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# THE ANTECEDENTS AND SUCCESS OF THE THAI SPA BUSINESS

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## Abstract

The objectives of this mixed method research combined both quantitative and qualitative methods were 1) to investigate the degree of predominance including service quality, 7Ps strategy, and administration critical to the success of the spa business in Thailand, 2) to study the impact of service quality, the 7Ps strategy, and administration on the performance of the Thai spa company, 3) to develop a model for the Thailand spa business's success. The sample group consisted of 400 spa business entrepreneurs in Thailand researched with stratified random sampling and simple random sampling. The key informants were 18 spa business entrepreneurs in Thailand by purposive random sampling. The tool used in the data collection is a semi-structured interview. The quantitative data were analyzed by a structural equation model using the LISREL program and the content analysis was used in the qualitative data. The research results revealed that 1) service quality, 7Ps strategy, and administration is at the highest level, respectively, while the success of the spa business in Thailand is at a high level with an average of 4.19. 2) The service quality, the 7Ps strategy, and administration all have a statistically significant impact on spa business success at the .05 levels. 3) The development of a spa business success model in Thailand is MQ2S Model. The qualitative research results promoted the importance of spa business management. The findings of this research can be used as the approach in formulating the policy in spa business operation to encourage entrepreneurs to operate a spa company in Thailand and be successful in long-term competition.

**Keywords:** Antecedents, Success of Spa Business, Thailand, Service Quality, 7Ps Strategy

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## **Introduction**

Spa has its origin in Latin language and phrase like 'sanitas, aqua'. Spa is one of the activities that people often choose. It offers a basic massage using water, health spa, massage using equipment or health supplements, and massage that brings innovation and modern technology to customers to relax. This includes anti-aging spas (Global Wellness Institute, 2020). Spas are one of the global wellness industries having the GWI rapid growth rate. It is caused by 1) an increase in the aging population. An analysis of the GWI and CIA World Factbook shows that the 20 countries with the highest market value for the spa industry having populations over 40 highlight the growing demand for spas together with the aging society tendency. 2) Rising income of middle-class consumers around the world leads to an increase in personal well-being spending apart from the daily spending. 3) The fast-paced lives of millennials are stressful (Global Wellness Institute, 2020). In the modern world of always-on digital communications via the internet, health care is provided with alternative medicine and exercise for medical and wellness tourism. Spas and health promotion are involved promoting a more integrated concept (International Spa Academy, n.d.; Global Wellness Institute, 2020).

Both domestic and international academicians have studied how to operate a successful spa business. The 3 important factors are summarized; service quality; Marketing Mix Strategies (7Ps) and administration. It is important for spa business operators to adopt strategies to create strong business success (Han et al., 2018; Lee, 2020) and to be certified with ISO standards (Department of Business Development, 2018). From the growth rate of the health and wellness tourism market, the number of health tourism in Thailand increased to 27.7 million in 2022 or equivalent to the annual growth rate of 5.6% from the year 2019. The Thailand's largest tourism is spa tourism with a cost of US\$ 794.7 million in 2019 (Globaldata, 2020). Combined with the trend of health lovers, such information shows that spa businesses and health care related businesses still have opportunities to grow.

However, even though the government currently supports spa business operators well, doing business spas in a fast-changing market in a high competition all over the world together with the consumer behavior changing after the COVID-19 pandemic, spa business operators then accelerate the adjustment in order to build consumer confidence. Most personnel in this industry still lack the skills to develop the services and products related to service. Therefore, the spa business still has parts that need to be developed in order to grow further. Not only the provinces that are tourist destinations, but the spa business can also be operated in every province by using the potential of the outstanding services of the spa business and appropriate spa management, such as developing products and services that are identity of each community, providing beauty services and elderly care, etc. This can create strengths and add value to the business and help support the entrepreneurs to expand their scope of services to increase their business competitiveness and to search for the antecedents that will be variables in creating more success for the spa business in Thailand. The researcher was therefore interested in studying the antecedents and success of the spa business in Thailand for promotion and development of spa business operators to have the potential to gain sustainable market advantage in the domestic and international markets.

## **Concepts, Theories and Related Research**

For the research on the antecedents and success of the spa business in Thailand this time, the researcher studied the concepts, theories, documents and related research from domestic and international educators. It was found that internal organizational management and the use of 7Ps strategies affected employee job satisfaction and efficiency towards spa service provision. The income can be generated from the quality of service that impresses customers (Charak, 2019; Pandey et al., 2020). The quality of service affects customer loyalty and repetitive use of service (Han et al., 2018; Lee, 2020). The Marketing Mixes can create customer acceptance

according to the goals and create success for the business (Huh et al., 2019). This study has the following concepts and theories.

### **Service Quality**

The concept of service quality is a level of excellence to meet customer needs. With increasing competition and the emergence of the industry, it is highly profitable leading to the development and delivery of quality services to customers. It was found that the SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman et al. (1988) measured service quality from five factors; (1) Physical evidence, (2) Reliability, (3) Response, (4) Confidence, and (5). Empathy. These were recognized as the tools to improve the quality of service. In addition, Alahmed (2018) mentioned the service quality in the spa business that the service responding the needs of customers is what every customer wants. It is regarded as the service quality of a business which can affect the success of the business from the strength and market advantage because of the popularity of customers with loyalty.

According to the literature review, it was found that the service quality factors that influenced the success of the spa business consisted of; (1) concreteness, (2) trust, (3) customer response, (4) assurance, and (5) ) customer care (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Kasagrandá & Gurnák, 2017; Han et al., 2018; Alahmed, 2018; Ahmed et al., 2017; Sevilmış et al., 2019; Valeriani et al., 2018; Smith & Wallace, 2019) which the researcher used as the components of the service quality factor in this study.

### **7Ps**

For highly competitive marketing in the current ever-changing needs and behaviors of consumers, the spa business operators are necessary to study the trends for spa business development agreeing with customer needs in order to gain competitive advantages in the market. Developing marketing strategies to achieve the desired results both in terms of product quality and service provision will meet customer needs to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty. The marketing mix theory (7Ps) based on the concept of Kotler & Keller (2016) has been popularly used in service marketing strategy management. The 7Ps marketing strategy consists of (1) Product, (2) Price, (3) Place, (4) Promotion, (5) People, (6) Process, and (7) Physical elements. The use the 7Ps in the health business which are marketing mixes requires the operators to design services that meet or exceed customer expectations. This includes what customers actually experience during the service provision such as the service atmosphere, service provision of the staffs, service of facilities, and distinction between the main service that customers are looking for and the peripheral services, the little things or added bonuses that come with the benefits. This is a marketing strategy that impresses customers until they come back to use the service repetitively. 7Ps Marketing Strategy implemented in business can directly and indirectly affect the success of a business, both monetary and non-monetary (Da Silva et al., 2018).

According to the literature review, it was found that the 7Ps Marketing Strategy influencing the spa business success consist of; (1) product, (2) price, (3) distribution channel, (4) promotion, (5) people, (6) physical appearance, and (7) process (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Chowdhury, 2017; Oh & Kim, 2017; Strack, 2018; Srinita, 2018; Koskinen & Wilska, 2019; Da Silva et al., 2018; Craig, 2018; Whitley, 2022; Huang et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2019; UKEssays, 2018a; Pandey et al., 2020; Jumanazarov et al., 2020). The researcher applied all the components of the 7Ps strategy factor in this study.

### **Management**

There are more spa businesses nowadays, both direct spa businesses and spa businesses in other businesses. These include tourism, beauty salons, hotels and resorts with different management according to the context that can generate to response the needs of customers as much as possible. This makes the business more competitive in the market. Whitley (2022) said that spa business management must be able to meet the needs of customers at all levels and all types of

services to build customer loyalty. Therefore, the spa business needs to apply innovation and modern technology to serve customers more. This includes improving the quality of service, using marketing strategies and customer access to create awareness of spa activities and types of provided services. With digital communication that can interact instantly anytime, anywhere, especially the virtual information, the customers should receive before deciding on the type of service to use. In addition, awareness must be created among the customers about fairness in terms of price as well. When the spa business can build confidence to consumers and customers, the image and loyalty to the spa business can be created. This agrees with Timberlake (2020) stating about the spa and wellness trends for the year 2020 that the development of the spa industry requires the application of innovation and modern technology to be used in the management of the organization including digital marketing in response to consumer behaviors that requires convenience and speed without time and place limitations. A spa business with marketing power will be accepted by customers both in terms of service quality and organization management including networks of dealers, customers, and consumers that can drive higher profits, both monetary and non-monetary (Whitley, 2022; Timberlake, 2020).

According to the literature review, it was found that the management factor influencing the spa business success consist of; (1) Internal management, (2) External management, (3) Innovation adoption and (4) Technology adoption (Rodrigues, 2017; Szymanska & Lech, 2017; Panfiluk & Szymanska, 2017; Whitley, 2022; Butler & Szromek, 2019; Timberlake, 2020; Jumanazarov et al., 2020). The researcher applied all the components of management factor in this study.

### **Spa Business Success**

The success of spa business is both monetary and non-monetary (Charak, 2019; Whitley, 2022). It results from consumer and customer satisfaction in spa services in various forms that can respond to the needs of customers until causing confidence in the quality of service making them come back to use the service again, recommend and tell others to use the service and not change their minds to use other services. They are willing to pay high rates for services and related products. The success of spa business can be measured by the performance of all types of spa business with higher profitability with the power to compete in the market, have a competitive advantage to earn customer's loyalty, confidence and create a good image for the business making it popular among high-end customers.

According to the literature review, it was found that the success factors of the spa business in Thailand consist of; (1) Higher profits (Butler & Szromek, 2019; Pandey et al., 2020; UK Essays, 2018b), (2) Competitiveness (Schmidt, 2021; Chowdhury, 2017; Craig, 2018; Guillet & Kucukusta, 2019; Huh et al., 2019; UKEssays, 2018a) (3) Customer's loyalty (Charak, 2019; Huh et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2019; Lam & Gao, 2020), and (4) Being popular among high-end customers (Gowan, 2017; Lin & Mattila, 2018; Clarke et al., 2018; Craig, 2018; Cadena, 2019; Yasa et al., 2020; Timberlake, 2020). The researcher applied all to measure the components of success of the spa business in Thailand in this study.

According to the results of literature reviews on the spa business both domestically and internationally, it can be concluded that the factors that can predict the success of the spa business are what make the business strong and has a market advantage. Loyalty can be created from customer satisfaction and business profits. It is a part that can draw customers of all levels to use each type of spa service and can indicate success in the spa business as well. The key factors influencing the success of the spa business in Thailand include; (1) service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Guillet & Kucukusta, 2019; Sevilmiş et al., 2019; Lee, 2020), (2) 7Ps strategy (Da Silva et al., 2018; Pandey et al., 2020), and (3) management (Lee, 2020; Whitley, 2022; Timberlake, 2020). The researcher therefore developed a causal relationship model of service quality, 7Ps strategy and administration towards the success of spa business in Thailand used in this research.

## **Research Methodology**

The researcher defined a mixed method research starting from quantitative research and then conducting qualitative research to confirm the quantitative research results. The steps to proceed are as follows:

### **Population and Sample**

The population was spa business operators registered as health establishments in Thailand in 2020 that have been licensed in all 6 regions, 77 provinces, totaling 6,717 persons (Department of Health Service Support, Ministry of Public Health, 2020). The sample group was 400 licensed spa business operators who registered health establishments in Thailand in 2020. The sample size was determined by estimating the observation variable in the proportion. The number of variables was number of samples 1: 20 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). In this research, there were 20 observational variables resulting in 400 subjects randomized by hierarchical sampling and simple random. The key informant are specialists in spa business in Thailand, totaling 18 persons, selected by purposive sampling.

### **Research Tools and Quality of Tools**

The researcher studied various theories and research about the elements of the success of the spa business in Thailand and factors affecting spa business in Thailand consisting of service quality, marketing strategy and administration of the spa business in order to define the concept of the study according to the current situation and to create a tool used to collect data according to the research conceptual framework. The 2 sets of tools were created. The first set was a questionnaire that was tested for the quality of the content validity by 5 experts. The content validity of the questionnaire was .801 and the reliability of the whole questionnaire was .805. The second set was the semi-structured interview which has been considered for the consistency between the questions and content validity from 5 experts. Then, the questions were improved to be appropriate.

### **Data Analysis**

For the quantitative research, the data were analyzed using a statistical package to find the frequency and the percentage of the personal data of the sample. The mean and the standard deviation of the Observation Variable and the Latent Variable were found. The Structural Equation Model (SEM) of the antecedents and success of the Thai spa business was analyzed with the LISREL program, and the qualitative data were used to support the results of the quantitative data analysis. The data were analyzed by content analysis technique based on the approaches of Alan and Robert (1995) and Pothisita (2021).

## **Research Result**

### **Quantitative Research Results**

The results of the study on the general information of the respondents revealed that most of the respondents had status as Deputy/Assistant Executive of spa business representing 51.50%, were female representing 64.50%, aged 31-40 years representing 38.00%, had bachelor's degree representing 75.50% and had an income of spa business per year less than or equal to 10 million baht representing 51.50%. The results of the study on the level of antecedent factors include service quality, 7Ps strategy, and administration towards success of the spa business in Thailand on average in the high to highest level. The results of the study on the influence of antecedent in the success of spa business in Thailand showed that the adjusted model was consistent with the empirical data. The parameter estimation in such model was acceptable. The Service Quality (SVQL), 7Ps Strategy (STTG), Administration (ADMA) have a direct influence on the success of the spa business with statistical significance at the .05 level as shown in Table 1.

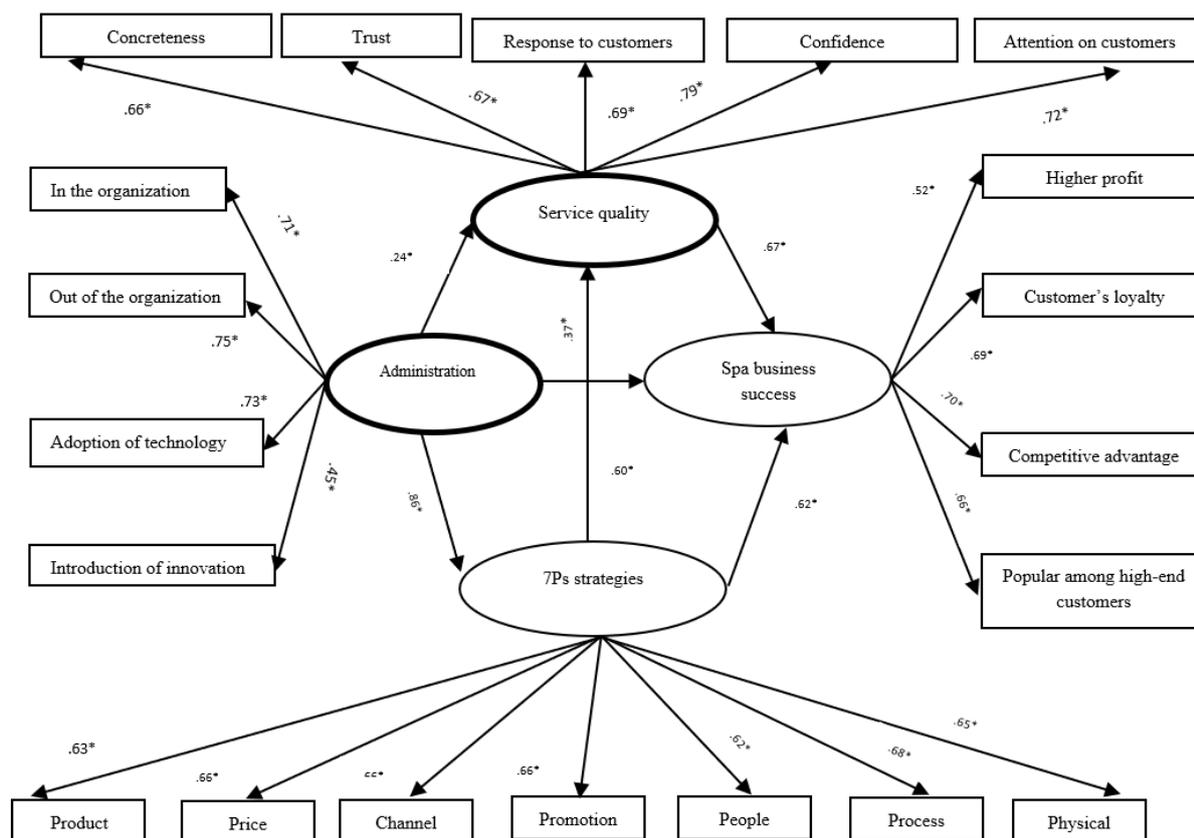
**Table 1** Results of parameter estimation of direct effect, indirect effect, and total effect from the corrective equation model

Dependent Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	Influence	Independent Variables		
			Service Quality (SVQL)	7Ps Strategy (STTG)	Administration (ADMA)
Service Quality (SVQL)	.82	DE	-	.60*(6.28)	.24*(5.60)
		IE	-	-	.65*(6.03)
		TE	-	.60*(6.28)	.89*(10.50)
7Ps Strategy (STTG)	.74	DE	-	-	.86*(11.84)
		IE	-	-	-
		TE	-	-	.86*(11.84)
Spa business success (SPASC)	.65	DE	.67*(6.34)	.62*(6.90)	.37*(4.56)
		IE	-	.28*(6.33)	.49*(3.03)
		TE	.67*(6.34)	.90*(3.59)	.86*(9.41)

$\chi^2 = 258.63$ ,  $df = 161$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .00000$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.60$ ,  $RMSEA = .039$ ,  $RMR = .019$ ,  $SRMR = .037$ ,  $CFI = .99$ ,  $GFI = .94$ ,  $AGFI = .92$ ,  $CN = 320.91$

\* with statistical significance at the .05 level

From Table 1, it was found that service quality (SVQL) directly influenced the spa business success (SPASC) at a coefficient of influence equal to .67. The 7Ps strategy (STTG) directly influenced the spa business success (SPASC) with a coefficient of influence of .62. The Administration (ADMA) directly influenced the spa business success (SPASC) at the coefficient of influence of .37. The Administration (ADMA) directly influenced service quality (SVQL) with an influence coefficient of .24. The 7Ps strategy (STTG) directly influenced service quality (SVQL) at the influence coefficient of .60. The Administration (ADMA) had a direct influence on the 7Ps strategy (STTG) at the influence coefficient of .86 with a statistically significant level of .05. The service quality (SVQL), 7Ps strategy (STTG), and Administration (ADMA) can together predict the spa business success (SPASC) for 86% as shown in Figure 1: Model of antecedent in the success of spa business in Thailand.



**Figure 1** Model of antecedent in the success of spa business in Thailand

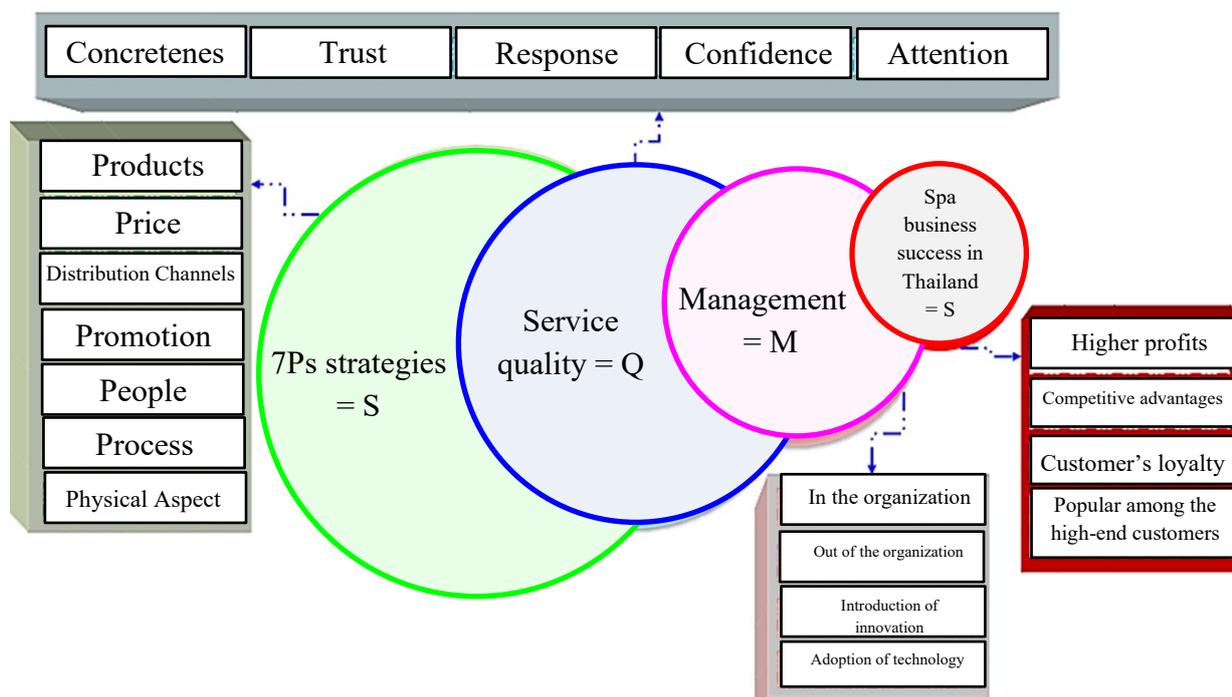
### Qualitative Research Results

The study found that for the factors of the success of the spa business in Thailand, the key informants who are experts in the spa industry in Thailand place great emphasis on the customer loyalty factor because loyalty is built on the quality of the spa services that the customer is impressed with. These are from caring, gentle touch, friendliness, use of spa tools or spa products that customers want making customers feel worthwhile. They will not change their mind to use the same services in other spa business locations. As for the service quality factor, the experts pay attention to the customer response factor because every type of spa tourists or customers demand and expect the service to meet their needs. When a business can respond to the needs, it is right for the customers. The more the service is tangible, concrete, and reliable as advertised, the more it gives customers confidence. The customers will trust in caring with friendliness. When the impressive feeling arises, the customers will have a good image of the business. They will repetitively use, refer, and persuade others. It will make businesses more competitive in the market. For the 7Ps strategy factors, the experts focus on the people factor because a successful spa business stems from the potential of human resources in the business whether the knowledge, ability, skills and experience in running a spa business according to their obligations whether being entrepreneurs, executives, therapists, spa providers, or receptionists. Even the workers are one dimension in customer service who can affect the spa business both positively and negatively. In addition, for the administration factor, the experts focus on the technology factor because the current market competition in the spa business uses technology to run the spa business, both in the organization management and outside the organization. This will make the management of the spa business organization more convenient, fast, and modern correspondent with the behaviors of modern consumers and able to respond to customer needs. The introduction of modern technology used in all types of spa

services to meet the needs with modern tools result in the performance of spa services worthwhile. The awareness of the quality of service can be created among the customers.

### Development of a Successful Spa Business Model in Thailand

The study on the components of the research based on the causal structural equation model on the success variables of the spa business in Thailand consists of variables; 1) service quality 2) 7Ps strategy and 3) administration. These are factors affecting the success of the spa business in Thailand at a high level. The researcher, therefore, developed a model for the success of the spa business in Thailand named MQ2S Model (M = Management, Q = Service Quality, S = 7Ps Strategy, S = Spa Business Success). The researcher had 5 experts and academicians give their opinions to confirm the model development of the spa business success in Thailand developed by the researcher. All commented that this model was appropriate and complete. The components are shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2** Entire components of the model of the spa business success in Thailand: MQ2S Model

### Conclusion and Discussion

The service quality factor directly influences the success of the spa business in Thailand having the coefficient of influence of .67 with a statistical significance at the .05 level is consistent with the qualitative research results. It was found that the service quality is concrete and tangible for the care and attention of customers. These meet the needs of customers as expected. Trust and reliability can be built among customers. Especially providing services that meet the needs of customers in the spa business, it makes customers satisfied. According to the research results, it was found that the service quality factors consisting of concreteness, trust, response to customers, confidence and caring for customers are satisfied by customers. It creates a good attitude towards the spa business and makes the customers come back to use the service again. They will recommend and tell others with loyalty to the business. It agrees with the study of Chantra & Ngamsirijit (2020) and Huang et al. (2019) studying the customer experience, well-being, and loyalty in a spa hotel context. It was found that the internal management of the human resources and the customer's spa experience had a positive effect on loyalty regardless

of length of stay. It was also found that travel experience and well-being affected customer loyalty.

Strategic factor 7Ps has a direct influence on the success of the spa business in Thailand. The coefficient of influence was .62 with a statistical significance of .05, consistent with the qualitative research findings. It was found that the 7Ps strategy was a comprehensive marketing strategy that could satisfy customers in both quality service with innovation and modern technology in providing all types of spa services to customers making the spa highly efficient. The research results revealed that the 7Ps strategy factors include product, price, distribution channel, marketing promotion, people, physical appearance, and the process. These create the possibility to reach the customer's needs and meet the expectations that the customers desire. The customers can be happy from marketing strategies to build trust and loyalty to the spa business. It is correspondent with Thornsiripunnarote et al. (2019) and Valeriani et al. (2018) and Pandey et al. (2020) finding that the seven marketing mix factors or 7Ps influence business success by making travelers feel more satisfied and repetitively use the service.

The management factor has direct influence on the success of the spa business in Thailand. The coefficient of influence was .37 with a statistical significance at the .05 level, correspondent with the qualitative research findings. It was found that management is an important part of spa business operations. Entrepreneurs must have strategies to manage the business including financial planning, personnel, location, marketing, and products used in each type of spa that serves customers. The findings are consistent with the studies of Cadena (2019) and Lee (2020) and Yasa et al. (2020) discovering that management factor consisting of management in the organization, outside the organization, introduction of innovation in the spa business, and the adoption of technology in the spa business. These make customers receive high quality service from the management efficiency of the spa business. The customer's trust and confidence in the spa business is increased along with sales revenue from customer loyalty.

The management factor directly influences the service quality factors. The coefficient of influence was .24 with a statistical significance at the .05 level, correspondent with the qualitative research findings. It was found that the management that created the system in the business was appropriate to provide quality service to customers. There must be strategies for management, planning, and organizational communication that make all personnel in the business understand the same. It can contribute to success in providing services that customers desire efficiently in all dimensions. The research results are consistent with Smith & Wallace (2019) finding that management factors consist of management in the organization, outside the organization, introduction of innovation, and the adoption of technology in the spa business. These make customer service tangible. Confidence and trust can be built among customers by responding to customers with care. The customer's impression leads to acceptance and loyalty to the business.

The 7Ps strategic factor indirectly influences the success of the spa business in Thailand through the service quality factor at the coefficient of influence equal to .40 with a statistical significance at the .05 level, consistent with the qualitative research results. It was found that a mixed marketing strategy will create more customer satisfaction in terms of making a spa that is highly efficient with customer care and making customers satisfied in all dimensions of service. The research results revealed that strategy factors make the business more recognized and has a competitive advantage. It is correspondent with Gyimóthy (2018) discovering that the customer's selection of spa types depends more on the attractions and features than on the facilities of the spa. The entrepreneurs can plan marketing strategies to effectively respond to customers. It agrees with UKEssays (2018a) finding that a long-term spa business that can gain a competitive advantage should have a successful competitive strategy. They can attract, maintain, and expand customer base to be differentiated through products, services, channels, people and image. It is correspondent with Alahmed (2018) who studied the quality of

government services in the United Arab Emirates. The key findings indicate credibility and trust positively affecting the perception of service users. It can be measured by the intention of repetitive use and overall satisfaction.

6) The management factors indirectly influence the success of the spa business in Thailand through the 7Ps strategy factor and service quality factor. The coefficient of influence was .35 with a statistical significance at the .05 level, correspondent with the qualitative research results. It was found that the management implements various systems in the business, planning, setting business policies, setting departments and strategies in business operations, placement of personnel according to their duties, recruiting personnel with knowledge and ability, budgeting for business operations. These include the use of innovation and modern technology in each type of spa service to increase service efficiency to attract customers. The 7Ps marketing strategy was used to respond to customers in all target groups according to the context of the operated spa service. The findings are consistent with those of Lin & Mattila (2018) and Lee et al. (2019). The study of Charak (2019) also found that management factors that consist of management in the organization, outside the organization, introduction of innovation and the adoption of technology in the spa business enable the spa business to efficiently serve customers.

#### **Recommendations Derived from the Research**

1) Public sector, private sector and agencies related to spa business operations should support and promote the success of entrepreneurs in spa business operations in Thailand. There should be integrated action to promote and improve service quality, 7Ps strategy and management. In addition, there should be the integration to solve the negative image of the service of spa establishment in Thailand. This will help spa business operators to succeed from a sustainable competitive advantage.

2) As the spa industry is one of the targeted industries according to the government's strategy to drive the economy for the future, the government should accelerate providing assistance to spa business operators more thoroughly, such as assistance in accessing credit. The development of labor skills should be promoted to elevate the potential of the industry in the long run to be able to expand the scope of services in other related activities that are Thai identity, such as Thai massage, utilization of herbs or local Thai wisdom. etc. The promotion should be on health & wellness tourism, long stay tourism and elderly care by emphasizing Thailand's strengths in various areas such as herbs and Thai identity, folk wisdom, and service mind of Thai people. Cooperation should be encouraged between educational institutes and establishments in the development of research on spa services and related products in order to create knowledge and expand business. It also increases the confidence of consumers.

#### **Recommendations for Further Research**

1) A comparative study should be conducted between the spa business successes of each ASEAN country in order to study the level of variables and the difference in influence that results among the variables.

2) Other variables should be studied, for example, spa business management innovation variables that can create concepts and unconventional methods of spa business management in order to meet the needs of customers in all target groups according to the types of spas that provide services efficiently amidst the changes in current customer behavior.

3) The factors that affect the success of the spa business should be studied in related services and products from the point of view of consumers such as the 4C strategy (Customer, Cost, Convenience and Communications), service quality, service user satisfaction, and the confidence of service users, etc.

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