

GUIDELINES FOR THE SERVICE QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL BOUTIQUE HOTELS THAT ATTRACT DOMESTIC WORKCATION TOURISTS: THE CASE OF PATTAYA CITY, THAILAND

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Abstract: The aims of this study are to 1) study the level of service quality of small boutique hotels in Pattaya City, (2) study the behaviors of Domestic workcation tourists at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City, and (3) suggest guidelines for the service quality development of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City. Small boutique hotels are presently dispersed around the globe, especially in Pattaya City, Thailand, where small boutique hotels are plentiful. Meanwhile, the concept of ‘workcation’ is more recognizable due to its concept of ‘anywhere is an office’. Although this concept is not new, limited studies concerning workcation tourists were found, particularly studies of service quality among small boutique hotels as well as workcation tourists’ behaviors. A mixed research method was used to accomplish the research objectives. For quantitative research, a validated questionnaire was refined to collect data from targeted samples of 400 domestic workcation tourists who had stayed at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City. For qualitative research, a semi-structured in-depth interview was organized to collect data from 30 small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya. The results indicated that domestic workcation tourists prioritize the following service quality factors: tangibility ($\bar{x} = 4.51$), responsiveness ($\bar{x} = 4.51$), reliability ($\bar{x} = 4.48$), assurance ($\bar{x} = 4.29$), and empathy ($\bar{x} = 4.35$). For behavioral studies, the findings revealed that domestic workcation tourists usually traveled alone, spent only one night at the hotels, stayed over five times per year, preferred July–September as a travel period, obtained hotel information via social media, and regularly made reservations through social media platforms. Having an internet connection was crucial to them. Lastly, three dimensions of guidelines were formulated, including human resource development, organization development, and information technology development. The findings give valuable insights for tourism stakeholders to cater domestic workcation tourists in response to the blooming of small boutique hotels in Pattaya, Thailand and other equivalent areas.

Keywords: service quality development; small boutique hotels; workcation tourists; tourism; hospitality; service industries; Pattaya City; Thailand

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INTRODUCTION

Pattaya City, the city that never sleeps, has long been famous for its nightlife activities and beautiful beaches. While international tourists see Pattaya as a paradise, the city is also popular among domestic tourists for several reasons, for instance, its proximity to Bangkok and its fully equipped tourist facilities such as restaurants, bars, department stores, and hotels. The findings of an initial area study, such as Gozzoli et al. (2024), Maneethorn et al. (2023), Pleerux and Nardkulpat (2023), Hansasooksin and Tontisirin (2021), and Prasert and Zilli (2019), agree that Pattaya has diverse themes, moods, and characteristics. Gozzoli et al. (2024) express that Pattaya city has suffered from overtourism, sustainable tourism, climate change and Covid-19. Nonetheless, the area creates thousands job opportunities for migrant workers from impoverished areas of Thailand, especially in the hotel and tourism sector. Meanwhile, Prasert and Zilli (2019) define the area as one of the most multilingual and multicultural areas, serving millions international visitors. Firmly added by Maneethorn et al. (2023), from the points of view of international visitors, Pattaya city has significant potential to become a regional hub, and could be well-developed into the top global tourism destination by the readiness of tourism innovations and facilities. Hansasooksin and Tontisirin (2021) also affirm that having magnificent beachfront, choices of tourism-based activities, leading medical services, and potential MICE capabilities, made the city become the worldclass tourism destination. In terms of demand study, Pleerux and Nardkulpat (2023) find that most international visitors prefer outstanding service by staff, high-quality products and services and flawless service quality when traveling in Pattaya. The above studies ensure that Pattaya is the city of opportunity with its strengths of tourism attractions, activities and facilities.

Undeniedly, one significant type of tourism facility in Pattaya is accommodation. Pattaya offers a wide range of hotels based on tourists’ preferences from economy to ultra-luxurious. Nonetheless, small boutique hotels seem to be admired by entrepreneurs based on the number of newly operating small boutique hotels in Pattaya. Several research indicate the rising

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numbers of newly opened small boutique hotels in Thailand such as Takuatung and Bussracumpakorn (2024), Chernbumroong et al. (2021), Punnasuparom and Choibamroong (2020). Nevertheless, the study of small boutique hotels in Pattaya city specifically is unfound. As of 2024, there are 45,684 rooms of small hotels, with less than 100 guestrooms per property, from 60,435 available rooms in Pattaya city (LH Bank, 2024). According to the stated numbers, small hotels take 76 percent of the whole hotel accommodations in Pattaya city. Additionally, the newly established small hotels have been statically surged from 43,760 rooms in 2019 to 45,684 rooms in 2024. This reflects the trends of small accommodations in response to tourists' demands. In Pattaya, the small boutique hotels are unique by locations. Each location gives different moods and feelings. Pattaya City can be divided into three zones as follows: (1) North Pattaya, or Wongamat Beach, is where modern tourist attractions and high-end lifestyle destinations are situated. Luxurious small boutique hotels, high-end condominiums and serviced apartments, and elegant restaurants are mostly located in this zone. Hence, this area is the quietest and provides the most privacy. Also, it is where the high-end Tiffani's show theater is located. For the stated reasons, this area is more suitable for affluent tourists (2) Central Pattaya is situated in the middle of Pattaya City. This area is regarded as a center of nightlife activities and shopping malls such as Central Marina, Central Festival Pattaya Beach, Royal Garden Plaza, Index Living Mall, and King Power Duty Free. In addition, plentiful bars are situated along the roads. Choices of accommodations are very diverse in this area. Lastly, (3) South Pattaya, or Phratamnak Hill, is remarkable for its serenity and tranquility. Although this area is unpopular for nightlife activities compared with the other areas, this area is more appropriate for peaceful tourists who prefer relaxation. In addition, South Pattaya has picturesque viewpoints where tourists enjoy daily morning sunrises and evening sunsets. Two principal keys for long-lasting hotels are establishing guest satisfaction and creating viable profits. Therefore, service quality is a significant tool for creating an impression for hotel guests. Excellent service quality management not only enhances guests' overall satisfaction but also ultimately leads to guest loyalty. Understanding visitors' requirements, needs and behaviors allows hotels, as service providers, to know their areas of improvement. In the meantime, they can rectify unheeded faults and errors, generating high level of guest satisfaction.

The concept of 'workcation', the combination of work and vacation, became recognizable during the COVID-19 pandemic and is found in numerous academic papers, for instance, Bassyouny and Wilkesmann (2023), Shin et al. (2023), Voll et al. (2023), and Vig and Tewary (2022). The flexibility of working hours encourages domestic tourists to travel much easier than before. Due to the modern technologies presently, works can be done digitally anywhere via mobile devices such as laptops, smart phones, and tablet computers. As well, the virtual meetings can be electronically conducted through various online applications. As a result, most companies allow their team members to work remotely. Working remotely helps companies in saving various office costs, for instances, utility expenses such as electricity, water, waste disposal, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (Yang et al., 2022). Therefore, modern officers regularly move their working locations to discover new inspirations while relieving possible stresses (Voll et al., 2023; Walia et al., 2024).

Accordingly, domestic workcation tourists are potential hotel guests nowadays due to the short travel distance with less traveling time, giving them convenience and ease. After the COVID-19 pandemic, there was continuous growth in Thai domestic tourism. In 2024, Pattaya welcomed more than 8 million domestic tourists, which confirmed the mighty return of the tourism industry (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2024). By aforementioned facts, even though domestic workcation tourists and small boutique hotels have become more visible in the tourism industry, research on the stated topics are scarcely found in the academic arena. Most research draw attention to the international visitors' points of view, some purely emphasis on the supply-based studies. As a result, this research suggests new dimensional guidelines of service quality development of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya city, Thailand which could be applicable to equipvalent cities worldwide.

Objectives

1. To study the level of service quality of small boutique hotels in Pattaya City
2. To study the behaviors of domestic workcation tourists at each service touchpoint at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City
3. To suggest guidelines for service quality development at service touchpoints at small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City. Conceptual Framework:

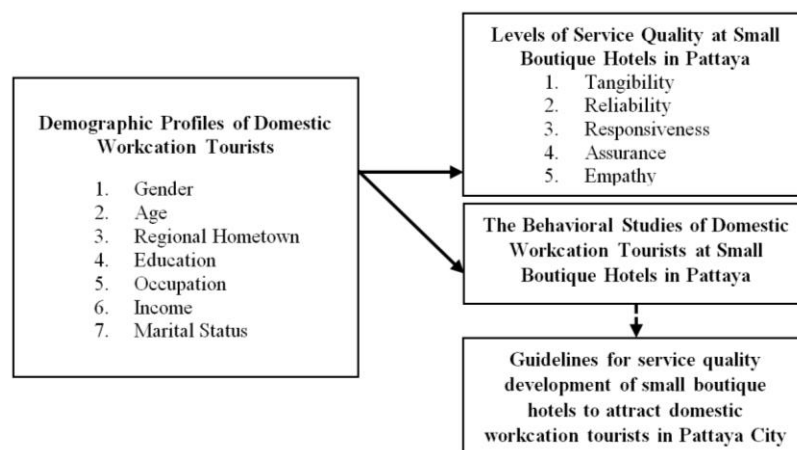


Figure 1. Research framework

LITERATURE REVIEWS

1. Boutique Hotels

According to the literature reviews by Buhagiar et al. (2024), Van Nguyen et al. (2021), Loureiro et al. (2020), and Punnasuparom and Choibamroong (2020), it can be concluded that a boutique hotel is a small compact hotel that contains less than 100 guestrooms. In addition, a boutique hotel's decorations should be modern yet contemporary. A 'boutique', derived from French vocabulary, is a small shop that sells items such as clothing, gifts, and souvenirs. However, an official definition of 'boutique hotel' has not been identified. Therefore, the interpretation of 'boutique hotel' can be explained as a hotel with modern yet elegant architecture and styles of services. Based on research by Buhagiar et al. (2024), Soonsan (2022), Tinakhat (2021), and Punnasuparom and Choibamroong (2020), the common standards of boutique hotels consist of three aspects:

1. **Architecture and Design Aspect:** this aspect emphasizes unique decorations consistent with the local area. The characteristics of most boutique hotels convey historical and modern tales to the guests.

2. **Service Aspect:** this aspect emphasizes building relationships between hotel staff and guests. Because boutique hotels have fewer rooms and small sizes, hotel staff are usually familiar with guests, resulting in more personal touches. Addressing guests by name and remembering guests' food and beverage preferences are common practices among boutique hotels.

3. **Target Market Aspect:** this aspect focuses more on a niche market. Boutique hotels usually serve guests who seek extraordinary experiences beyond standard hotels. Hence, high-income guests are the most frequent users of boutique hotels.

Additionally, the intensive reviews found that successful small boutique hotels should have the following factors:

1. **Location factor:** before choosing a location, accessibility must be carefully studied, for instance, the proximity to main roads, highways, railways, overground stations, and underground stations. Data related to the location must be explored to check for potential traffic and area readiness. In addition, cost factors, such as transportation costs, labor costs, and land and building costs, should be understood. Ancillary factors such as local policies, laws, and regulations; community attitudes; and the readiness of workforces are also significant to know (Loureiro et al., 2020; Sulaiman, 2020).

2. **Service factor:** generating 'word-of-mouth' marketing by exceeding guests' expectations is crucial in the hotel business. It is also regarded as a powerful zero-cost marketing method (Punnasuparom and Choibamroong, 2020). Suksutdhi and Boonyamethaporn (2022) also added that the more outstanding the service provided to guests, the more satisfaction and loyalty returned.

3. **Human Resource factor:** Van Nguyen et al. (2021) explained that staff are the heart of hotel operations. The hotel business requires qualified service providers who are friendly, kind-hearted, caring, attentive, flexible, speedy, and active. Ashton (2018) also stated that hotel service providers must be attentive to all details to create a unique impression and a competitive advantage. Suksutdhi added that training and development in hotels must be conducted at least bi-monthly to ensure that staffs are up to standards set.

4. **Marketing factor:** Zhovkva (2020) affirmed that small boutique hotels should thoughtfully employ a product differentiation strategy in a highly competitive market. It was found that each small boutique hotel used different marketing strategies based on the following principles: (1) creating obvious differences, (2) creating superiority, (3) demonstrating leadership, (4) increasing affordability levels, and (5) refining service touchpoints. According to Buhagiar et al. (2024) and Garg and Kumar (2021), major small boutique hotel users are from a modern generation, love independence, and prefer unusual lifestyles. Also, they need to express their lifestyles and identities through traveling. In addition, small boutique hotel users have stable careers and decent incomes. Therefore, these hotels set competitive prices to maintain their images according to the users' social statuses. Selling a boutique experience linked to the beauty, history, and background of the location is another marketing strategy for small boutique hotels (Zhovkva, 2020; Ahmad et al., 2017). In addition, emotional and experience marketing are mandatory for small boutique hotels because guests need something extraordinary. Hence, evaluating the feelings of guests to craft positive experiences is essential. A study by Sangwichien and Jaroenwisana (2017) revealed that evaluating guests' feelings consists of two elements: (1) a physical element and (2) an emotional element. It can be concluded that using product and service differentiation is a key marketing strategy employed by small boutique hotels. Emotional selling points must be added to products and services while constantly creating positive experiences for guests. In addition, customer relationship management must be carried out with a variety of distribution channels and business partners.

5. **Technology factor:** Punnasuparom and Choibamroong (2020) and Hussein et al. (2018) said that the use of technology presently plays a vital role in the hotel business. To attract workcation tourists, small boutique hotels must ensure they have internet stability. Also, there are plenty of assisting devices to enhance convenience for hotel staff and guests. To improve guests' experiences, technology is the right investment these days. Some examples of technological assistance are mobile check-in applications, digital keys, automated cleaning robots, chatbots, and instant chat. Large international hotel chains, for example, Hilton Worldwide and Marriott International, make immense investments in technological systems. In addition, smart in-room technologies are necessary, for example, wireless audio systems, mobile screen mirroring for TV, intelligent curtain systems, smart lighting systems, and automatic coffee machines. These examples clearly create satisfaction among hotel guests.

According to Rojas et al. (2021), Zach and Krizaj (2017), and Tuominen and Ascensão (2016), a 'service touchpoint' can be defined as any time a potential guest or guest comes in contact with a hotel before, during, or after receiving services. To define service touchpoints, a Customer Journey Map (CJM) is a vital tool used to understand the satisfaction received by hotel guests. Touch points for hotels can be divided into three periods as follows:

1. **Touchpoints before purchase** include accessing social media websites, reading reviews or testimonials from customers who have used the service, receiving advertising media both online and offline, promotions, public relations, various forms of marketing, word of mouth, organizing important events such as the Travel Fair, and participation in various activities.

2. Touchpoints during purchase include the process during the use of services from arrival until the end of service.
3. Touchpoints after purchase include conducting opinion and satisfaction surveys, presenting new promotions, managing customer loyalty programs, and profiling guests through customer relationship management systems.

2. Service Quality Model

Over the years, service quality has been studied in order to understand the different factors that affect service-related industries. It can be considered a comprehensive customer evaluation of a special service and the extent to which it meets their expectations and provides satisfaction. The success and survival of service-related organizations hinges on the quality of their services, particularly in environments of intense competition, as stated by Kirillova and Chan (2018) and Sharma and Srivastava (2018). Since the market is a customer-oriented economy where the customer has the right to choose, all organizations strive to give a high service quality to customers in order to increase customer satisfaction (Zainul, 2019). It has been demonstrated that the perceived quality of a service has the potential to determine the direction WOM is directed, ultimately influencing future behavior and purchases (2019). The notion of service quality pertains to the discrepancy between expectations and actual performance, and the most commonly employed measurement method is the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The SERVQUAL model, as proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), is based on dimensions that can be utilized to assess service quality. The model measures both expectations and perceived performance with the same dimensions. This creates a gap between the two variables, which is later used to measure the customer's perceived service quality. The objective is to identify the dimensions that reflect the services utilized by customers, thereby assessing the perceived service quality. The SERVQUAL scale measures the quality of a service before and after consumption with five dimensions: (1) tangibility, (2) responsiveness, (3) reliability, (4) assurance, and (5) empathy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Scope

The small boutique hotels in Pattaya City, Chonburi province, Thailand, were chosen as the area of study. In terms of population, two groups were considered. Using purposive sampling, the first group was domestic workcation tourists who had stayed at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City. The sample size was 400, according to the sample size calculation by Yamane (1973). The second group was 30 small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City. Data collection took 4 months from October 2023 to January 2024.

2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

A mixed research methodology was employed. Two research tools were utilized, including a validated questionnaire and a semi-structured in-depth interview. The questionnaire was validated by five experts, including three from the academic sector and two from professional sectors. The content validity value was between 0.60 and 1.00, and the final reliability level was 0.92 after trying it with 40 identical samples. Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Table 1 illustrates the research methodology and research objectives.

Table 1. Research Methodology

Objectives	Research Methodologies	Populations	Sample Sizes	Sampling Techniques	Research Tools	Data Analyses
(Obj. 1) To study the level of service quality of small boutique hotels in Pattaya City	Qualitative research	Small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City	30	Purposive sampling	Semi-structured interview form	Coding analysis
	Quantitative research	Domestic tourists who had stayed at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City	400 Yamane (1973)	Purposive sampling	Questionnaire	Inferential statistics
(Obj. 2) To study the behaviors of domestic workcation tourists at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City	Quantitative research	Domestic workcation tourists who had stayed at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City	400 Yamane (1973)	Purposive sampling	Questionnaire	Inferential statistics and descriptive statistics
(Obj. 3) To suggest guidelines for service quality development of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City	The research data from objectives 1 and 2 were investigated to establish guidelines for the service quality development of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City.					

Research Findings

Part 1: The Results of Demographic and Behavioral Profiles

From the demographic characteristics, it was discovered that the majority of the people surveyed were female (205 people or 51.2 percent). Most of them were 31–40 years old or over 60 years old (82 people or 20.5 percent). Their education level was a bachelor's degree (120 people or 30 percent). The majority of the respondents were employees of contract companies (109 respondents or 27.3 percent). The highest monthly income was THB 20,001–30,000 (132 people or 33 percent). Most respondents were Northerners (167 respondents or 41.8 percent).

For the behavioral studies, the findings revealed that domestic workcation tourists usually traveled alone (105 people or 26.3 percent). They stayed at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City over five times per year (122 respondents or 30.5

percent). The preferred traveling period was July to September (108 respondents or 27 percent). In addition, they obtained hotel information through social media (131 respondent or 32.7 percent) and regularly made reservations through social media platforms (70 respondents or 17.5 percent). The average daily expense per person per stay was THB 2373. The stability of the internet connection was highly significant when selecting boutique hotels (172 respondents or 38.8 percent).

Part 2: The Results of Service Quality Levels of Small Boutique Hotels that Attract Domestic Workcation Tourists in Pattaya City. Table 2 presents the service quality levels rated by domestic workcation tourists who had previously stayed at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City, Thailand. Based on the data on the quality of hotel services of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City, the overall service quality was at a high level. The tangibility ($\bar{x} = 4.51$, S.D. = 0.499) and responsiveness ($\bar{x} = 4.51$, S.D. = 0.500) aspects had the highest levels, followed by the reliability aspect, which was at a high level ($\bar{x} = 4.48$, S.D. = 0.499). The assurance aspect was at a high level ($\bar{x} = 4.29$, S.D. = 0.702), and the empathy aspect was at a high level ($\bar{x} = 4.35$, S.D. = 0.641).

Table 2. Service quality levels of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists (Source: research findings)

Service Quality Factors	Quality Levels		
	(\bar{x})	(S.D.)	Levels
Tangibility			
1. Staff dress neatly, cleanly, and suitably for the styles of the hotels.	4.50	0.501	High
2. The equipment and amenities in guestrooms are clean, neat, and functional.	4.52	0.500	Very High
3. The hotels offer online reservation channels.	4.55	0.498	Very High
4. The hotels have nice atmospheres and environments suitable for relaxation.	4.53	0.500	Very High
5. The hotels have sufficient, safe, and secure parking lots to serve all hotel guests.	4.47	0.500	High
6. Hotel websites and reservation systems are up-to-date, reliable, and easy to navigate.	4.52	0.500	Very High
Total	4.51	0.499	Very High
Reliability			
1. Hotels offer a variety of trustable payment channels.	4.49	0.500	High
2. Hotels have security systems to protect guests' personal data.	4.46	0.499	High
3. Hotels offer full safety and security, ensuring a safe stay for guests.	4.45	0.499	High
4. Hotel staff are knowledgeable about hotel products and services.	4.52	0.500	Very High
Total	4.48	0.499	High
Responsiveness			
1. The service times of hotel staff at each touchpoint are appropriate.	4.50	0.501	High
2. Hotel staff are enthusiastic and willing to answer questions with great support.	4.50	0.501	High
3. Hotel staff solve problems effectively and quickly, presenting satisfactory solutions.	4.52	0.500	Very High
4. Hotel staff clearly inform guests about all hotel facilities, such as breakfasts, swimming pools, and health club operational hours.	4.49	0.500	High
5. Hotel guests receive flawless convenience from hotel staff, amenities, and facilities.	4.55	0.498	Very High
Total	4.51	0.500	Very High
Assurance			
1. Hotel staff have strong expertise, skills, and knowledge to solve problems.	4.29	0.716	High
2. Hotel staff have good communication skills and are able to give advice according to guests' requirements.	4.32	0.696	High
3. Hotel staff provide service with politeness, gentleness, and excellent manners.	4.26	0.693	High
4. Hotels strictly follow measures to prevent the spread of contagious diseases.	4.29	0.706	High
Total	4.29	0.702	High
Empathy			
1. Hotels consider the benefits of guests as the utmost priority.	4.35	0.642	High
2. Hotel staff service all guests without discrimination.	4.36	0.663	High
3. Hotel staff are able to recognize the requirements of different guests.	4.36	0.640	High
4. Hotel staff willingly listen to guests' concerns and questions.	4.35	0.643	High
5. When guests have doubts, hotel staff are able to address their inquiries accurately and correctly.	4.37	0.619	High
Total	4.35	0.641	High

Part 3: Analyses of Independent Samples Using t-test and One-Way ANOVA to Study Demographic Factors Significant to Hotel Service Quality of Small Boutique Hotels that Attract Domestic Workcation Tourists in Pattaya City

Hypothesis 1. Different demographic characteristics of gender, age, and occupation were significant to the quality of hotel services of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City.

Hypothesis 1.1. Different genders were significant to the quality of hotel services of small boutique hotels that attract Domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City. The findings revealed that males and females were similarly insignificant to the quality of hotel services of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City. They were not significantly different at the 0.05 level. This was inconsistent with the assumptions.

Hypothesis 1.2. Different ages were significant to the quality of hotel services of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City. It could be observed that different ages were insignificant to the hotel service quality of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists. They were not significantly different at the 0.05 level, which was inconsistent with the assumptions.

Hypothesis 1.3. Different occupations were significant to the quality of hotel services of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City. It was found that different occupations were insignificant to the hotel

service quality of small boutique hotels that attract Domestic workcation tourists, with an insignificant difference at the 0.05 level, which was not consistent with the assumptions.

Hypothesis 2. Different characteristics of accommodation behavior, including purpose of stay and channel of communication, were significant to the hotel service quality of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City.

Hypothesis 2.1. Different purposes of stay were significant to the hotel service quality of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya. It was revealed that the responsiveness aspect of the service quality factors had a Sig. value of 0.007. It can be concluded that the different purposes of stay were significant to the quality of hotel services of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists, with a significant difference at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 2.2. Different channels of communication were significant to the hotel service quality of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City. It was noticeable that different channels of communication were insignificant to the hotel service quality of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists, with an insignificant difference at the 0.05 level. Accordingly, this was inconsistent with the assumptions.

Part 4: The Results of Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews with Small Boutique Hotel Entrepreneurs in Pattaya City
Table 3 presents the information of the interviewed domestic small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City. The interview data were derived from 30 domestic small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City. The interview contents were mainly about the readiness of small boutique hotels to accommodate domestic workcation tourists divided by SERVQUAL aspects and feedback from domestic workcation tourists who previously stayed at small boutique hotels in Pattaya City.

Table 3. Information of interviewed small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City

Entrepreneurial Code	Hotel Location	Number of Rooms	Mode of Interview	Years of Operation
E01	North	55	On-site	18
E02	North	42	Online	12
E03	North	20	Online	5
E04	North	77	On-site	23
E05	North	60	On-site	20
E06	North	84	On-site	9
E07	North	14	On-site	5
E08	North	90	On-site	24
E09	North	92	On-site	16
E10	North	25	Online	13
E11	Central	39	Online	11
E12	Central	15	On-site	10
E13	Central	80	On-site	14
E14	Central	100	On-site	9
E15	Central	75	Online	5
E16	Central	18	Online	15
E17	Central	30	Online	8
E18	Central	58	On-site	9
E19	Central	80	On-site	18
E20	Central	62	Online	21
E21	South	94	On-site	30
E22	South	21	On-site	12
E23	South	35	On-site	7
E24	South	50	Online	8
E25	South	42	Online	18
E26	South	19	On-site	14
E27	South	32	Online	17
E28	South	59	Online	24
E29	South	65	Online	20
E30	South	80	On-site	16

In terms of the tangibility aspect, most small boutique hotels took the opportunity to renovate, decorate, clean, maintain, and replace equipment and facilities to keep them refreshed after the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 27 out of 30, or 90 percent, of small boutique hotels in Pattaya were well equipped with working desks and chairs in guestrooms. Additionally, every property except E07, E12, and E22 had its own coffee shop to serve workcation tourists when they needed relaxation. In addition, all hotels were offering complementary high-speed internet, which was considered a necessity for workcation tourists. In total, 7 out of 30 entrepreneurs, or 23 percent (E04, E23, E14, E18, E19, E24, and E30), similarly agreed that the numbers of domestic workcation tourists were rising, according to relative feedback on the requirements of high-quality writing tables and chairs as well as the stability of the wireless internet signal in guestrooms. In addition, E05, E16, and E25 mentioned the numbers of quiet room requirements upon registrations by domestic workcation tourists. Also, several hotels, such as E02, E09, E25, and E27, adapted the concepts of the five senses to attract workcation tourists, including taste, hearing, smell, sight, and touch. For taste, they focused on the appealing quality of the food they serve. Hearing was managed by turning on light background music in the hotels' public areas. For smell, the hotels set humidifiers and aroma diffusers in common areas to provide relaxation. Sight and touch were expressed by nicely decorated hotels with style, as well

as the useful hotel facilities that were provided. Meanwhile, E10 and E14 said that the on-going renovations at their hotels caused heavy complaints because domestic workcation tourists could not concentrate on their work and online meetings. Asking about hotel reservation platforms, 19 entrepreneurs out of 30, or 63 percent, offered their own websites for their guests to make direct reservations. However, all of them partnered with online intermediaries such as Booking.com, Agoda, Hotels.com, Trivago, and Expedia. Costly incentives were paid to these intermediaries. E02, E06, E07, E11, E15, E19, E22, E23, E25, and E29 stated that about 12–30 percent of the total room rates were taken by the online intermediaries. In total, 4 out of 30 hotels (E03, E12, E22, and E26) provided co-working spaces by setting working desks and chairs in hotel common areas. These were parts of the hotels' revenue centers, as the hotels sold freshly made coffees and snack bars.

For the reliability aspect, 80 percent, or 24 out of 30, of small boutique hotels in Pattaya City were non-chain-operated and family-run businesses (all hotels except E09, E13, E14, E19, E21, and E30). Some hotels, including E02, E11, E24, and E29, were rated as providing a high level of satisfaction, over 8 out of 10, by domestic guests who booked through online travel agents such as TripAdvisor, Agoda, Expedia, and Booking.com. The overall occupancy percentage in 2023 among small boutique hotels in Pattaya was 91 percent, which reflected the notable rebound in tourism. To elaborate on this number, about 63 percent of small boutique hotel guests were domestic tourists. The capability as well as availability of workforces seemed to be challenging points after the pandemic, based on statements by E01, E03, E07, E09, E14, E17, E22, E26, E27, and E30. The concept of outsourcing was widely adopted by small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City, as it significantly lowered operating costs. The outsourcing companies, which provided services such as security and housekeeping, supplied qualified staff to perform daily tasks and were responsible for their benefits of social welfare. Nonetheless, the low quality of service was mentioned by E14, E24, and E28, who noted that outsourced staff were inhospitable and irresponsible. This was seen by the entrepreneurs, and complaints were made by guests. Nonetheless, all of the small boutique hotels had installed CCTV to witness possible dangers and crimes. Only a small number of entrepreneurs, E12 and E22, reported that guests were pickpocketed near their hotels.

Regarding the responsiveness aspect, many hotels (E01, E03, E05, E08, E15, E18, E20, E23, E27, and E30) mentioned the insufficient quality of hotel staff nowadays, which causes delays in service handling, and 90 percent of entrepreneurs agreed that responsiveness is crucial for hotel staff. According to the characteristics of domestic workcation tourists, they usually need instant support from knowledgeable hotel staff. Hence, the hotels conducted monthly staff training on excellent service to create positive mindsets. To put it simply, E7 and E19 frequently instructed their staff on complaint handling techniques. Instead of calling managers to deal with complaining guests, the hotel staff were empowered to compensate some typical complaints made by guests. Additionally, every hotel except E16 and E23 offered social media platforms to connect with their guests, for instance, Facebook Messenger, Line Official, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Apart from installing key card systems, none of the small boutique hotels in Pattaya City were investing in technological devices such as self-registration and self-checkout kiosks, mobile applications, or robotic cleaning systems. Although technological devices may greatly assist workcation tourists, some entrepreneurs, i.e., E05, E12, E18, and E26, stated that those tools were costly and unnecessary.

In terms of the assurance aspect, the hotels had taken steps to improve their overall hygiene standards. Most hotels (25 out of 30 hotels or 83 percent) were certified as 'Amazing Thailand Safety & Health Administration (SHA)' by the joint cooperations between the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), and the Thai Ministry of Public Health. SHA is a certificate that prominently assures small boutique hotel entrepreneurs' readiness to improve hotel products, services, and sanitation measures, which are the decisive factors in preventing the spread of any contagious disease. In addition, 21 out of 30 hotels, or 70 percent, such as E03, E07, E16, and E18, affirmed that they received repetitive compliments about the friendliness and eagerness of their hotel staff. They agreed that the hotel staff are the major differentiators at small boutique hotels. Although none of the hotel samples provided business centers, domestic workcation tourists still considered their properties because of the remarkable services provided by the hotel staff. Besides their professional staff, 100 percent of the small boutique hotels put a great emphasis on selecting the finest bedding sets. E08, E07, and E26 stated that they only selected premium-quality bedding sets, for example, 100-percent cotton or sateen fitted sheets, luxuriously soft 500-thread-count bedsheets, and genuine duck or goose down pillows. Some hotels such as E03, E16, and E29 installed double-pane windows for better in-room sound insulation. Hence, guests enjoyed high-quality sleep.

Workcation tourists had good concentration without any voice disturbance. For the empathy aspect, the small boutique hotels in Pattaya City adjusted their services according to their hotel guests. This was affirmed by 60 percent of the small boutique hotel entrepreneurs. The hotels noted individual requests pre-arrival and tried their best to facilitate them. Workcation tourists usually requested quiet rooms and fully set-up toiletries, according to E14 and E29. Hence, by knowing specific requirements, the hotels fulfilled them prior to guest arrivals to ensure that their expectations were met. Guest comments via diverse channels were valuable for hotels. The hotels treated guest comments seriously, as mentioned by E02, E05, E08, E13, E14, E18, E25, E28, E29, and E30. All comments were shared in daily management meetings to seek possible rectifications. Additionally, hotel managers normally contacted complaining guests to personally apologize. Offers by the hotels were optional depending on the cases. Once the guests trusted the hotels, they visited again. In addition, every hotel set standards for responding to complaints made by their guests. Hotel staff were instructed to carefully listen before taking action. The ultimate goal was to ensure the highest satisfaction and create guest loyalty.

DISCUSSION

According to the findings on the quality of hotel services of small boutique hotels that attract domestic workcation tourists in Pattaya City, the overall levels based on the user evaluations were at high levels and the highest levels. The aspects of tangibility and responsiveness were ranked at the highest level. Meanwhile, the reliability, assurance, and empathy aspects

were rated at a high level. Hence, it can be said that each domestic workcation tourist needs instant services from hotels, fully convenient facilities with top-notch hospitality from hotel staff, and safety and security to ensure their lives and belongings. The research results were also incorporated with those of Ali et al. (2021), Malik et al. (2020), and Jasinskas et al. (2016) showing that business travelers expected the highest level of a hotel's overall service quality. Flawless service was an indicator determining service quality. The study of service quality dimensions based on their research was slightly different because every aspect was rated in sequential order: reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibility.

Based on the entrepreneurs' points of view, small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City paid a great deal of attention to the restoration of their hotels' physical conditions. The guestroom cleanliness and equipment functionality were prioritized. In addition, more experiences were crafted specially for the tourists. The concepts of the five senses seemed to be widely applied by small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City and were also linked with a study by Nunkoo et al. (2020) that mentioned that atmospheres and environments are two significant factors forming tourists' experiences. Also, research findings from Lee et al. (2019) and Lo et al. (2015) revealed that appealing to the five senses would increase tourist retention, which would encourage them to visit again. Additionally, research by Kirillova and Chan (2015), Tuominen and Ascensão (2016), and Akoğlan Kozak and Acar Gürel (2015) found that service specializations would impress users; therefore, services designed specially for groups of users are essential.

The small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City all partnered with online intermediaries on diverse platforms to create availability and increase their chances of offering their services to prospective guests. Although most of them were independently managed, they ensured reliability by giving their guests the utmost safety and security. All guests were assured that the hotel staff were capable of handling all requests and inquiries. Payment methods were enhanced to allow different channels, for instance, digital wallets, a QR code for an instant bank transfer, Apple Pay, and Google Pay. These findings were in line with those of Lin and Mattila (2021) and Sun et al. (2020), who showed that methods of payment must be aligned with fast-moving trends and technologies. Otherwise, users would consider alternative options that provide better convenience. In addition, among competitive markets, the hotels set their services as the major differentiators. In alignment with studies by Yang et al. (2019), Ashton (2018), and Sourvinou and Filimonau (2018), the staff were assets for the service businesses since similar facilities were offered. Resources were considered more when operating the small boutique hotels because they were the primary costs. Cutting resources meant a more profitable income. Hence, outsourcing concepts were mostly applied, in agreement with the research findings of Ibrahim et al. (2023), Elhoushy et al. (2020), and Espino-Rodríguez and Ramírez-Fierro (2018), who discussed successful models of outsourcing in service businesses, including hotels and airlines. Additionally, hygiene standards were crucial factors in assuring hotel guests that the hotels would prevent the spread of any possible contagious diseases, as stated by Lee-Anant (2023). In terms of marketing, the channels of communication were expanded to responsively connect with hotel guests. Social media were common communication tools; for instance, most hotels used Facebook Business and Line Official to manage their customer relationships, and these platforms offered reservation opportunities for their prospective guests. These facts were affirmed by Garg and Kumar (2021), Gupta (2019), and Jung et al. (2018), who showed that marketing channels are considered as factors to build trust. Hence, contents and promotions must be clear, reliable, and professional.

In terms of the tourists' behaviors, the findings revealed that July to September was the popular period among domestic workcation tourists. The visibility of the hotels was mostly reflected through social media, which were favorable reservation channels among domestic workcation tourists. They spent an average of THB 2,373 per trip, while their daily expenses were between THB 1,501 and 2,500. When traveling as workcation tourists, they traveled alone and usually spent only one night at a hotel. These results were consistent with studies by Wang et al. (2020) and Radojevic et al. (2018), who showed that business travelers had short lengths of stay due to urgency and work-related engagements. By studying domestic workcation tourists, it was discovered that they expected technological assistance during their stays, not just for experience advancement but also for convenience and ease of receiving hotel services.

In addition, these results were incorporated with those of Yang et al. (2021), Zhovkva (2020), and Zach and Krizaj (2017), who discovered that technology was a crucial tool for retaining and capturing market shares. To create sustainable competitive advantages, technology helps firms to adapt quickly to fast-paced environments. Stable internet connections in guestrooms and common areas were crucial for domestic tourists. They preferred quiet rooms with a full setup of in-room amenities. Room sizing was not significant to domestic workcation tourists, but cleanliness and the presence of functional tables and office chairs were. A combination of data were utilized to establish guidelines to develop service quality for small boutique hotel entrepreneurs in Pattaya City that attract domestic workcation tourists. The guidelines were mainly divided into three aspects, including human resources development, organization development, and information technology, as follows:

In terms of human resources development, various skills must be equipped by hotel staff to increase work efficiencies. The hotel industry relies heavily on people; hence, employing hotel staff must be carried out carefully. Attitudinal, enthusiastic, managerial, and attentive dimensions should be tested by small boutique hotel entrepreneurs. To attract workcation tourists, hotel staff must have information technology knowledge as well as knowledge on the behaviors of workcation tourists. In addition, hotel staff must perform their duties according to the standards and procedures set by the hotels and entrepreneurs. Regular training must be arranged to improve knowledge on workcation tourists about trends, requirements, and developments. Entrepreneurs must ensure that hotel staff represent positive hotel images. They should strictly comply with a set of grooming and hygienic standards, as instructed in written staff handbooks. Whenever hotels install technological devices, hotel staff must be trained before assisting hotel guests to ensure knowledgeability. To briefly conclude this aspect, the guests' satisfaction is the utmost priority. Therefore, entrepreneurs must ensure that hotel staff are readily prepared to attract hotel guests, especially domestic workcation tourists. For organization development, entrepreneurs must seek the

possibility to reach targeted tourists. More visibility for a hotel increases recognition and opportunities for repeated visits. Especially in touristic areas, the competition among small boutique hotels is deliberately intensive. It is recommended that hotels develop overall infrastructure, including furniture, equipment, and facilities, to attract domestic workcation tourists.

In addition, it is a duty of the management team and entrepreneurs to arrange working procedures. The design thinking theory would assist in arranging convenience for workcation tourists at each service touchpoint. Therefore, the in-depth service processes at each small boutique hotel must be explored using service blueprint tools. Moreover, hotels must set short-term, immediate-term, and long-term goals and communicate them with their staff so that everyone has the same opportunity to reach the outcomes. To encourage hotel staff, hotel entrepreneurs may use incentive programs in numerous ways, for instance, bonuses, incentive trips, recognitions, and vouchers. Knowing that workcation tourism is constantly increasing, strategies to respond to targeted groups must be included in hotel directions, for example, upgrading the internet speed, installing functional ergonomic office chairs, and providing quiet spaces for individual hotel guests.

Additionally, organization development also refers to a commitment to conducting a business with integrity and transparency, including fairness, honesty, and social responsibility (Ismail, 2021; Laut et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2020). These functions dramatically improve hotel reliability and assurance, which are two significant factors in the service quality model. Good governance must be practiced by respecting guests' rights and privacies. Lastly, for information technology, this aspect is considered to be a magnetic tool for attracting domestic workcation tourists. Although information technology is costly, the return on investment is evident based on several consequences. The financial benefit may not be instant; however, hotels would experience high levels of satisfaction and retention. According to the research findings of Shin et al. (2019) and Wu and Cheng (2018), investments in information technology are long-lasting. More importantly, workcation tourists, the direct target market, would receive immediate benefits of the investment. Information technology is not only for the demand side, as the supply side also needs to install operational property management systems (PMSs) to control their hotel operations in all areas of function. In addition, the development of customer relationship management (CRM) must be carefully directed. In order to retain workcation tourists among competition, small boutique hotels must engage with loyalty programs. Providing points for each stay and night would encourage guests to visit again. In addition, for frequent guests, more benefits should be given, for example, complimentary breakfast for room-only reservations, complimentary in-room drinks and snacks per stay, second guest stays free, etc. Being innovative allows small boutique hotels to create competitive advantages. A study by Wu et al. (2018) also indicated that hotel guests prefer using digital assistance systems while staying at hotels, as they provide extraordinary experiences and convenience.

CONCLUSION

Theoretical Contribution

Besides understanding of service quality levels of small boutique hotels in Pattaya city among domestic workcation tourists, the study also revealed certain requirements to cater their specific needs based on behavioral insights. This paper contributed a great significance between service quality management of small boutique hotels and workcation tourists. It was discovered that tangibility and responsibility are the most crucial aspects of service quality development, followed by reliability, assurance and empathy. Additionally, the research explored the readiness of small boutique hotels in Pattaya city in servicing domestic workcation tourists. Most small boutique hotel entrepreneurs were well-informed about the growth of workcation tourists. They adapted their services and facilities while uplifting overall service quality to impress their valuable workcation guests. A unique result of this research filled the missing gaps of domestic workcation behavioral profiles as well as their points of views towards service quality development of small boutique hotels. Then, guidelines for the service quality development were refined to apply specifically to small boutique hotel entrepreneurs and management team.

Managerial Implications

The research contributed significant managerial implications. Entrepreneurs and management team could instantly employ given guidelines of service quality development in their current businesses. First, improving service quality by hiring qualified team members with ideal characteristics is on the top to-do list. Organizing frequent training in service quality maintenance is also another crucial step. It is responsibility of entrepreneurs and managers to set clear job procedures and standards to ensure the highest level of guest satisfaction. Additionally, modern innovations, such as digital booking engines, super high-speed wireless internet, hotel designs and hotel facilities must be well-equipped to attract workcation tourists. Incentive program, as a customer relationship management tool, shall be introduced to engage with loyalty workcation guests. As well, trade with fairness, honesty, and sustainability are suggested. Unavoidably, technological facilities are a necessity to demand workcation tourists at this era.

Future Research Directions

This research could be beneficial as a guideline to conduct similar research in different touristic areas, for instance, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Phuket. This could also be a useful research practice for different international touristic cities such as Paris, London, Tokyo, and Singapore. Additional intensive studies on workcation tourists' satisfaction with small boutique hotels' styles and service innovations might be carried out in the future due to their scarce availability in the academic arena.

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