An Important Performance Analysis (IPA) of Service Quality
of Fine Dining Restaurant in Phitsanulok, Thailand

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Abstract

Restaurant business is one of important businesses in the tourism industry. One type of restaurants that is becoming popular is the fine-dining restaurant that focuses on providing excellent service. To impress the customers to come back to use the service again is not easy; therefore, the concept of service quality is a good tool for fine-dining restaurants to be used and implemented to create good service standard. This research aims to study ways to increase service quality of fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok by using the Performance-Priority Analysis (IPA) as a tool to assess service quality. Purposive sampling was conducted by distributing surveys to 200 Thai customers of fine-dining restaurant in Phitsanulok from October 2019 to November 2019. The result of the research shown that consumers place the most importance on Assurance, followed by Empathy, Reliability which were in Quadrant 2, Responsiveness was in Quadrant 4, and Tangibility was in Quadrant 1.

Keywords : Important Performance Analysis, Service Quality, Fine-dining Restaurant, Thailand

Introduction

Phitsanulok is one of tourist destinations in Thailand where there are domestic and international visit because it has many interesting places such as historical, religious sites. It provides a convenient transportation system to visitors (Tinakhat, 2015) . Not only Phitsanulok is well-known for tourism attractions, but it is also famous for many nice restaurants serving various kind of food. Customers have a wide range of restaurants to

choose, thus the service quality will influence a restaurant competitive advantage (Namin, 2017). Service quality is a vital area of interest for restaurant business because it impacts directly to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and the company profitability (Murali, Pugazhendhi & Muralidharan, 2016).

According to Larsen (2019), restaurant business should be well-prepared to welcome and accommodate the visitors all over the corner of the world, especially the fine-dining restaurants where become popular among the local people and visitors. Service quality is mainly concluded as the service delivery system output, particularly in the case of pure service which is determined as the highest form of service given to consumers in the marketing continuum (White, 2017). In restaurant business, food is an important impact on customer loyalty and satisfaction (Lu & Gursoy, 2017). Apart from the food quality, most studies focused on the factors influencing customer satisfaction such as food quality. It is supported by Rozekhi et. al (2016) studied the influence of food quality on customer satisfaction in fine dining restaurant. Meanwhile, according to Alhelalat, Ma'moun, & Twaissi (2017), service quality of the restaurant is one of the major attributes which explains customer satisfaction and forecasts repeated customer. Unfortunately, the service quality was not one the major interest in their studies. On top of that, there is no particular evidence from previous studies to ascertain the influence of service quality itself in the fine dining restaurant which truly affects customer satisfaction. At this instant, there are few attentions is yielded to the contribution of each individual service quality attribute to satisfy customers. Hence, this study attempts to provide knowledge concentrates on service quality attributes to help restaurant operation becoming closer to the success. Furthermore, this study will complete the gap by exploring to what extent the service quality attributes influencing customer satisfaction in the find-dining restaurant from dining context in Phitsanulok Province, Thailand.

Objectives

1. To study the expectation and perceived service quality of restaurant clients for analyzing the importance performance of the fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok, Thailand.

2. To provide knowledge on service quality attributes helping restaurant operate business successfully.

Literature review

Push and Pull Factors

Uysal and Hagan (1993) developed the framework of push and pull factors in tourism context, identifying the different factors that affect each category. As per the authors, push factors are linked with the individual tourist and are classified into: motivations, such as: escape, relaxation, adventure, personal interests, etc.; socio-economic and demographic factors, such as: age, gender, income, education, etc. Pull factors are related to attributes of the destination, such as beauty of the scenery, climate, cultural and historical sites, events, etc.; destination infrastructures, safety and security; and image of the destination such as the perceived quality of services and facilities (Ezeuduji & Dlomo, 2020). In restaurant business, push factor has many dimensions namely taste of food, interpersonal relationship, family togetherness, enjoyment, relaxation, novelty, socialization, cultural experience, especially taste of food. It is the sensory experience tends to be the main motivation for customer to choose the restaurant and also socialization can be as a desire to meet with the new people or friend at the restaurant (Su, Johnson & O'Mahony, 2020). While, pull factor is identified as one of the crucial factors that attracts customer to purchase product or service and also motivates the customer to make decision to dine out at specific place (Kalldin et al., 2015).

Customer Satisfaction

According to Mutanga, et al. (2017), tourist satisfaction is a degree of positive feelings that a tourist has an experience. So, tourist satisfaction is the overall emotional response from using tourism services or products (Chen, Huang, & Petrick, 2016). A delighted and satisfied customer tends to be a positive word-of- mouth (WOM) and a potential loyal customer (Ahrholdt, Gudergan, & Ringle, 2017). On the contrastingly, when the customer is satisfied, his/her levels of expectation are raised (Ludwig, Heidenreich, Kraemer, & Gouthier, 2017), which means that the service staff have to put a great effort to satisfy the customer. It is essential to say that measuring customer satisfaction brings an indication on how the company performs or provides services or products (Atiyah, 2016). Especially, Palese & Usai (2018) concluded possible dimensions that a company can apply in measuring customer such as pricing, service quality, service speed, complaints, trust in staff and a good relationship between customers and a company.

Service Quality

According to Kasiri et al. (2017), service quality is defined as the result of customers' expectation and customers' perception of the services provided by the restaurant. Since services are intangible, it is the reason why measurement of service quality is more complicated because service quality will used to measures how much the service delivered meets the customers' expectations (Akdere, Top & Tekingündüz, 2020). Service quality is commonly examined in the perception of the customer that they have received the service, compared to their expectation formed before consuming the service (Abdullah, Hamir, Nor, Krishnaswamy, & Rostum, 2018). Function of service quality is interacted between customers and service providers (Ofori, Boakye & Narteh, 2018).

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), customers are often unable to truly touch the product and service from each purchase of a product or service. They will use five criteria for measuring service quality before deciding to purchase a service as follows:

1) Tangibility : The appearance of the organization and the service provider such as modern equipment, high technology, beauty of materials, professional personality, convenience serving the entire organization and service providers.

2) Reliability: The service provider must demonstrate credibility and reliability. The service should be performed correctly as agreed and on time. For example, the service should be provided as promised, demonstrated credibility, meet the needs of customers, notify the customer in advance of the service or visit to the customer.

3) Responsiveness: The response must be willing to serve to represent full care in the service, including the rapid service, and ready to serve when they need it.

4) Assurance: The service provider must assure the customers without any possible risk as well as showing the ability to build trust such as being able to build the confidence of customers, make them feel reliable when they come to contact, be humble, and have knowledge of the job

5) Empathy: Taking good care of both pre-sales, during sales and after sales, for example, giving personal attention to customers, providing attentive service, holding the best interests of customers, understanding customer needs

Quality of service has two dimensions: quality of service functions and technical service quality (Alzaydi, Al-Hajla, Nguyen, & Jayawardhena, 2018). In a restaurant context,

the service quality is about how the staff performs their duties, while the technical service quality is related to the food quality (Farooq, Salam, Fayolle, Jaafar, & Ayupp, 2018). Dabestani et al. (2016) mentioned that in the restaurant industry, customers do not only evaluate the quality of food but they also evaluate the quality of service during their dining experience too. The most important attribute of service quality in restaurants is the way that customers perceived the taste of the food and this preference has not changed over time. It's reasonable because the primary product that restaurant sells is food. There is also a correlation between the overall customer satisfaction and a restaurant's word-of-mouth reputation. (Byun & Jang, 2019).

Importance Performance Analysis (IPA)

Many academicians applied Important Performance Analysis (IPA) which is derived from Martilla and James (1977) to study expectations and satisfactions of customers in many industries including tourism and hospitality industry (Boley, McGehee & Hammett, 2017; Chen, Murphy & Knecht, 2016; Junio, Kim & Lee, 2017; Patiar et al., 2017). IPA is used to analyze attributes of products for measuring or evaluating the acceptance by the consumer; furthermore, it is convenient to examine the turnover and product importance which causes improvement in effective marketing (Huang, Ye and Kao, 2015; Murali, Pugazhendhi & Muralidharan, 2016). IPA has the advantage for evaluatingconsumer acceptance of marketing programs. It is a low-cost assessment with easy-to-understand evaluation techniques and provides important in-depth information in terms of marketing mixes for the business (Sayeras et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs can focus on areas that should be improved or identify areas that may use more resources than necessary (Lai & Hitchcock, 2015).An interesting feature of the IPA is that results can be displayed in a picture that is easy to interpret in a two-dimensional graph (Shia, Chen & Ramdansyah, 2016) as shown in Figure 1.
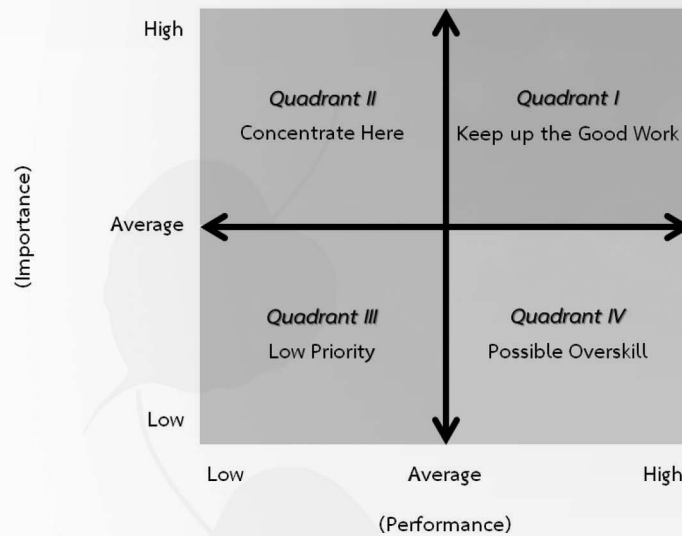
Figure 1 Important-Performance Model

Source: Martilla, J. A., & James, J. C. (1977). Importance-performance analysis. *Journal of*
marketing, 41(1), 77-79.

With regards to Sever (2015), when comparing expectations and satisfaction in each property, results fall on the four Quadrants which can be explained as follows:-

Quadrant A (Concentrate Here): services are important to consumers, but not to get an adequate response. Quadrant B (Keep up the Good Work): service providers can respond very well and can attach great importance from customers. Quadrant C (Low Priority): It is low service quality, and results in features that are not important to consumers. Service providers can postpone the update from various features which come from the rating scale. Quadrant D (Possible Over skill): service providers give more importance than is necessary in features that are less important to consumer decisions. Furthermore, IPA is easy to understand from the presentation with two-dimensional graphs and can provide important in-depth information in terms of the marketing mix.

Hence, researchers applied IPA with this research to analyze the comparative average scores, expectation and satisfaction of customers towards service quality of fine-dining restaurant in Phitsanulok.
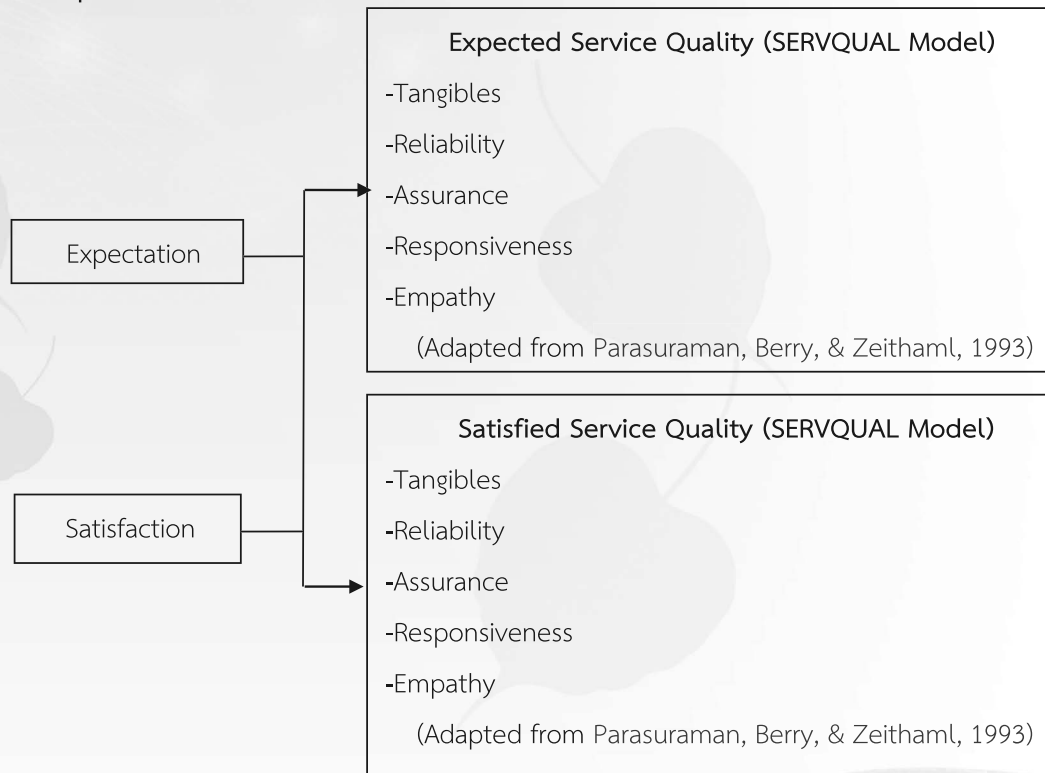
Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

Research Methods

A quantitative methodology was considered to use for this research. According to Mohajan (2018), the aim of quantitative research methodology is to obtain the reliability of variable measurements from the collected data, then analyzed by research statistical method such as SPSS, Stata or R, etc. In addition, a survey questionnaire was used for collecting data (Brace, 2018).

The respondents were 200 customers of fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok. G*Power version 3.1.9.4 was used to compute the sample size of the study because it was generally used in the multi-disciplinary researches such as social sciences, health sciences and business administration (Swank & Mullen, 2017). With the power (1-β) of 0.95, alpha (α) of 0.15, number of test predictors of 13, and effect size of 0.15, the obtained results revealed 189. But this research is in a business field, the researcher considered about business significant and adjusted to be suitable with the study, the researcher finalized total sample size of 200 for the field survey (Moshagen & Erdfelder, 2016; Sinkovics et al., 2016).

Purposive sampling was conducted by distributing surveys to Thai customers of fine-dining restaurant in Phitsanulok from October 2019 to November 2019.

A questionnaire is used for this research. It is formed from relevant information, documents, theories, concepts, and related researches as a tool to collect data for analyzing the expectation and perceive value of fine-dining restaurant's service quality. There are 3 parts: Part 1 is about the participants' personal information, Part 2 is about the evaluation of expected service quality and perceived service quality. This section is to evaluate 5 levels of Likert scale and is used interval scales to level the information, and Part 3 is about participants' suggestion. The researcher submitted the questionnaire to 3 academic experts to recheck the data to have reliability and apply to the demographic considered from Index of Consistency (IOC) and the result of IOC is 0.8, which means the questionnaire is suitable and reliable as confirmed by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977) who developed IOC used to test the questionnaires. If the result is in excess of 0.5, it is considered acceptable (Siajunboriboon, Ngoenmak, Tanpowpong, Sarawit, & Treepongkaruna, 2019).

Results

This research focused on a service quality of top 5 fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok from www.tripadvisor.com, which is one of the most popular search engine websites among tourists (Vyas, 2019). The researcher got 200 questionnaires as feedback; the yield rate is 100%. The reliability analysis is concentrated on the internal consistency of the questionnaire and the study direction (Vaske, Beaman & Sponarski, 2017).

Demographic information was gender, age, occupation, education, monthly income, and frequency of dining outside. Majority of participants are female, which consists of 73.2%; age between 31-39 years old, which consists of 68.5% ; obtained bachelor degrees, which consists of 71.1% of participants; work as a government worker, which consists of 69.1% ; earn THB 35,001 – 40,000 per month, which consists of 78.4%, and go out for dinner at fine-dining restaurant 10 times per month, which consists of 52.8%.

The alpha coefficient of Cronbach reassured the conformity for critical items of every dimension (Namin, 2017), and if it's above 0.7, it indicates valid reliability (Ursachi, Horodnic & Zait, 2015) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Internal consistency of constructs

Dimension	Sample Number	Average Expected Service Quality	Average Perceived Service Quality	Cronbach Alpha coefficient
Tangible	200	2.40	2.76	0.72
Reliability	200	2.63	2.67	0.78
Responsiveness	200	4.20	2.38	0.83
Assurance	200	2.79	3.14	0.81
Empathy	200	3.58	2.88	0.79
Total	200	3.12	2.77	0.75

Further to Table 1, the researcher compared between averaged expected service quality and average satisfaction score of service quality of fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok in all 5 dimensions of SERVQUAL by IPA technique, the result revealed that the score of averaged expected service quality and average perceived service quality of customers of fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok was mostly Quadrant 2 which were assurance, empathy, and reliability meaning that customers were satisfied, followed by Quadrant 2 which was responsiveness meaning that the staff can serve customers well, but not important, and Quadrant 1 which was tangible meaning that owners should pay attention to this point to maintain customers as shown in Figure 3.
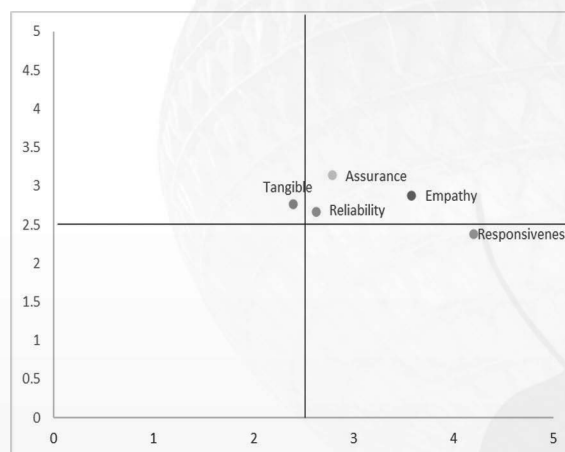
Figure 3 A comparison of between averaged expected service quality and average perceived service quality of fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok in 5 dimensions

In addition, the researcher analyzed the service quality of fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok with four measurements from each dimension. The result is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Service quality measure factors for fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok

Dimensions	Average Expected Service Quality		Average Perceived Service Quality	
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
Tangible				
1. Restaurant has modern-looking equipment.	2.21	.713	3.98	.700
2. Employees are neat and appearing	2.15	.701	3.07	.690
3. Materials associated with the service are visually appealing &clean	3.07	.746	2.88	.732
4. The decoration & the atmosphere of the restaurant are attractive.	2.15	.721	1.12	.715
Total	**2.40**	**.720**	**2.76**	**.709**
Reliability				
5. When a customer has a problem, the restaurant shows a sincere interest in solving it.	2.14	.647	1.12	.637
6. The restaurant performs the service right the first time.	3.24	.715	3.43	.699
7. Services are provided at the time the restaurant promises to do	3.01	.746	2.97	.737
8. Records are error-free.	2.13	.691	3.17	.689
Total	**2.63**	**.699**	**2.67**	**.690**
Responsiveness				
9. Employees give prompt service to customers.	4.76	.672	2.11	.656
10. Employees are willing to help customers.	4.15	.684	3.02	.676
11. Employees are helpful and never too busy for customers.	3.97	.669	2.12	.650
12. Employees are responding to customer's requests & complaints.	3.93	.642	2.26	.632
Total	**4.20**	**.666**	**2.38**	**.654**

Table 2 Service quality measure factors for fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok (cont.)

Dimensions	Average Expected Service Quality		Average Perceived Service Quality	
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
Assurance				
13. Employees have the knowledge and be able to answer customer's questions.	1.02	.638	2.17	.628
14. Employees are consistently courteous.	3.15	.612	3.96	.513
15. Customers feel safe in their transactions.	4.41	.626	4.72	.610
16. Behaviors of employees instill confidence in customers.	2.57	.637	1.72	.625
Total	**2.79**	**.628**	**3.14**	**.594**
Empathy				
17. Restaurant gives individual attention to the customer.	3.83	.792	2.70	.787
18. Employees give personal attention to customers.	3.62	.781	2.10	.777
19. Restaurant understands specifics needs of its customers.	3.73	.664	2.67	.6425
20. Operating hours are convenient to all customers.	3.14	.649	4.03	.632
Total	**3.58**	**.721**	**2.88**	**.709**
TOTAL	**3.12**	**.686**	**2.77**	**.671**

According to the investigation of SERVQUAL of the service quality of fine-dining restaurants in this study, researchers used the mean of all implicitly derived degrees of importance for average expected service quality and the mean of all performance for average perceived service quality to divide the IPA matrix into four quadrants, as shown in Figure 4.
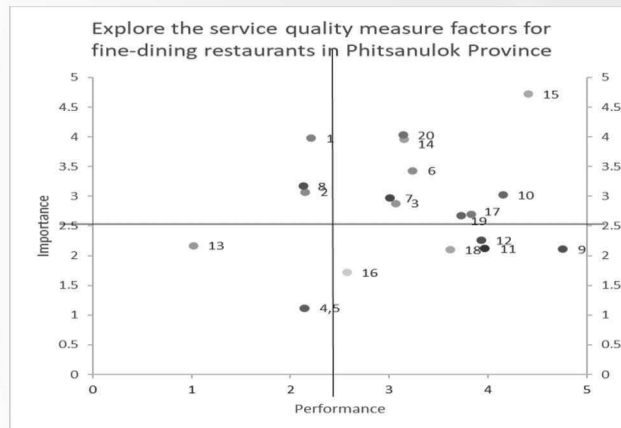
Figure 4 IPA matrix of service quality factors for fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok

as shown in Figure 4, it can be summarized as the following:

Discussion

Tangible: " Restaurant has modern-looking equipment" is currently the most important factor because cleanliness of materials and equipment are important factors of service quality (Kanyana, Ngana & Voonc, 2016). According to Lee, Lee & Dewald (2016), tangibility is all about physical appearances such as design, layout, furniture, menu design, portion of food, nice smell, lighting, temperature, and cleanliness of utensils, etc. Restaurant owners should be aware of tangible attributes that influence customers to spend their time at the restaurant.

Reliability: " The restaurant performs the service right the first time" is the crucial dimension because ninety percent of customers in restaurant business will be formed first impression after they are served by the staff who have good attitudes and professional skills (Rozekhi et al., 2016). Hence, customers will be satisfied when the restaurant staff can handle and perform well in many things, moreover, the staff will be probably able to keep a good relation with customers.

Responsiveness: "Employees are willing to help customers." is currently the most important factor that customers are satisfied because it shows that the staff care about the feeling of customers and will be able to assist them best whenever they need helps. Ma, E., & Hsiao, A. (2020). A well-training from the restaurant about how to cope with problems or complaints will be advantage to compete with other restaurants.

Assurance: " Customers feel safe in their transactions" is the most satisfied dimension from customers in terms of the service quality because it reflects to the financial credibility of the restaurant when charging the bill from customers (Azar, 2019). Assurance and credibility represent honesty and trustworthiness which support reliability, the restaurant needs the staff who have good knowledge to minimize customers' risk when dining at the restaurant (Lau et al., 2019)

Empathy: "Operating hours are convenient to all customers." is crucial dimension to create care and individualized attention to customers (Agyapong, Afi & Kwateng, 2018). Managers of the restaurant who can train their staff to be able to individualize attention given to needs of customers and to provide convenient services or to put themselves as a customer will successfully create impression and tend to have loyalty (Aliman & Mohamad, 2016).

This research can be discussed as per the objective that the highest service quality dimension of fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok Province was assurance in Quadrant 2. The evaluation score of the expected service quality was 2.70, and the perceived service quality was 3.14. This consistent with the research findings of Harr (2008) who studied service dimensions of service quality impacting customer satisfaction of fine dining restaurants in Singapore. The study revealed that the service dimensions of assurance was the most important to the evaluation of customers about service quality, and this might have a positive influence to customer satisfaction. This is because " assurance" which is about knowledge of food and the ability to response needs of customers were most concerned. Moreover, the ability to inspire the confidence as discussed by Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2018) would enable the staff to communicate effectively with customers too.

In Quadrant 4, "Responsiveness" was evaluated 4.20 for expected service quality and 2.38 for perceived service quality. This shown that restaurants could not perform well to response to customers' needs and wants which was related to the study of Cheng et al (2012), who studied the service quality improvement strategies of fine-dining restaurants. Their study found that " Responsiveness" was the most urgent of service quality that the restaurant needed to improve to satisfy the demand of customers. This can be done in many ways for example a willingness to help customers and provide a quick service or to show an extra effort to handle customers' special requests (Hanks, Line & Kim, (2017).

The most critical service quality of fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok was "tangible" which was lied on Quadrant 1. The expected service quality was 2.40, and the perceived service quality was 2.76. This showed that customers were not satisfied with the tangibility of restaurants. This was related to the study of Shahzadi et al., (2018), who studied perceptions of fine dining restaurants in Pakistan and they summarized that environmental cleanliness is one of the key success of fine dining restaurants in Pakistan and also one of the most concern about customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions; furthermore, the study of Jalilvand et al., (2017), who studied factors influencing word of mouth behaviour in the restaurant industry mentioned that physical environment quality influence word-of-mouth of customers as well.

Conclusion

General information of participants revealed that most of them are female (73.2%), age between 31-39 years old (68.5%), graduated with bachelor degrees, and are a government worker (69.1%), their monthly salary is between THB 35,001 – 40,000 per month (78.4%), and go out for dinner 10 times/month (52.8%). Ranking of service quality dimension analyzed by IPA technique in perspective of customers of fine-dining restaurants in Phitsanulok Province is Assurance, Empathy, Reliability which were in Quadrant 2 (Keep up the good work), Responsiveness was in Quadrant 4 (Possible overskill), and Tangibility was in Quadrant 1 (Concentrate Here). This brought to the attention of restaurant owners that customers were not satisfied with the tangibility of restaurants. Hence, to create the first impression and maintain the competitive ability, restaurants should focus on the tangibility such as the attractive decoration and atmosphere of the restaurant, appealing and clean material associated with the service, neat employees, and modern-looking equipment.

Suggestions for future research

This research was a survey research method that focused on quantitative research; therefore, the researcher in the future may conduct additional qualitative research in order to explore more in detail about views of customers on the service quality in depth or may use the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) to analyze. Additionally, the researcher should apply DINESERVE model to assess customers' perception of restaurant service quality as another theory.

Suggestion for fine-dining restaurant

Social media is a fun and easy way to reach customers and can be an excellent platform to alert customers of special events. Through social media, the restaurant owner can show off his/her restaurant through pictures and videos and encourage customers to talk about the restaurant with their friends. Taking the time to build a social media marketing plan can pay itself back manifold in new customers and increased online visibility, two things that are vital to the continued success of your restaurant. While it is easy to stress out over the day-to-day business of running a restaurant, the restaurant owner should still use email and social media to reward those loyal to him/her. Inviting to private events can make the restaurant stand out as not just one that serves great food or has a great atmosphere, but one that gives as well as receives. It can be as simple as a Facebook post or Instagram story that directly addresses the restaurant's followers and friends.

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