentioned that branding is a symbol of the products or services that differentiate one company from other competitors. Ekelundand et al, (2001) presented that trust is divided into 2 groups institutional trust and self-belief trust. Brand trust in some products or services is a part of personal trust. Brand trust is a feeling of safety and security that customers have when they think about their favorite brand. This brand trust is based on reliability and responsibility for the interest and welfare of their customer (Upamannyu et al, 2014). Dayanti et al, (2019) studied the brand trust of skincare products at Ara shop Sidoarjo in Indonesia and found that brand trust has a strongly positive effect on customer loyalty. According to these literature reviews the sixth hypothesis in this research was developed:

- H6: There is a positive relationship between brand trust and customer loyalty Mediating effect There are several studies and research that attempted to investigate the mediating effect of brand trust, which helps the company to meet the needs of their customers and eventually leads to customer loyalty to the organization. Shirin and Puth, (2011) have done their research about customer loyalty in the South African automotive market. Results show that brand trust is a very important factor that affects the positive of customer loyalty as both a direct impact and mediating between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Following these previous studies, the seventh and eighth hypotheses of this research are developed:

- H7: Brand trust mediates the relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and customer loyalty

- H8: Brand trust mediates the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty

Research Methodology

Population and sample size

This research studied the impact of marketing mix elements (7Ps) through customer satisfaction and trust in order to increase the level of customer loyalty at the hotel in Thailand. The population of this study is both domestic and international hotel guests at the international hotels in 4 famous tourist attraction cities of Thailand namely Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, and Huahin. These customers must be former clients or returning customers who have stayed at this hotel at least 1 time. Questionnaires were sent to 3 to 5-star hotels in each city. The hotel manager, receptionist, guest relationship, and researcher teams will distribute this questionnaire to the customers who volunteer to give their answers. The total number of 20 hotels in this research were collecting the data. The hotel manager or front office manager was contacted before the distribution

process started to explain the reason for this research and also asked for permission. The questionnaires were distributed only to the guests who were already checked –in and staying at the hotel, using the services of the hotel such as hotel guest rooms, and restaurants, and also guests who have been to this hotel before and come back again. The data collection was using convenience sampling methods. Most importantly before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher and teams will be asked for permission from customers first if they would like to volunteer their valuable time for this data collection process. In total 800 questionnaires were administered and 435 were returned.

5.2 Data Collection and Population

This research used quantitative methods to test the hypotheses by developing a questionnaire to measure the brand trust of hotel customers. A minimum sample size estimation method in SEM is the "10-times rule" method (Hair et al., 2011). The sample size in this research was 435 customers who are staying at the hotel in 4 famous tourist cities namely Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya, and Hua Hin. The quantitative method was used by filling out the questionnaire to collect the data. The purposive sampling techniques were used and questionnaires were sent to the hotel directly by asking the permission from the hotel manager. Another way of collecting the data is by asking the tour guide and travel agent to help pass the questionnaire to their customer who stays at the hotel in these 4 cities. The chosen hotel was a 3-star to 5-star hotel following the criteria of the Thai Hotels Association.

Descriptive Statistics Result

The 435 responders were made up of 225 women (51.7%) and 210 males (48.3%). Furthermore, at 150 (34.5%), the bulk of the mean age was between 31 and 40 years old. This investigation revealed 111 people between the ages of 41 and 50 (25.5%), 93 people above the age of 50 (21.4%), 81 people between the ages of 21 and 30, and no people under the age of 20. The degrees of study are undergraduate (260: 59.8%), master's (163: 37.5%), and doctorate (12: 2.8%). Salary or average monthly income ranges between 20,000-30,000 Baht (35: 8.05%), 30,000-40,000 Baht (104: 23.91%), and 40,000-50,000 Baht (104: 23.91%).

Result

The findings of this research have been reported by showing the results in Table 1 Construct Reliability, Table 2: Absolute Model Fit Indices, Table 3: Hypothesized Relationship Results, Table 4: Mediating Effect Results, and Table 5: Total effect, direct effect and indirect effect from The SEM in term of how service marketing mix 7Ps impact, customer satisfaction impact on customer loyalty by the mediating effect of brand trust of the hotel customer in Thailand.

Construct Reliability

Construct reliability testing is the type of reliability that is applied to assess the consistency of results across items on the same test (Suryani and Tentama, 2020). Reliability could indicate how much confidence is in the research tools. This confidence is when the research tool is actually used. Then the results obtained are reliable which can be proved with the Cronbach Alpha value. Hair et al, (2019) suggested that the construct reliability could measure from the expected composite reliability value and Cronbach's alpha and the value should be higher than 0.70. The construct reliability of service marketing mix 7Ps has shown in Table 1 (α=.719), customer satisfaction (α=.756), brand trust (α=.854), and customer loyalty (α=.708). While in Table 2, the Absolute Model Fit Indices

Table 1 Construct Reliability (n=435)

Construct and Items	Cronbach's Alpha
7P	.719
CS	.756
BT	.854
CL	.708

Structural equation model (sem report)

The overall fit in this research used structural equation modeling or SEM to test the structural model, which examined the outcome of the hypothesis testing. According to Hair et al. (2010), the criteria of model fit should have χ^2/df ≤ 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 2 the model fit indices were explained following the initial model showed moderate fit (χ^2=0.00, χ^2/df=0.00, p=.000, GFI=100, CFI=1.00, NFI=1.00, AGFI=1.00, RMSEA=0.00, RMR=0.00). The results shown in Table 2 and Figure 2 present the structural equation modeling model results.

Table 2: Absolute Model Fit Indices

		Absolute Model Fit Indices						
Model	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	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00

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
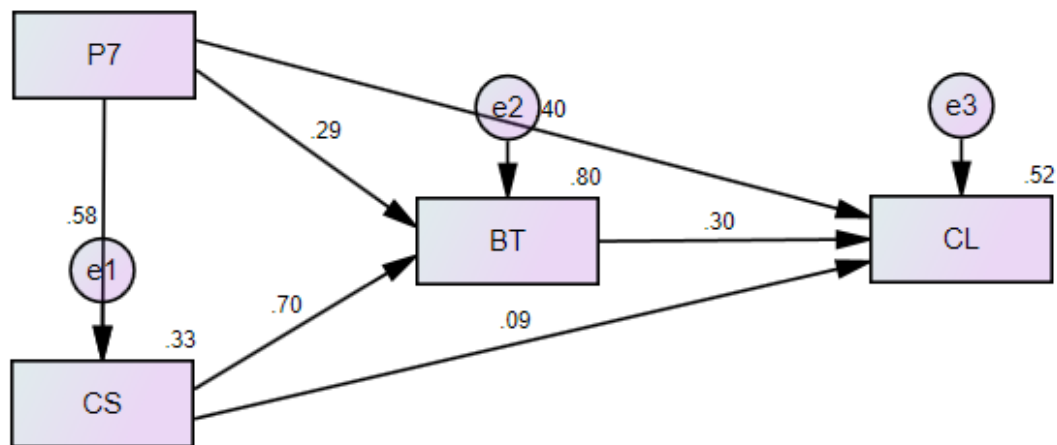

Figure 2 Structural Equation Model Result

Hypothesis results

In total, the 6 hypothesis results are presented in Table 3. The first hypothesis: There is a positive relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and customer satisfaction. This hypothesis was supported which indicated that all 7P marketing mix are important to customer satisfaction. The second hypothesis is that there is a positive relationship between the marketing mix 7Ps and brand trust. This hypothesis was also supported. The third hypothesis stated that there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand trust. This hypothesis was also theoretically supported. Similar to the fourth hypothesis, which hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between the marketing mix 7Ps and customer loyalty. This fourth hypothesis was also supported. The fifth hypothesis was the only hypothesis that was not theoretically supported. It was proposed that there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The sixth hypothesis proposes that there is a positive relationship between brand trust and customer loyalty. This hypothesis was also supported.

Table 3: Hypothesized Relationship Results

Hypothesized relationship	Results	P-value
H1: There is a positive relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and customer satisfaction	supported	.05
H2: There is a positive relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and brand trust	supported	.001
H3: There is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand trust	supported	.001
H4: There is a positive relationship between marketing mix 7Ps and customer loyalty	supported	.001
H5: There is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty	not supported	.181
H6: There is a positive relationship between brand trust and customer loyalty	supported	.001

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

Table 4 and Table 5 illustrate the results of the mediating variables of the seventh and eighth hypotheses, which proposed that the service marketing mix (7Ps) has a positive effect on customer loyalty through brand trust. The eighth hypothesis proposed that customer satisfaction has a positive effect on customer loyalty through brand trust. The results of these two hypotheses were theoretically supported. The seventh hypothesis was a partial mediation while it was a full mediation effect in the eighth hypothesis.

Table 4: Mediating Effect Results

Mediating effect	IV-M-DV		Mediation type
	direct	indirect	
7P → BT → CL	.403 (p=.000)	.260 (p=.001)	Partial mediation
CS → BT → CL	.092 (p=.181)	.210 (p=.000)	Full mediation

Table 5: Total effect, Direct effect and Indirect effect

Path	Path coefficient	SE	t-value	P-value
Total effect				
7P ⟶ CL	.699	.033	9.431	.000
CS ⟶ CL	.382	.024	5.035	.000
Direct effect				
7P ⟶ BT	.286	.025	10.567	.000
7P ⟶ CS	.576	.039	14.145	.000

Path	Path coefficient	SE	t-value	P-value
7P → CL	.403	.050	8.461	.000
CS → BT	.700	.026	25.087	.000
CS → CL	.092	.075	1.3337	.181
BT → CL	.300	.089	3.870	.000
Indirect effect				
7P → CL	.260	.032	6.443	.000
CS → CL	.210	.046	4.002	.000

Discussion

Brand trust is another significant variable that could be able to expand the level of customer loyalty. Furthermore, brand trust is taking the role of mediator between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction and the marketing mix 7Ps. This outcome is very beneficial to indicate and remind the owner and executive that every hotel needs to be aware of the branding because this is one of the very important factors in bringing customers to the hotel and revisiting the hotel (Ji et al, 2024)

Body of Knowledge

Acceding to the results from SEM analysis all hypotheses could be concluded that the integration of the 7Ps in marketing could create high-quality products and services which could be able to satisfy the customers to stay at the hotel and also use other facilities in the hotel. Moreover, the high quality of products and services from the marketing mix 4Ps could assist the hotel in increasing customer loyalty. The happy customers tend to return to stay at the hotel again and if they are very satisfied, then in the future these customers will be ready to become loyal customers and they tend to inform their family, friends, and anyone that they know to come and stay at the hotel. However, the second hypothesis repeated that it does not only increase customer satisfaction but the high quality of marketing mix 7Ps could be able to increase the level of customer loyalty. The third hypothesis explains that the high value of customer satisfaction could increase the level of brand trust and help the customers decide to stay at the hotel because they have confidence in the hotel brand, which could be able to provide good service and customers would be delightful to stay or return to the hotel again in the future.

Conclusion

One of the significant points of this study is the fifth hypothesis: There is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty when the result showed that it was not supported. This score indicated that only the satisfaction of the

customer is not enough to transform the satisfied customer to be a loyal customer. On the other hand, if the customer satisfaction factor is mediated by brand trust, then it could be able to stimulate the satisfied customer to become a customer loyalty as in the eighth hypothesis (Brand trust mediates the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty). Khairawati, (2020) studied the customer loyalty program has found the same result when customer satisfaction is not significant in influencing customer loyalty.

Suggestion

According to the result from this research, researcher suggested the business owner and entrepreneur especially in the hospitality industry to put their effort to create the loyalty customers. However, the way to create high quality of loyalty customers. Business owners need to focus on the quality of their products and services by following the principle of 7P marketing mix, to build the satisfaction of the customer which will lead to the higher level of trust that customers will give to the brand because they are a precious group of people who will help their business to become great successful in the future.

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