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FACTORS INFLUENCING WORD-OF-MOUTH OF USERS AT SAKON NAKHON IMMIGRATION, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to examine 1) the influence of service quality on user satisfaction and word-of-mouth and 2) the effect of user satisfaction on word-of-mouth. Data was collected from a sample of 400 respondents who were a user of Sakon Nakhon Immigration, Sakon Nakhon Provinces, Thailand. They were 147 of Thai people and 253 of foreigner. Questionnaire was developed by two steps as follows. Firstly, language validity was checked by using Back-Translation technique (a method for translation and validation was showed in detail). Secondly, Cronbach's Alpha was conducted to test reliability. Then, Multiple Regression Analysis was used for analyzing data. The results revealed that four dimensions of service quality significantly impacted user satisfaction and word-of-mouth. However, there was only one dimension of service quality "reliability" did not significantly impact user satisfaction and "assurance" did not significantly impact word-of-mouth. Moreover, the results presented that user satisfaction significantly affected word-of-mouth. This finding could be applied to increase user satisfaction and word-of-mouth. The Sakon Nakhon Immigration should improve and develop their service quality, especially in reliability and assurance dimension. Research implications and directions for future research were suggested.

Keywords -Immigration, Service Quality, User Satisfaction, Word-Of-Mouth

INTRODUCTION

Background

World Travel and Tourism Council has foreseen that over the next ten years, Thailand's tourism income will account for one-tenth of the global gross domestic product (GDP). Moreover, Tourism Authority of Thailand predicted that tourists traveling to Thailand would increase by five percent in 2018 by Tourism Authority of Thailand. [12]. Not only is their visit to Thailand for traveling alone, but also they visit or live in Thailand for certain reasons, e.g. marriage to a Thai spouse, businessman's investment in Thailand, study in Thailand, propagation of religion and living a life after retirement. The figure of foreigners visiting Thailand continues growing because Thais are caring and sincere, and the country has low cost of living, thus enabling a life of comfort. If foreigners wish to live in Thailand, they are obliged to contact Immigration Bureau to file a request letter for living in Thailand and pay the fees. Hence, permitting foreigners to live in Thailand is considered vital since this job is to offer services for foreigners wishing to live in Thailand. If the officers can perform this task effectively, rapidly and smoothly, it will leave the foreigners with impression, service satisfaction and positive attitudes towards Thai people and the country; simply put, it is regarded as promotion of a positive image of the organization and country[8]. Sakon Nakhon Immigration Office is a subdivision of Thailand Immigration Bureau located on the northeastern region of Thailand. This particular division is to provide services to foreigners wishing to live in the area of responsibility of Sakon Nakhon[13]. If the staff of Sakon Nakhon Immigration Office are able to work in response to citizens and foreigners' needs instantly and effectively, it will build a positive image of the organization itself[5]. A positive image of Sakon Nakhon Immigration Office can be usually spread through word-of-mouth – real user experiences and user's positive or negative attitudes[2]. Thus, the present study intended to investigate the factors influencing user word of mouth of Sakon Nakhon Immigration Office. In particular, the objectives of this study were to examine 1) the influence of service quality on user satisfaction and user word-of-mouth of Sakon Nakhon Immigration Office, Sakon Nakhon Provinces and 2) the effect of user satisfaction on user word-of-mouth of Sakon Nakhon Immigration Office, Sakon Nakhon Provinces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature search in this research study was from three theories of researchers that were service quality, satisfaction of users and word-of-mouth.

Service Quality

Service quality can be referred to as the organization's ability to respond to user's needs; it is considered as the most important factor which will elevate the organization. Delivery of service quality conforming to user's expectation is necessary since users will be satisfied if their needs are met [11].

Service qualities are divided into 5 dimensions [3].

1. Tangibility: concerns the physical facilities, equipment, personnel and materials that can be perceived by the five human senses.

2. Reliability: translated into the ability of the supplier to execute the service in a safe and efficient manner. It depicts the consistent performance, free of non-compliance, in which the user can trust. The supplier must comply with what was promised, without the need for rework.

3. Responsiveness: refers to the availability of the provider to attend voluntarily to users, providing a service in an attentive manner, with precision and speed of response. It concerns the availability of employees of the institution to assist users and provide the service promptly.

4. Assurance: it is identified as the courtesy, knowledge of employees and their ability to convey trust.

5. Empathy: related to whether the organization cares for the user and assists him in an individualized manner, referring to the ability to demonstrate interest and personal attention. Empathy includes accessibility, sensitivity and effort in understanding the needs of users.

Satisfaction of Users

Satisfaction is a feeling of pleasure after using a service; user satisfaction reflects quality of services. If the service provider can respond to user's needs, they will be left with satisfaction; otherwise, they will not be satisfied [6].

The user satisfaction was categorized into six types as follows [1]:

1. Satisfaction with convenience is concerned with waiting time in the service provider's office, provision of care if needed as well as convenience and comfort.

2. Satisfaction with co-ordination involves the service provider's provision of services and care required as well as attention for users.

3. Satisfaction with courtesy is concerned with the service provider's courteous and friendly manners towards users.

4. Satisfaction with information provided to users.

5. Satisfaction with quality of care.

6. Output-of-pocket cost.

Word-Of-Mouth

Word-of-mouth can be referred to as oral communication between individuals concerning impression or unimpression about products or services. In using word of mouth, a speaker should have real experience of products or services; moreover, a word-of-mouth receiver may use this approach to retell a story and pass on information to others. As a result, the stories and information are widely disseminated, which could cause uncontrollability [7].

To divided word-of-mouth communications into three categories as follows [2]:

1. Product news refers to the information about products, e.g. product's features and attributes.

2. Advice giving is concerned with giving opinions about products, such as how to buy a particular type of products.

3. Personal experience refers to positive and negative comments towards products based on usage experience and reasons of purchase.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

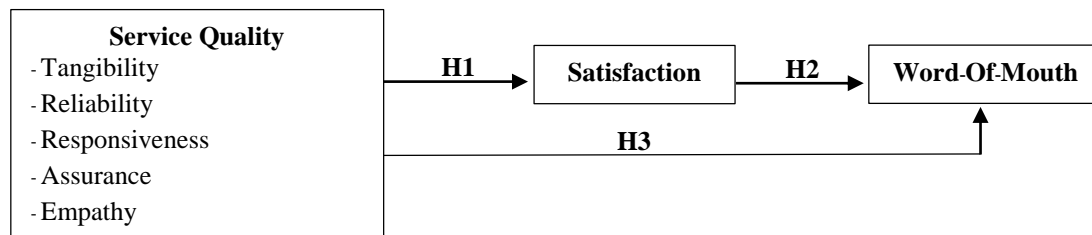
From the reviews of the literature, the conceptual framework of this research study was presented in figure 1 the research was mainly aimed to investigate the influence of service quality on user satisfaction and user word-of-mouth and the effect of user satisfaction on user word-of-mouth. Therefore, the research hypotheses are:

H1: service quality will affect user satisfaction of Sakon Nakhon Immigration, Sakon Nakhon Provinces.

H2: user satisfaction will affect user word-of-mouth of Sakon Nakhon Immigration, Sakon Nakhon Provinces.

H3: service quality will affect user word-of-mouth of Sakon Nakhon Immigration, Sakon Nakhon Provinces.

Figure 1
The conceptual framework of this research



This research is a quantitative study. The data was collected from a sample of 400 respondents who were a user of Sakon Nakhon Immigration, Sakon Nakhon Provinces, Thailand. They were 147 of Thai people and 253 of foreigner. Questionnaire was developed by two steps as follows. Firstly, language validity was checked by using Back-Translation technique (a method for translation and validation was showed in detail). Secondly, Cronbach's Alpha was conducted to test reliability. Then, Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis were used for analyzing data. Questionnaire was developed and Cronbach's Alpha was used for reliability of measurement. Reliability scale of Cronbach's Alpha is higher than 0.7[9] as show in table 1. Multiple Regression Analysis were employed to assess all hypothesizes.

Table 1
The results of measure validation

Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Tangibility	0.787
Reliability	0.834
Responsiveness	0.797
Assurance	0.802
Empathy	0.890
Satisfaction	0.929
Word-Of-Mouth	0.927

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics of demographic data of the respondents revealed that the respondents were 53.3% of female and 46.7 of male. Mostly of them, which is 31.0%, age were over 45 years. The nationality of respondents was 63.3% of foreigner and 36.7% of Thai people. The status of respondents was 61.3% of married. Average income per month was less than 15,000 baht (53.0%) and the occupation of respondents was other (41.8%).

Hypothesis testing

The statistical analysis for hypothesis testing to study the effect of research variables were used pearson's product moment correlation coefficient to determine the relationship of the independent variables, and the multiple regression analysis to study the influence of service quality on user satisfaction and word-of-mouth and the effect of user satisfaction on word-of-mouth. The symbols used to analyze were as follows.

- SQ1 Represent Tangibility
- SQ2 Represent Reliability
- SQ3 Represent Responsiveness
- SQ4 Represent Assurance
- SQ5 Represent Empathy
- ST Represent Satisfaction
- WOM Represent Word-Of-Mouth

Table 2
Correlation Analysis between independent variables

	SQ1	SQ2	SQ3	SQ4	SQ5	ST	WOM
\bar{X}	4.52	4.63	4.53	4.45	4.58	4.44	4.51
SD.	.56	.54	.56	.56	.56	.63	.67
SQ1	1						
SQ2	.74**	1					
SQ3	.70**	.72**	1				
SQ4	.65**	.72**	.67**	1			
SQ5	.70**	.77**	.75**	.76**	1		
ST	.75**	.71**	.77**	.72**	.80**	1	
WOM	.45**	.39**	.53**	.41**	.52**	.60**	1

** P<0.05

Table 2 showed that the relationship between the variables that are related not exceed 0.80. The relationship between the variables must be less than 0.80, which is more than 0.80 may cause of Multicollinearity by Hair et al. [9]. The research found the relationship between the independent variables the highest value was 0.80, it was not exceed 0.80. Multicollinearity problem was not found. Therefore, it can be tested by using multiple regression analysis to the next.

Table 3
Research results of regression analysis

Variable	Dependent Variable			
	ST		WOM	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
SQ1	0.25	0.00	0.13	0.05
SQ2	-0.03	0.52	-0.19	0.01
SQ3	0.28	0.00	0.33	0.00
SQ4	0.15	0.00	-0.02	0.75
SQ5	0.32	0.00	0.34	0.00
ST			0.60	0.00

P<0.05

Table 3 presented the result by using Multiple Regression Method. It showed that firstly, tangibility significantly impacted on user satisfaction (H1.1), reliability did not significantly impact on user satisfaction (H1.2), responsiveness significantly impacted on user satisfaction (H1.3), assurance significantly impacted on user satisfaction (H1.4) and empathy significantly impacted on user satisfaction (H1.5). Then, word-of-mouth was statistically significant affected by user satisfaction (H2). Lastly, tangibility significantly impacted on user word-of-mouth (H3.1), reliability significantly impacted on user word-of-mouth (H3.2), responsiveness

significantly impacted on user word-of-mouth (H3.3), assurance did not significantly impact on user word-of-mouth (H3.4) and empathy significantly impacted on user word-of-mouth (H3.5)

Table 4
The hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Accepted/Rejected
H1	
H1.1	Accepted
H1.2	Rejected
H1.3	Accepted
H1.4	Accepted
H1.5	Accepted
H2	Accepted
H3	
H3.1	Accepted
H3.2	Accepted
H3.3	Accepted
H3.4	Rejected
H3.5	Accepted

CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that all four dimensions of service quality of Sakon Nakhon Immigration, including tangibility, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, affected users at Sakon Nakhon Immigration's satisfaction. The reason why reliability did not affect user satisfaction may lie in the fact that Sakon Nakhon Immigration is a government agency that provides services free of charge; thus, the staff's responsibilities and performance are considered reliable. It can be stated that reliability was not the factor which would influence user satisfaction. This complies with Thipsri et al. [10] the effects of service quality of travel business on the impression of European tourists in Chiang Rai province; the study revealed that four aspects of service quality, namely tangibility, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, had positive effects on tourists' impression. On the other hand, reliability did not have any impact on the impression. The possible explanation for that phenomenon may lay in the fact that reliability was considered as such a process which the staff are obligated to perform regularly to offer services based on tourists' needs. Thus, it can be inferred that European tourists' satisfaction mainly depended on tangibility, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. In addition, the present study revealed that users at Sakon Nakhon Immigration's satisfaction positively influenced their word of mouth. This is consistent with Aday & Anderson[1] that word-of-mouth communications are claims or referrals to personal experiences; simply speaking, when the users are satisfied after receiving services, they will share positive experiences with others. Moreover, the findings correspond to Sanjaya & Yasa[14] the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth and corporate image. Their study demonstrated that customers at the hospital's satisfaction had positive effects on their word-of-mouth. Lastly, the present study demonstrated that four dimensions of quality of services of Sakon Nakhon Immigration, namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and empathy, affected user word-of-mouth. Assurance did not have any effect on the users' word-of-mouth possibly because the staff of Sakon Nakhon Immigration must operate and provide services to users according to the law; specifically, police officers perform their duties according to Immigration Act. Thus, providing that users abide by requirements and regulations, the staff will provide services responding to their needs. This phenomenon differs from a service business, such as beauty and healthcare business, restaurants and travel business, in that service provider in those businesses must be equipped with expertise and skills to provide services which will impress users and affect word of mouth.

This study led to the integration of concepts and theories. In particular, concepts and theories on word of mouth, which are important for marketing principles, were applied to government agencies as a non-profit service provider in which competitiveness among the agencies does not exist. It was not akin to other studies which applied such concepts and theories to products or service businesses for competitiveness. What's more, the findings in this study can be applied to Sakon Nakhon Immigration's operation; specifically, it should enlarge the area for filling in forms, include samples for filling in forms to aid users' understanding and increase the counter staff to accelerate service provision processes. However, this study utilized only a quantitative

approach, so further studies may employ a qualitative approach to elicit data from real situations and environment, and their attention should be paid to other variables, such as users' attitudes or organizational image, which may influence word of mouth.

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