THE EFFECT OF E-SERVICE QUALITY ON THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES OF TOURISM AND HOTEL BUSINESSES IN THAILAND

Pisit POTJANAJARUWIT

Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Faculty of Management Science, Business Administration, Bangkok, Thailand, e-mail : pisit.po@ssru.ac.th

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Abstract: In recent yeats, technological advancement has become a crucial factor for businesses' survival. Traditional business models and processes have been modified and integrated with technology to enable competitive business operations. Consequently, the internet has taken on an important role in business as it allows access to a large number of users at the same time, resulting in an ability to compete without limits. This research aimed to study the effect of electronic service (e-service) quality on the competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand. Data were collected from 113 marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand using a questionnaire as the research instrument. Statistical methods used to analyze the data were Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis. The results showed that the reliability and efficiency of e-services correlate with and have an impact on competitive advantages – in the aspects of customer relationships, business networks, organizational learning, productivity, technology sourcing, knowledge management, and entrepreneurship orientation – at a statistically significant level of 0.05. That means business should place importance on the reliability of online service websites. This is to help service users have more confidence in the accuracy of information and security of private information. There should also be a reliable security system in place and a focus on providing support to customers through the website.

Key words: customer relationships, e-service quality, competitive advantage, tourism and hotel business, technology to improve operational efficiency

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the business landscape has become a very competetive environment. There is competition from other players within the country and those from abroad, as well as the need to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions of the world. Technological advancement has also become a crucial factor for businesses' survival. Traditional business models and processes have been modified and integrated with technology to enable competitive business operations. These adaptations can be seen most among service businesses as they have started providing online services. Consequently, the internet has taken on an important role in business as it allows access to a large number of users at the same time, resulting in an ability to compete without limits (Bazazo and Alananzeh, 2022). An electronic service (e-service) is a form of online service provided via a website. It is a product of the changes caused by the Internet which has become an important factor in the service business (Alnaim et al., 2022); Using websites as a medium to connect between businesses and clients allows for a channel through which information about a product or service can be exchanged, resulting in more successful exchanges. The basis of electronic services is the core of products and services. Even though the fundamental element of eservices is having products and services at the core (Pourabedin, 2021); focusing only on the products or services alone cannot keep the business afloat. Service quality is another important factor in differentiating products and creating competitive advantages. The service should be of quality and there must be continuous improvement of the quality as it has a direct influence on the perception and attitude of the clients. Provision of quality services will create satisfaction and good impression for service users, resulting in them willingly returning to the service. More importantly, these service users can provide public relations in either a positive or negative way (VO et al., 2020). The quality of service evaluated on the side of service users may not truly reflect the efficiency of the business. However, the quality of e-services of service providers can be considered from factors such as reliability, efficiency, support, communication, security, and incentive. These 6 service quality indicators can help tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand to be appraised for the quality of their e-services.

Since the Covid-19 lockdowns, tourism and hotel businesses have become crucial factors in the Thai economy in terms of both economic expansion and stability. Tourist arrivals in Thailand continue to increase, with the estimated total tourism income in 2022 at 1.08 trillion baht, from 10 million foreign visitors and 120 million Thai tourists, accounting for 6% of Thailand's GDP. This is divided into 670 billion baht from Thai tourists and 4.3-4.4 billion baht from foreign tourists. Most recently, from 1 Jan to 17 Sep 2022, there were 5.43 million foreign tourists visiting Thailand, leading to a projection of 1.5 million foreign tourists visiting Thailand monthly in the last 3 months of this year. However, it is not necessary to measure competitiveness with only financial performance which may include some inaccurate information and may not be able to truly reflect a competitive advantage. Competitive advantages can be measured in 9 aspects, but for relevence with the

^{*} Corresponding author

studied businesses, only 7 aspects are used here– customer relationships, business networks, organizational learning, productivity, technology sourcing, knowledge management, and entrepreneurship orientation. These elements help businesses understand their true competitive advantages and assess how each business stands out in terms of service performance over its competitors, allowing businesses to be able to compete in the market (Pongsakornrungsilp et al., 2021).

Due to the aforementioned reasons, the researcher was interested in investigating the effect of e-service quality on the competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand, by testing what impacts the e-service quality would have on their competitive advantages. The data were collected from marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand which registered as e-commerce with the Department of Business Development. The research results can be used as a guideline for improvement of operation processes and forms of products or services to enhance the quality of e-services of tourism and hotel operators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

E-service Quality and Competitive Advantages of Businesses

In the work of (Bazazo et al., 2022) "Towards quality e-service in the public sector: The evolution of websites in the local public service sector", it was found that transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of the local public sector demonstrated understanding of e-service outcome, evaluating methods, and the use of electronic data to develop website content. The important factors found include the quality of the electronic table of contents, website and application technologies used to increase efficiency and effectiveness, as well as and the flexibility of organizations that adopt eservices. The e-services used in local services were ones used for education. There was also a comparison of the eservices' quality, emphasizing the qualitative aspects, using the association between what the customer received and what was provided on the website made by each local agency. It was necessary to collect data to analyze changes, to consider of the importance of details related to the scope of e-service quality, and to establish an e-service quality control system using information as a basis for maximum benefit. This is consistent with the work of (Hu et al., 2022); "E-business development for competitive advantages: a case study" which used Intel as a case study. 8 factors were found to help contribute to the company's competitive advantages: (1) Creation and use of differentiation strategies to position themselves in the market; (2) Complete implementation of e-business, covering all competitive channels; (3) Support from high-level management; (4) Targeting quality networks; (5) Supporting new e-commerce knowledge for the networks and providing trial services to customers; (6) Efficient security of the entire network system; (7) Building and maintaining a strong e-business structure; and (8) Implementing effective e-business management strategies (Song et al., 2022); studied the relationship between competitiveness and technological innovation capability. It was found that only 16 percent of organizations operated with good new practices. Many organizations were also found with inconsistencies between their innovation capability and their competitiveness. Around 70% of the inefficient enterprises were found with decreasing returns to scale, while the other 30% were found with increasing returns to scale. For this reason, an appropriate innovation process in an organization is a very important factor for an organization's performance. This also shows that organizations must be capable of technological innovation in order to be competitive. This is in line with (Zollo et al., 2022); who studied consumer perspective of e-service quality. It was found that convenience of service, website service quality, and risk affect the satisfaction level of service users. To improve the quality of service for users, companies need to invest in the design of a website for it to provide good and measurable quality service. There should be usage risk control by combining e-services quality with technological innovations to create presentations through eservices – a result of the growth of online commerce. The focus should be placed on e-services, the relationship between various factors, and customer attitudes toward e-services. The presentations should emphasize privacy, individual differences, convenience of e-services, website service quality, risks, electronic satisfaction, and increase of interest.

Business Competitive Advantages

From the review on relevant literature, 'competitive advantages in business' refers to the ability of a business to compete with its competitors and maintain its market share. It is a creation of advantages in business competition including;

1. Organizational learning: (Lee et al., 2022); defined organizational learning as principles and guidelines that will help organizations, in both the public and private sectors, to be ready, capable, and able to adapt and respond to changes of the environment and organizational factors appropriately. It can create new business opportunities and help turn the obstacles into benefits for the operations, in order to steer the organization continuously towards its goals. This is consistent with (Zhang et al., 2023); who defined organizational learning as a process of management that focuses on providing organizations and personnel with quality work processes and effective performance, to be able to adapt and respond appropriately to changes in the environment and organizational factors. It can create new business opportunities and adjust obstacles to be useful for operations, leading the organization to achieve its goals.

2. Productivity refers to the use of electronic technology for improvement in terms of products and personnel. E-services are used as a tool to change or improve the quality of products (Stroumpoulis et al., 2022).

3. Customer relationship refers to continuously building relationships with customers by understanding their needs and behaviors. This can be done through the use of e-services to learn more customer information and implement those data in product and service development, as well as in tailoring marketing programs to suit each individual or each group of customers to precisely meet their needs (Mahadevan and Joshi, 2022).

4. Business networks: (Salamah et al., 2022); defined a business network as a cooperation between individuals, groups, or organizations of the same type – or a network between groups or organizations of different types – by using e-services as

a tool (Girish et al., 2022); defined business networking as creating cooperation between groups of related businesses and institutions, to carry out activities together with a reciprocal agreement to have each other's support, to exchange ideas and information, as well as to associate and complement each other's businesses in a comprehensive way (commonality and complementarily). This is to achieve common goals and continuously create competitive advantages.

5. Technology sourcing refers to the use of e-services as a reference source of information to help manage and improve business and its capabilities, as well as the use of advanced manufacturing facilities and quality technology resources to help businesses become proficient in technology that is advantageous to future work improvement (Hung and Khoa, 2022).

6. Knowledge management refers to processes and technologies that use e-services as sources to acquire, create, manage, share, and enable the required knowledge to achieve the organization's vision. This is done through the consistent combination of human operations, work processes, and technology, leading to desired success. This is because knowledge is the origin of competitive advantages of each company which will help them gain the ability to evolve and transform the global marketplace (Ibrahim and Shaalan, 2023).

7. Entrepreneurship orientation refers to the use of e-services to assist in the design of innovative products, technical management, after-sales service systems, sales channels or brand image. It also includes being aware of internal and external organizational environments, which might be complicated for management decision-making, as well as uncertain environments. This is to help further decision-making in response to problems and obstacles that may arise in business operations and to achieve the expected results.

This corresponds with (Kim et al., 2023); in the study "Customer Perceived E-service Quality in Online Shopping". It was found that the e-service quality strategy is an important part of e-commerce websites' success in addition to pricing strategy and website design. The five major factors found affecting the quality of e-services were; (1) website design, (2)



Figure 1. Conceptual framework

reliability, (3) responsiveness to needs, (4) trust, and (5) personalization. The results were used to increase understanding of how e-service quality affects customer perceptions of online purchases. As the internet and e-commerce have grown dramatically, new distribution and marketing channels have emerged. A work by (O'Connor, 2023); on the competitiveness of information technology (IT) in Thailand found that the use of IT brings in benefits from cost reduction to the speed and accuracy of the information system, leading to appropriate strategic planning and contributing to the efficiency of the organization's operations. Use of strategies combining with technology is crucial in the era of globalization as businesses are met with competition from free trade and having to achieve a high enough potential to compete for their domestic market share. This is in line with the research of (Bazargani and Kilic, 2021); on the competitiveness of information

Needs Survey)

technology (IT) in Thailand which found that the use of IT brings in benefits from cost reduction to the speed and accuracy of the information system, leading to appropriate strategic planning contributing to the efficiency of the organization's operations. Use of strategies combining with technology is crucial in the era of globalization as businesses are met with competition from free trade and having to achieve a high enough potential to compete for their domestic market share. Clarity in service providng, building of trust, and providing assistance to service users when in doubt or faced with various problems also creates good faith for the business itself. This is consistent with the work of (Choirisa, 2022); which found that transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of the local public sector demonstrated understanding of e-service outcome, evaluating methods, and use of electronic data to develop website content. The quality of the electronic table of contents, website, and application technologies was used to increase efficiency and effectiveness, as well as the flexibility of organizations. Details related to the scope of e-service quality were also important to establish an e-service quality control system using information as a basis for maximum benefit.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Determination of population and sample

1. Review of relevant literature and

theoretical concept research

(Secondary Sources)

Figure 2. Flow chart of methodology steps

1. The population for this the research was 257 marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand that were registered with the Department of Business Development (Srhoj et al., 2021).

2. The samples included in the research were 160 marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand that were registered with the Department of Business Development. The sample size was determined by Taro Yamane's calculation formula (Yamane, 1973); using the known number of population and then the Stratified Random Sampling method to recruit participants based on business locations. The steps for sampling were as follows: (2.1) Classifying marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand according to their business locations; (2.2) Determining proportionate samples of marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand.

Research instruments

The research instrument used was a questionnaire created according to the objectives and conceptual framework established. The questionnaire was divided into 4 parts – (I) General information of marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand, (II) General information about tourism and hotel businesses, (III) Opinions on the quality of e-services, and (IV) Opinions on the competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses. The quality of the research instrument was tested as follows:

1. The questionnaire was used in a try-out with 30 marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand (Bazazo et al., 2022); who were not included in the sample group. The reliability was evaluated by finding the alpha coefficients according to Cronbach's alpha method. Each aspect of e-service quality was found with alpha coefficients as follows: reliability = 0.592, efficiency = 0.699, suppor t = 0.600, communication = 0.739, security = 0.527, and incentive = 0.710. Each aspect of competitive advantages of tourism and hotels was found with alpha coefficients as follows: customer relationships = 0.463, business networks = 0.665, organization learning = 0.836, productivity = 0.714, technology sourcing = 0.651, knowledge managemen t = 0.832, and entrepreneurship orientation = 0.674.

2. The discriminant power of the questionnaire was determined by using the item-total correlation test. Each aspect of e-service quality was found with discriminant power as follows: reliability = 0.367-0.841, efficiency = 0.499-0.813, support = 0.369-0.723, communication = 0.492-0.756, security = 0.433-0.783, and incentive = 0.549-0.783 (Table 81, Appendix C). Each aspect of competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses was found with discriminant power as follows: customer relationships = 0.549-0.753, business network s= 0.554-0.710, organizational learning = 0.699-0.859, productivity = 0.386-0.734, technology sourcing = 0.415-0.750, knowledge management = 0.790-0.835, and entrepreneurship orientation = 0.434-0.740.

Data Collection

Data were collected by sending the questionnaire to marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand, using the name and address registered with the Department of Business Development. The questionnaire was in the format of an online survey with a scheduled response time of within 30 days after receiving the questionnaire. At the end of the 30-day period, 100 sets of questionnaires were received. Phone calls were then made to the rest of the marketing managers who had not submitted the form and additional sets of the questionnaire were re-sent to these individuals with a scheduled response time of 15 days. After receiving the questionnaires, they were examined for completeness of the content. From the total of 160 sets of questionnaires sent, 145 were answered, of which 33 copies were excluded for being incomplete. As a result, 113 sets of complete questionnaires were received, representing 70.63 % of the sample group.

Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaires were input into a computer software to analyze opinion data on e-service quality and competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses. The analysis included processing descriptive statistics and using Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis to test the correlation between e-service quality and competitive advantages of the tourism and hotel businesses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis results of overall opinion towards e-service quality of Thailand's tourism and hotel marketing managers are as follows; From Table 1, the marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand were found to have overall opinion towards e-service quality at a high level ($\overline{\mathbf{X}} = 3.58$). When considered by aspect, 5 items, ranking from highest to lowest score, were all ranked at a high level – reliability ($\overline{\mathbf{X}} = 3.76$), incentive ($\overline{\mathbf{X}} = 3.58$), support ($\overline{\mathbf{X}} = 3.56$), efficiency ($\overline{\mathbf{X}} = 3.55$), and communication ($\overline{\mathbf{X}} = 3.53$). One aspect of e-service quality had a mean score

Table 1. Overall opinion towards e-service quality of Thailand's tourism and hotel marketing managers

E-Service Quality	Х	SD	Opinion level
1. Reliability	3.76	0.46	High
2. Efficiency	3.55	0.55	High
3. Support	3.56	0.55	High
4. Communications	3.53	0.52	High
5. Security	3.47	0.58	Moderate
6. Incentive	3.58	0.60	High
Overall	3.58	0.40	High

at a moderate level – security ($\overline{X} = 3.47$). Results on Multiple Correlation Analysis and prediction equation formation.

Table 2 shows independent variables being correlated, resulting in a multicollinearity phenomenon. The researcher therefore tested this multicollinearity by using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. It appeared that the VIF values of the e-service quality independent variables were less than 10, ranging only between 1.441-1.881, indicating the variables not being significantly correlated (Bazazo et al., 2022); When considering the correlation coefficients between each independent variable or each aspect of e-service quality, they were found correlated with the overall competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses at a statistical significance level of 0.05, with correlation coefficients between 0.330-0.563. The researcher then performed a Multiple Regression Analysis and created a prediction equation (Hu et al., 2022); for competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses (CRA) as follows;

CRA = 1.433 + 0.207 RLY + 0.116 EFC + 0.188 SUP + 0.042 COM + 0.051 SEC + 0.083 ICT

It means if tourism and hotel entrepreneur develop reliability of the website (RLY) 0.207 such transparency, clarity in service providng, building of trust, and providing assistance to service users when in doubt or faced with various problems also creates good faith for the business itself. Efficiency (EFC) 0.116 such increase speed and accuracy of the website system, support (SUP) 0.188 such demonstrated understanding of e-service outcome, evaluating methods, and use of electronic data to develop website content, Communication (COM) 0.042 such allows access to a large number of users at the same time, resulting in an ability to compete without limits, Security (SEC) 0.051 such the presentations should emphasize privacy, individual differences, risks electronic satisfaction, and increase of interest and also incentive (ICT) 0.083 such tailoring marketing programs to suit each individual or each group of customers to precisely meet their needs it will create competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses (CRA) for 1.433 (Alnaim et al., 2022).This equation can predict the overall competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses (CRA) at a statistical significance level of 0.05 (F = 14.606; p < 0.000) with 0.422 Adjusted R-Squared (AdjR2) (Table 4). When used to test correlation between independent variables or each aspect of with e-service quality overall competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses (CRA), (Zhang et al., 2023) the results were acquired as shown in Table 3. From Table 4 eservice quality in the aspects of reliability (RLY) and support (SUP) was found with a positive correlation and a positive impact on the overall competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses (CRA) at a statistical significance level of 0.05 (Salamah et al., 2022). Therefore, regarding eservice quality were accepted. Other aspects were not found correlated with the overall competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses (CRA). When using only these two aspects of e-service, reliability (RLY) and support (SUP), to create another prediction equation for overall competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses (CRA), it resulted in

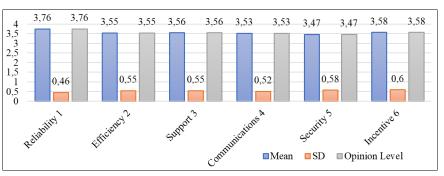


Figure 3. Overall opinion towards e-service quality of Thailand's tourism and hotel marketing managers

Table 2. Multiple Correlation Analysis of e-service quality and overall competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand*Statistically significant at 0.05 level

VIF
1.701
1.881
1.628
1.691
1.521
1.441

Table 3. Data source for the competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses' equation

Researchers and Academics	Correlation Coefficients of Competitive Advantages in Tourism and Hotel Businesses' Equation						
	CRA	RLY	EFC	SUP	COM	SEC	ICT
(Bazazo et al., 2022);							
(Hu et al., 2022);							\checkmark
(Stroumpoulis et al., 2022);						\checkmark	
(Zollo et al., 2022);	\checkmark						

Table 4. Testing the correlation of regression coefficients with the overall competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand* Statistically significant at 0.05 level

•					
E comico quality	Competitive adv	t	p- value		
E-service quality	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	ι	p- value	
Constant (a)	1.433	0.249	5.750	0.000*	
Reliability (RLY)	0.207	0.075	2.752	0.007*	
Efficiency (EFC)	0.116	0.066	1.760	0.081	
Support (SUP)	0.188	0.062	3.042	0.003*	
Communication (COM)	-0.042	0.066	-0.629	0.531	
Security (SEC)	0.051	0.057	0.902	0.369	
Incentive (ICT)	0.083	0.053	1.561	0.122	
$F = 14.606 \text{ p} = 0.000 \text{ Adj } \mathbb{R}^2 = 0.422$					

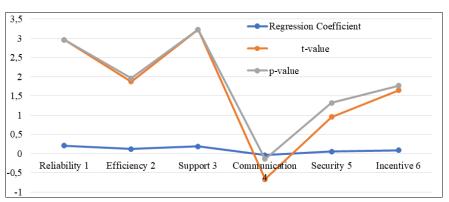


Figure 4. E-service quality and advantages in tourism and hotel businesses

AdjR2 being 0.673 and the equation (Bazazo and Alananzeh, 2022); as follows:

 $CRA = 1.620 + 0.280 \ RLY + 0.256 \ SUP$

It means if tourism and hotel entrepreneur want to create competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses (CRA) for 1.620 the business have to develop reliability of the website (RLY) 0.280 such clarity in service providng, building of trust and also support customer (SUP) for 0.256 such providing assistance to service users when in doubt or faced with various problems. It will improve competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses (CRA).

And also focus should be placed on e-services, the relationship between various factors, and customer attitudes toward e-services. The presentations should emphasize privacy, individual differences, convenience of e-services, website service quality, risks, electronic satisfaction, and increase of interest (Mahadevan et al., 2022).

	Correlation Coefficients of Competitive Advantages in Tourism and Hotel Businesses' Equation			
Researchers and Academics	CRA	RLY	SUP	
(Alnaim et al., 2022)	\checkmark			
(Zhang et al., 2023)	\checkmark	\checkmark		
(Salamah et al., 2022)	\checkmark		\checkmark	
(Mahadevan et al., 2022)		\checkmark		

Table 5. Data source for the competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses' equation

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that marketing managers of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand haved a highlevel opinion towards the quality of e-services both in general and by each aspect. The quality of reliability includes a business's capability to properly provide e-services through the website. The business has to be able to provide fast eservices via the website and ensure that the business website is up-to-date. Businesses must be prepared to meet the needs of customers all the time, for instance, allowing customers to contact the business at all times and use more services. The businesses should also show sources of information when citing external information on their website's content. This corresponds with (Mirčetić and Mihić, 2022); in the study "Customer Perceived E-service Quality in Online Shopping". It was found that the e-service quality strategy is an important part of e-commerce websites' success in addition to pricing strategy and website design. The five major factors found affecting the quality of e-services were; (1) website design, (2) reliability, (3) responsiveness to needs, (4) trust, and (5) personalization. The results were used to increase understanding in how e-service quality affects customer perceptions of online purchases. As the internet and ecommerce have grown dramatically, new distribution and marketing channels have emerged.

Two aspects of e-service quality – reliability and support – were also found with a positive correlation and positive impact on the overall competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses, as well as competitive advantages such as customer relationships, business networks, organizational learning, technology sourcing, and knowledge management. This might be due to current business competitions being not limited only to the domestic market, but including competitions at regional and global levels. This can be done through building foundations such as customer relationships and useful information, as well as using it efficiently. There should also be business networking to gain both domestic and international alliances, supporting and encouraging personnel within the organizations or agencies with new technological potential to apply the existing knowledge within the organization for maximum benefit.

This is in line with the research of (Bazargani and Kilic, 2021); on the competitiveness of information technology (IT) in Thailand which found that the use of IT brings in benefits from cost reduction to the speed and accuracy of the information system, leading to appropriate strategic planning contributing to the efficiency of the organization's operations. Use of strategies combining with technology is crucial in the era of globalization as businesses are met with competition from free trade and having to achieve a high enough potential to compete for their domestic market share. Clarity in service providing, building of trust, and providing assistance to service users when in doubt or faced with various problems also creates good faith for the business itself. This is consistent with the work of (Choirisa, 2022); which found that transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of the local public sector demonstrated understanding of e-service outcome, evaluating methods, and use of electronic data to develop website content.

The quality of the electronic table of contents, website, and application technologies was used to increase efficiency and effectiveness, as well as the flexibility of organizations. Details related to the scope of e-service quality were also important to establish an e-service quality control system using information as a basis for maximum benefit.

Suggestions

Executives and entrepreneurs of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand shoud focus on the quality of e-services as they are a tool to increase the efficiency of online services. This is to increase the competitive advantages of tourism and hotel businesses both at domestic and international levels. They should also place importance on the reliability of online service websites. This is to help service users have more confidence in the accuracy of information and security of private information. There should also be a reliable security system in place and a focus on providing support to customers through the website. This could include adding frequently asked questions (FAQs) to help users make decisions and solve problems of products or services that may arise.

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