



Research Report

**An analysis of tourist reviews regarding spa business services
in Thailand's major tourism cities**

**การวิเคราะห์คำวิจารณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยวเกี่ยวกับการให้บริการของธุรกิจสปา
ในเมืองท่องเที่ยวหลักของประเทศไทย**

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บทคัดย่อ

ในช่วงระยะเวลาหลายปีที่ผ่านมา นักวิชาการได้ให้ความสนใจและทำวิจัยด้านการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพกันมากขึ้น ตามกระแสและการเติบโตของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพที่แพร่หลายไปทั่วโลก รวมทั้งประเทศไทย อย่างไรก็ตาม จากการวิเคราะห์วรรณกรรม พบว่างานวิจัยด้านการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพทั้งของประเทศไทยและระดับนานาชาติ ส่วนใหญ่มักเป็นงานวิจัยเชิงปริมาณที่เก็บข้อมูลจากนักท่องเที่ยวเป็นหลัก แต่ทว่างานวิจัยที่นำข้อมูลจากแหล่งข้อมูลทุติยภูมิมาวิเคราะห์เพื่อเป็นประโยชน์ต่อภาคธุรกิจยังไม่มีปรากฏ ทำให้เกิดช่องว่างองค์ความรู้ในด้านนี้ ดังนั้นงานวิจัยในครั้งนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์การวิจัยสำคัญ 2 ประการ คือ 1) เพื่อวิเคราะห์คำวิจารณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยวที่ใช้บริการธุรกิจสปาโดยจำแนกออกเป็นหัวข้อ (subjects) ประเด็น (themes) และโครงสร้างคำวิจารณ์ (constructs) และ 2) เพื่อวิเคราะห์และจัดหมวดหมู่คำวิจารณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยวในเชิงบวกและเชิงลบภายใต้แนวคิดเรื่องคุณภาพบริการ (service quality) อันจะนำไปสู่การพัฒนาคุณภาพการบริการของธุรกิจสปาให้ดีขึ้น

งานวิจัยในครั้งนี้ดำเนินการโดย 1) สำรวจธุรกิจสปาประเภท day spa ที่จดทะเบียนกับกระทรวงสาธารณสุข เพื่อเป็นหลักในการค้นหาคำวิจารณ์ 2) กำหนดหลักเกณฑ์ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล 3) ค้นหาคำวิจารณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยวที่ใช้บริการธุรกิจสปาจากแหล่งข้อมูลทุติยภูมิ และ 4) ใช้การวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา (content analysis) ควบคู่กับความถี่และร้อยละ เพื่อจำแนกคำวิจารณ์ออกเป็นเชิงบวกและเชิงลบ

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า คำวิจารณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยวเกี่ยวกับการให้บริการของธุรกิจสปาในเมืองท่องเที่ยวหลักของประเทศไทย สามารถแบ่งออกเป็น 13 หัวข้อหลัก (subjects) ได้แก่ 1) services of staff & spa therapists 2) staff hospitality 3) products & treatments 4) rest & relaxation experience 5) decoration & environment 6) rooms and facilities 7) recommendations 8) prices 9) language & communication 10) complimentary services 11) location & accessibility 12) booking & reservation and 13) marketing & management

หากวิเคราะห์ต่อไปเพื่อจำแนกคำวิจารณ์ออกเป็นเชิงบวกและเชิงลบ พบว่า คำวิจารณ์เชิงบวก สามารถจัดหมวดหมู่ได้ 10 ประเด็น (themes) โดยเรียงลำดับตามจำนวนความถี่จากมากไปหาน้อย ได้แก่ 1) friendliness of staff 2) good skills of spa therapists 3) relaxing atmosphere 4) cleanliness 5) beautiful of decoration & environment 6) recommendations 7) complimentary services 8) language & communication 9) good services and 10) product knowledge ส่วนคำวิจารณ์เชิงลบสามารถจัดหมวดหมู่ได้ 10 ประเด็นเช่นกัน โดยเรียงลำดับตามจำนวนความถี่จากมากไปหาน้อยได้แก่ 1) poor skills of spa therapists 2) poor services and operations 3) non-recommendations for using services 4) noise disturbance 5) weak English language 6) poor staff 7) poor facilities & atmosphere 8) high price 9) poor products and 10) uncleanliness

เมื่อนำคำวิจารณ์ทั้งเชิงบวกและเชิงลบมาจัดกลุ่ม โครงสร้างคำวิจารณ์ (constructs) เพื่อให้ประเด็นต่างๆข้างต้นมีความชัดเจนขึ้น สามารถแบ่งออกเป็น 3 องค์ประกอบ ที่มีโครงสร้างคล้ายๆกันทั้งคำวิจารณ์เชิงบวกและเชิงลบ ซึ่งได้แก่ 1) people 2) emotional & physical elements and 3) marketing issues สำหรับการวิเคราะห์คำวิจารณ์ภายใต้แนวคิดเรื่องคุณภาพบริการทั้ง 5 มิติ พบว่า คำวิจารณ์เชิงบวกสามารถจัดหมวดหมู่ภายใต้แนวคิดเรื่องคุณภาพการบริการ โดยเรียงลำดับตามความถี่จากมากไปหาน้อยได้แก่ 1) reliability 2) responsiveness 3) tangibility 4) assurance and 5) empathy ส่วนคำวิจารณ์เชิงลบสามารถจัดเป็นหมวดหมู่ในมิติของคุณภาพการบริการ โดยเรียงลำดับตามความถี่จากมากไปหาน้อยได้แก่ 1) reliability 2) assurance 3) responsiveness 4) empathy and 5) tangibility โดยข้อค้นพบที่น่าสนใจในครั้งนี่คือ มิติคุณภาพการบริการในเรื่อง reliability (ทักษะของพนักงาน) มีการกล่าวถึงมากที่สุดทั้งจากคำวิจารณ์เชิงบวกและเชิงลบ ซึ่งผลการวิจัยในประเด็นนี้สอดคล้องกับองค์ประกอบของโครงสร้างคำวิจารณ์อันดับแรก คือ ด้าน people

ผลการวิจัยในครั้งนี้ได้ขยายองค์ความรู้ในเรื่องธุรกิจสปาเพื่อการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพ อีกทั้งยังให้ข้อเสนอที่เป็นประโยชน์แก่ผู้ประกอบการธุรกิจสปาทั้งในด้านคำวิจารณ์เชิงบวกเพื่อรักษาจุดแข็งเอาไว้และเชิงลบเพื่อพัฒนาคุณภาพพนักงานและการบริการ ตลอดจนให้ข้อเสนอแนะในเรื่องของคุณภาพการบริการทั้ง 5 มิติ เพื่อพัฒนามาตรฐานคุณภาพการบริการของธุรกิจสปาไทย

คำสำคัญ: สปา การท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพ คำวิจารณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยว คุณภาพการบริการ และประเทศไทย

Abstract

During the past few years, scholars have interested and conducted more research in health tourism due to the global trend and the worldwide growth of this type of tourism, including Thailand. However, the literature indicated that most health tourism research was dominated by the quantitative approach such as questionnaire surveys. Yet, there is a lack of studies using the secondary data that benefits the business sector. This consequently contributes to the research gap, particularly the day spa business. This study, therefore, has 2 major research objectives. The first objective was to analyze and categorize tourist reviews regarding spa business services while the second one aimed to analyze and categorize these reviews in relation to the service quality dimensions.

This study was conducted through the following procedures 1) selecting day spas that are registered with the Ministry of Public Health 2) searching for tourist reviews based on registered day spas from the major secondary source such as Trip Advisor 3) employing content analysis to classify the reviews into positive and negative issues and 4) categorizing these reviews into service quality dimensions.

According to the findings, the study found 10 positive themes based on the frequency analysis which are: 1) friendliness of staff 2) good skills of spa therapists 3) relaxing atmosphere 4) cleanliness 5) beautiful of decoration & environment 6) recommendations 7) complimentary services 8) language & communication 9) good services and 10) product knowledge. Likewise, 10 negative themes based on the frequency analysis were also established: 1) poor skills of spa therapists 2) poor services and operations 3) non-recommendations for using services 4) noise disturbance 5) weak English language 6) poor staff 7) poor facilities & atmosphere 8) high price 9) poor products and 10) uncleanliness.

With regard to service quality dimensions, the study categorized positive reviews into 5 dimensions based on the frequency analysis: 1) reliability 2) tangibility 3) empathy 4) assurance and 5) responsiveness. Meanwhile, the negative reviews are also categorized into 1) reliability 2) empathy 3) assurance 4) responsiveness and 5) tangibility. Interestingly, reliability was found to be the top dimension from both positive and negative reviews.

The findings of this study, therefore, expand the limited literature related to spa business and also provide useful recommendations for Thai spa establishments regarding the positive and negative reviews as well as the service quality issues in order to improve staff performance and spa services.

Keywords: spa, health tourism, tourist reviews, service quality, Thailand

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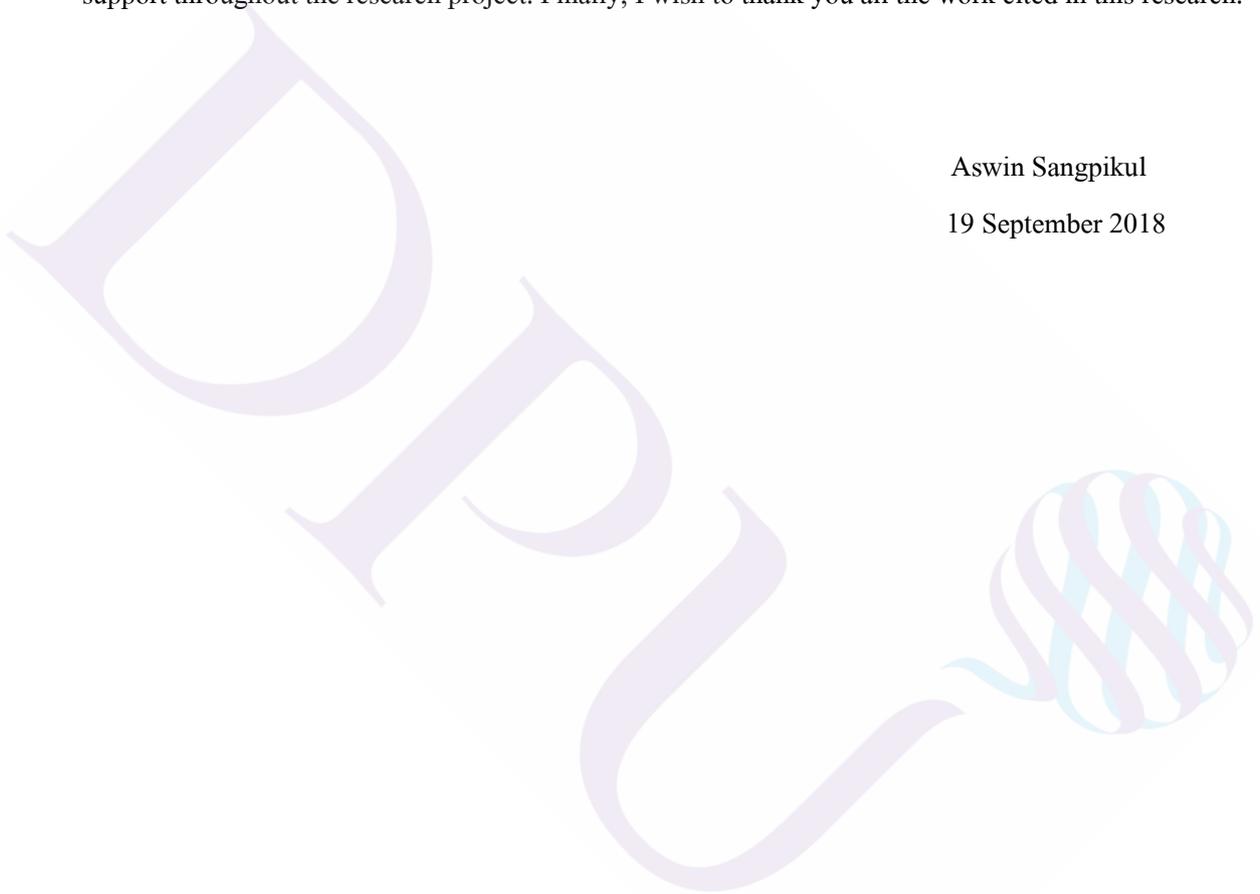


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Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the overview of research project including research background, objectives, contributions, scope of research and definitions of key terms used in this study.

1.1 Research Background

Health tourism is generally referred to the travel to places and facilities (e.g. day spas, bath houses, fitness centers, spa resorts, hospitals, and clinics) with the purposes to maintain ones' well-being and life satisfaction (Fernandes & Fernandes, 2013; Han, Kiatkawsin, Kim & Lee, 2017). Given the meaning of health tourism, this suggests that there are 2 subsectors (components) of health tourism (Quintela, Costa, & Correia, 2016) which are 1) **wellness tourism** (e.g. day spas, bath houses, fitness centers, spa resorts) and **medical tourism** (e.g. hospitals and clinics). These terms will be further clarified in a sector of definition of key terms. Today, health tourism becomes one of the important sectors of tourism industry, and its overall market has been growing faster than the tourism sector due to the increasing awareness of people's health and well-being. Since 2013 the health tourism market has grown by 10% - 15% compared to the growth of 7% by the overall tourism sector (McCarthy, 2017). People participate in health tourism with a variety of purposes, for example, medical cares, beauty concerns, relaxation, recovery and rehabilitation treatments (Fernandes & Fernandes, 2013). It is widely argued that health tourism is a lucrative market targeting the high-end or high purchasing customers because its products' prices (e.g. medical treatments, beauty cares, spa services) are relatively higher than other tourism products such as hotels and restaurants (Quintela et al., 2016). With this regard, health tourism becomes a potential sector that generates huge revenues and profits for many destinations including Thailand (Hashemi, Jusoh, Kiumarsi, & Mohammadi, 2015; Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017).

Inside wellness tourism, **spa business** has been gaining popularity in the past decade (Han, Kiatkawsin, Kim & Lee, 2017) due to the increasing demands of consumers to pursue a better quality of life and well-being (Quintela, Costa & Correia, 2016). Spa business is directly associated with wellness tourism in that tourists spend some of their free time (or leisure time) to receive the services enhancing their physical and mental well-being. Spa business offers specific water-based facilities which may include health, relaxation and beauty services (Hashemi et al., 2015). Spa

market in Thailand has been rapidly grown for decades due to the increasing health-conscious consumers among Thais and internationals (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017) as well as the fame for high quality services, welcoming hospitality and inexpensive cost of living (Ministry of Public Health, 2014). This phenomenon consequently makes Thailand being one of the largest spa destinations in the Asia Pacific region (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017). Today, wellness tourism is one of the target tourism products under Thailand 4.0 policy promoted by the government with the aims to accelerate Thailand's future economic growth and to earn higher incomes (Klaysung, 2016; Ministry of Public Health, 2014).

A growing market of health tourism worldwide (including spa market) has motivated international scholars to pursue a wide range of related research in this area. A review of literature indicates that there is an abundance of studies related to health tourism and wellness tourism (including spa business) both in Thai and international contexts (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Han et al., 2017; Hashemi, Jusoh, Kiumarsi, & Mohammadi, 2015; Tsai, Suh, & Fong, 2012). **However**, through the literature review, there are several **research gaps** (limited knowledge) in the context of customer reviews regarding spa services and service quality in general. **Firstly**, past research regarding online customer reviews seems to heavily concentrate on negative customer complaints about hotels and restaurants rather than examining both positive and negative customer feedback in other sectors of tourism related businesses (e.g. spa business). Examining the secondary data (or spa reviews) can help spa managers/owners to discover the fact about their services and to fix the service errors; making their service better (Dawson & Titz, 2012). Moreover, learning the positive comments also helps the spa business to develop these strengths and to boost their sales volume and gain good image.

Secondly, it is related to the service quality of spa business. A concept of service quality has been one of the essential topics for hospitality research for decades. Service quality is generally referred to an assessment or evaluation of how well a delivered service meets customer expectation. This topic is important to the hospitality service providers because it assists the business to get the in-depth information about customer expectation and perception of service performance. Understanding these issues and improving them can help the service providers to gain high level of customer satisfaction due to the improved service performance. Past research has examined service quality in tourism businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and spa business (Gonzalez & Brea, 2005;

Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014). **Unfortunately**, most of them were undertaken by the quantitative methods with primary data analysis (questionnaire surveys). Little effort was attempted to understand service quality based on the actual tourist experiences that were shared or posted in the secondary sources (called tourist reviews). This study, *in contrast*, will seek out another approach (perspective) by using the secondary data to deeply understand the service quality from customers' experiences and their perceptions of using spa services in Thailand. The actual customers' experiences towards spa services will be a necessary and effective tool to inform the service providers about their service performance; leading to better guest services and satisfaction (Dawson & Titz, 2012; Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015). Therefore, the current study will be an appropriate approach to deeply understand the service quality through customers' post purchase opinions and their experiences after using spa services in Thailand. These issues are still **undocumented** in the international literature, and worth further investigation to expand the body of knowledge in this field.

Given the above background, the current research aims to fulfill the research gaps by having the main objective to analyze tourist (customer) reviews of spa business services in Thailand's major tourism cities by using the secondary data sources. The benefits of the study will generate both academic and business contributions, for example, the in-depth understanding of spa review constructs, service quality dimensions in the context of spa reviews, and practical recommendations for spa service providers in Thailand.

1.2 Research Objectives

- 1.2.1 To analyze tourist reviews regarding spa business services in major tourism cities, and to categorize them into major subjects, themes and constructs
- 1.2.2 To analyze the positive and negative reviews in relation to the service quality dimensions (i.e. reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibility)
- 1.2.3 To interview tourists regarding spa services

1.3 Research Scope

Contents – This study will mainly analyze positive and negative tourist reviews regarding spa services, as well as categorize them into major subjects, themes, and constructs. In addition, the study will also analyze these reviews in relation to service quality dimensions.

Population – This study will explore spa tourist reviews (population) from registered day spas with the Ministry of Public Health through the secondary sources (i.e. travel review websites).

Areas of investigation – This study will analyze tourist reviews regarding spa service providers in major tourism cities in Thailand. For example, one or two major cities (based on Tourism Authority of Thailand) will be selected and represented from each region (Northern, Northeastern, Central, Eastern and the South).

1.4 Research Contributions

Academic contributions

Since there is a lack of related research on spa business services and tourists' reviews (customers' feedbacks/comments) in international context, the findings of this study regarding the positive and negative reviews of spa services will provide a contribution to academic literature in this limited area (expanding the existing literature). Moreover, the analysis of spa services reviews with the service quality dimensions will help academics to better understand the service quality dimensions in relation to the spa services as well as to expand the limited literature about the service quality in the context of wellness tourism in Thailand. This current research will also serve as a secondary data source for future research opportunities.

Managerial contributions

The study will provide useful and practical recommendations to spa service providers (e.g. spa managers, owners) in Thailand to maintain their strengths and improve (recover) their weaknesses/failure in spa services in order to enhance customer satisfaction and to be competitive in the market. The findings will assist spa service providers to learn about customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction or complaints about their services, and these may help them further improve their service performance. Importantly, the analysis of customer reviews (customer experience) will be a great source for spa providers to develop appropriate services to respond to customers' needs and wants; thereby increasing high level of customer satisfaction. With the improvement of service quality together with the strengths of spa business sector, these will enhance the competitiveness of

Thailand's wellness tourism in terms of stronger spa business sector and higher service standards. In addition, related parties may use the benefits of the current study to further develop their policies or strategies to promote wellness tourism in Thailand.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Several technical terms are used in this study. In order to better understand the context of this study, the definitions of technical terms are provided as follows:

Spa originally refers to health through water but nowadays spa is widely referred to water-based facilities that offer diverse types of treatments and cares for health, relaxation and beauty (Hashemi et al., 2015). In order to provide spa services, one needs to establish a spa business.

Spa business/spa establishment (or day spa) is an establishment who provides services related to health promotion. Their main services are Thai traditional massage and spa for health which may have additional services such as beauty treatments, sauna, exercises for health, nutrition and supplement dietary, yoga and meditation course (Ministry of Public Health, 2014).

Day spa is a business that provides facilities on a day-use basis by primarily offering rejuvenating and renewing spa treatments that foster the body and mind. Day spas usually offer a wide range of spa treatments in a clam and nurturing environment and in private treatment rooms for each client to receive a personal service (Day Spa Association, 2006). Day spas in this study may be an individual spa, spa chains or hotel spas. Day spas are a subsector of health tourism.

Health tourism is traveling both nationally and internationally to places and facilities, such as hospitals, clinics, day spas, bathing facilities, fitness centers and spa/wellness resorts with the purposes to maintain or enhance ones' well-being in mind and body through the experiences of health-promoting activities or services (Fernandes & Fernandes, 2013). Given this meaning, health tourism consists of 2 subsectors which are: 1) **health healing tourism** or **medical tourism** (e.g. specialized medical treatments such as hospitals or clinics) and 2) **health promotion tourism** or **wellness tourism** (e.g. physical and mental maintenance such as day spas, bathing facilities, fitness centers and spa/wellness resorts) (Smith & Puczko, 2009). One of the key successes for health tourism or day saps is the delivery or provision of higher service quality.

Service quality is a concept that describes an assessment or evaluation of how well a delivered service meets customer expectation. Service providers (e.g. hotels, spas) often assess the

service quality in order to improve their services and enhance customer satisfaction. In order to assess the service quality in spa business, one needs to use the SERVQUAL as the measurement.

Service quality dimensions (or SERVQUAL) refer to a model of service quality for measuring how well a delivered service meets customer expectation. They are a multi-dimensional research instruments designed to measure consumer expectations and perceptions of the service delivered to customers. The following 5 dimensions of SERVQUAL are believed to be able to measure service quality in serviced-based business: 1) reliability, 2) responsiveness, 3) assurance, 4) empathy and 5) tangibility. Each dimension will have a set of service quality items reflecting the quality of the service in that particular dimension.

Medical tourism (health healing tourism) is overseas traveling for the purposes of medical cares and treatments (Balaban & Marano, 2010). In a specific term, medical tourists travel overseas to cure or treat a certain illness or medical conditions. These travels may include or not include a holiday or the consumption of tourism services (Connell, 2006).

Wellness tourism (health promotion tourism) is traveling for the purposes of promoting health and well-being through physical, psychological, or mental activities (Dimon, 2013). Wellness travelers may seek for diverse services and activities such as physical fitness, beauty treatments, healthy diet, relaxation and stress relief, meditation, yoga, and other health-related services (Quintela, 2016).

Spa tourist reviews (spa reviews) refer to the feedback of customers (tourists) on electronic commerce or online website sites through various forms of opinions, comments, recommendations, appreciations, satisfactions, dissatisfactions, or even complaints about a particular a spa establishment they already used or experience (Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015; Sparks & Browning, 2010). Generally, customer will post one review through the website. In one review, it may compose of several opinions, points of view or issues regarding one's experience with spa services.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter aims to review related literature to provide general knowledge and overall concepts regarding the research topic as well as to establish a research framework. This chapter contains the following literature topics.

- 2.1 General information about spa business and its services
- 2.2 The importance of online reviews
- 2.3 Previous literature about spa industry
- 2.4 Concept of service quality
- 2.5 Previous studies about spa industry and service quality
- 2.6 Research framework

2.1 General information about spa business and its services

There are 5 sub-sections under this topic in order to provide the background of spa business and its services.

2.1.1 Spa definition

As noted, **spa** may be referred to water-based facilities that offer diverse types of treatments and cares for health, relaxation and beauty. Spa business or usually called “day spas” are the establishments who provide services related to health promotion. Day spas usually provide customers with calm and nurturing environment to receive a personal service (The Day Spa Association, 2006). Their main services are massages, facial treatments, and body treatments. People use the services of day spas to revitalize their physical and mental health. Day spas are a subsector of wellness tourism which is mainly concerned with physical and mental well-being.

2.1.2 Types of spa

According to International Spa Association (2012 cited in Quintela et al., 2016), there are **7 different types of spas**: day spa, club spa, medical spa, mineral spring spa, resort & hotel spa, cruise ship spa, and destination spa. Brief information of each spa is given as follows (Wisnom & Capozio, 2012, p.5-6):

Day spa is a business that offers a variety of professionally administered spa services to day-use clients. Day spa is open to the public and offer a la carte spa service to customers who can enjoy one or two individual treatments or a full day treatment.

Club spa is a business that offers a variety of professionally administered spa and fitness services to its membership. Club spa is emerged from fitness club looking to provide more comprehensive wellness offerings to their customers. To receive services in a club spa, you are generally required to be a member.

Medical spa is a business that offers a variety of professionally administered spa services, including medical and wellness care, to day-use clients, typically with on-site supervision by a licensed health care professional. It is generally located in a hospital. This spa offers a blend of conventional and alternative medicine therapies in a clinical setting. Medical spa can include skin injections, cosmetic dental services, and laser skin care.

Mineral spring spa is a business that offers an on-site source of natural mineral, thermal or seawater used in professionally administered hydrotherapy treatment. Some of these spas may offer only hydrotherapy treatment, whereas others may offer a wide range of spa services, lodgings, fitness, and other opportunities. It is the 'spring' that makes this spa different from other types of spas.

Resort & hotel spa is a business that operates as a division of and within a resort or hotel. It provides professionally administered spa, wellness, and occasionally, medical services primarily to guests of the establishment.

Cruise ship spa is a spa that operates on board a cruise ship and provides professionally administered spa and wellness services to passengers. These unique spas serve exclusively those on a cruise vacation.

Destination spa is an extended-stay resort with the primary purpose of providing guests with healthy lifestyle services. These spas have health, wellness, and 'spa-ing' as the focal point of the visit. Modern destination spas encourage stays of a week or longer, as well as provides a blending of health related activities such as spa treatment, wellness education, healthy cuisine and medical services.

In this study, **day spa** is the focus of this study because it is the spa establishments that are widely found in major tourism cities and many tourists may have the experience of using the services of day spas. Moreover, the rise of wellness tourism has been in strong in the spa industry (Global Spa Summit, 2010). According to Wisnom and Capozio (2012), a guest may experience the services of day spas in 3 primary phases. *Phase one* includes the guest entering the facility, being greeted, being checked in, and preparing for the experience. In *phase two*, the guest may enter into a self-guided experience or receiving a treatment. He or she may be again greeted by the service provider and is escorted to the treatment location, and experiences the treatment. *Phase three* is the guest preparing for departure, checking out and a fond farewell.

2.1.3 Spa personnel

According to Wisnom & Capozio (2012, p.95-99), generally there are 3 primary staffing areas: managers, service providers, and support staff. A description of responsibilities of each position is presented as follows:

1) **Spa manager** is a full-time employee who manages daily activities; communicate with employees and guests; develop and enforce all policies and procedures; and oversee all human resources functions of the spa. In addition, spa manager also markets and sells spa products; contacts with vendors; and serves the clients.

2) **Service providers** are persons who provide spa services or treatments directly to customers. Generally, there are 4 groups of spa service providers:

Licensed spa technicians (involving with cosmetology) focus on skin, hair, and nails. Their work may involve with makeup, hair design, electrolysis, laser technicians, body wrapper, and others.

Licensed spa therapists (involving with health/wellness) focus on the mind, body, and spirit. They are responsible for all massages and treatment related activities.

Medical personnel (involving with medical degree) focus on medical treatments and related services. They may be physicians, dermatologists, dentists, nurses, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Generally, medical personnel work in medical spa or destination spa.

Specialty/fitness personnel are commonly personal trainers, fitness instructors, nutrition consultants, aquatic mangers, and sport/recreation staff.

3) **Support staff** are those who provide support tasks to run a spa business effectively. Some of these positions may have direct contact with guests, whereas others do not. Support staff may are, for example, receptionists, front desk agents, housekeepers, room attendants, laundry, and food staff.

2.1.4 Treatment room

Spa treatment rooms are generally divided into 2 categories: dry rooms and wet rooms (D'Angelo, 2010, p.105). Dry rooms are those that do not contain water services or hydrotherapy equipment, with the exception of a sink basin. These rooms are primarily used to perform facial and massage services as well as waxing and microdermabrasion. Wet rooms are used for hydrotherapy or water-based treatment. The wet rooms may provide hydrotherapy tubs, whirlpools, Jacuzzis, relaxation pools, and showers.

2.1.5 Spa products and services

According to the literature (Miller, 1999; Wisnom & Capozio, 2012), spa products and services may be categorized into various types such as:

Hair services	styling, cutting, coloring, scalp treatment
Nail services	regular manicures, regular pedicure, oil massage for hands/feet, food spa
Facial treatments	deep cleansing, exfoliation, masks, facial massage, facial nutrition, aromatherapy, layer, waxing, makeup
Body treatments	hydrotherapy, exfoliation, masks, body massage, body tanning, wraps, foot spa/massage, sauna, thermal treatment
Mind therapy	meditation, yoga, and relaxation classes
Fitness services	personal training, general fitness and weight exercises
Educational programs	nutrition counseling and stress management

2.1.6 Spa business standards

Ministry of Public Health (2014) has set up the spa business standards, and identified them into 5 element standards as follows:

- 1) Service quality: This element will examine if the spa business provides customers with good services and quality as well as enhance customer satisfactions.
- 2) Spa staff: This element will examine if the spa personnel has appropriate qualification to provide standard services and customer satisfactions.
- 3) Tool & equipment: This element will examine if the spa business provides tool & equipment in good quality and safety for customers.
- 4) Organization & management: This element will examine if the spa business has effective working procedures and further service development.
- 5) Environment: This element will examine if the spa business provides customers with good environment and customer well-being.

In summary, the above literature gives some insight about spa business and its services. In particular, a day spa is a focus of this study. Customers or tourists who had used the services of day spas in Thailand may wish to make a review by telling, sharing or reflecting their experiences or perceptions about the spa services through a travel related website. Their reviews about spa experiences may be various issues such as customer reception, service staff, spa products, spa treatment, and tangible environment. **Therefore**, these reviews are

the focus of this study because spa tourists may wish to share their experiences of using spa services to the public through travel related websites. This will highlight the importance of the **online reviews**.

2.2 The importance of online reviews

The widespread application of the Internet has led to a phenomenon known as eWOM or electronic word of mouth (Dawson & Titz, 2012, 67). According to Stauss (2000), eWOM may be defined as any positive or negative statement made by actual or former customers regarding a product or service, which is made available to a multitude of people via the Internet. The eWOM can take place in many ways such as customer reviews, web-based opinion platforms, discussion forums, news groups, blogs and other social media channels (Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). An issue of concern for the tourism businesses is that the online reviews can be made anonymously and easily by anyone (Dawson & Titz, 2012). Thus, the online reviews can be made and spread the word-of-mouth without fear of identification (Black & Kelley, 2009). Generally, online reviews can be mixed with positive and negative messages about a specific service or product (Xie, Miao, Kuo, and Lee, 2011). In spite of negative comments by customers, the online reviews can be valuable tools for service providers (e.g. spa business) to improve their services and correct service failure as well as to enhance company performance internally (Wagner, 2008 cited in Dawson & Titz, 2012). In addition, tourism businesses can use positive reviews as a marketing tool to increase sales and boost company reputation (Dawson & Titz, 2012). *As there is a source of online reviews about spa business, it would be a great value to make the existing reviews more useful for the business sector through this research project. Next, it is important to review the literature about spa industry.*

2.3 Previous literature about spa industry

A review of literature indicates that previous literature about spa industry may be classified into 2 groups: 1) empirical studies and 2) conceptual papers.

2.3.1 Empirical studies about spa industry

Regarding the **empirical studies**, most scholars used questionnaire surveys to deeply investigated common spa topics such as customer motivation, satisfaction, and perception. For example, **Mak, Wong, & Chang (2009)** examined the factors motivating travelers to search for spa experiences in China. The study revealed the 4 important factors pushing travelers to go for saps which are: relaxation/relief, escape, self-reward, health/beauty. The study also disclosed that tourists with different backgrounds had different perceptions of spa experiences. For example, European tourists perceived spa mainly for curative or therapeutic purposes while Americans perceived spa experience as a means of self-reward, and Chinese

tourists used spa for the purposes of relaxation and escape motivations. **Tsai, Suh, & Fong (2012)** explored behaviors of male spa customers in Hong Kong and found that most respondents patronized a hotel spa due to relaxation purpose by mainly using body massage. The study revealed that Hong Kong hotel spas had performed up to customer expectation, except for the price of spa services, staff communication skills and knowledge, and security measures. Among the five services of spa hotels in Hong Kong, (environment, reliability, service experience, value and augmented service), the environment dimension was the important factor that significantly influenced respondents' satisfaction with hotel spa services. An interesting study by **Choi, Kim, Lee, and Hickerson (2015)** examined the role of two dimensions of perceived value (functional and wellness values) in spa customers' future behavior in South Korea. Functional value was associated with customers' perception on the monetary benefits of spa products/treatment whereas wellness value was related to customers' perception on the health benefits of spa products/treatment. The study revealed that both functional and wellness values had the influences on customer satisfaction and behavioral intention. In particular, wellness value was a more powerful predictor than functional value on customer satisfaction, and it also had a stronger total effect on behavioral intention than functional value. A recent study by **Rivero, Rangel, & Caldito (2016)** segmented spa tourists' motivations in Spain by using a discriminant analysis. The study revealed three groups of spa tourists: un-motivated, multi-motivated, and half-motivated groups. Among the three groups, multi-motivated tourists (aged between 30s – 50s) represented less than one-fourths of the total samples but they showed higher motivation to spa tourism than other groups. They went to spa places to improve their physical condition, their health and to relax in a spa resort.

2.3.2 Conceptual papers about spa industry

For the **conceptual papers**, scholars recently reviewed the concepts of health tourism and wellness tourism literature (not directly focus on spa tourism) in order to better understand the concepts of these key terms. For instance, Quintela et al. (2016) reviewed the concepts of *health*, *wellness*, and *medical tourism* and classified them for future literature or research discussions. Health tourism is traveling both nationally and internationally to places and facilities, such as hospitals, clinics, day spas, bathing facilities, fitness centers and spa/wellness resorts with the purposes to maintain or enhance ones' well-being in mind and body through the experiences of health-promoting activities or services (Fernandes & Fernandes, 2013). With this regard, Quintela et al. (2016) addressed that there are two important issues under health tourism: wellness tourism and medical tourism. Wellness tourism (or recreational point of view) focuses on relaxation, leisure, escape from the routine environment whereas medical tourism (or therapeutic point of view) is associated with surgery and/or therapeutic treatments for cure and for preventing diseases. The authors concluded that wellness and

medical tourism are integrated within the overall context of health tourism which is associated with preventive and curative health approaches.

Likewise, Stara & Peterson (2017) reviewed the wellness literature (including spa topics) in order to identify the theoretical conceptualizations of wellness and current wellness tourism practices, as well as the future market opportunities. The authors reviewed the related wellness articles and thematically categorized them based upon how the articles conceptualized wellness. The reviews disclosed five main conceptualization of wellness: 1) wellness as a state of well-being 2) wellness as a process of personal or self-improvement 3) wellness as an approach to professional care 4) wellness as a matter of community 5) wellness as a global topic. The authors addressed that understanding the meaning of wellness helps management of wellness businesses to position themselves on the wellness market by choosing to which demands they will respond with which services and products. This understanding also allows for further use in promoting activities and marketing spa products

To conclude, given the examples of the literature review, although there is related literature about wellness and health tourism in terms of empirical studies and conceptual papers, the international literature still lacks of the analysis or discussion of secondary data that are available in terms of tourist reviews. These reviews were from customers who shared, reflected or commented about their experiences or perceptions about the spa services they used. **Unfortunately**, international scholars *overlook* the benefits of these existing secondary data to the spa service sector. In order to run a successful spa business, one needs to learn about the “*service quality*”.

2.4 Concept of service quality

Spa business mainly sells an “**experience**” in terms of beauty cares, massage services, and health-related treatments (Wuttke & Cohen, 2008 cited in Lo et al., 2015). The spa experience does not only rely on physical service but it also includes mental well-being as well as relaxing and resting emotions (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008 cited in Lo et al., 2015). In particular, spa business is a service-oriented business. Most of spa products are services (e.g. treatments and beauty cares) which are highly related to staff’s service performance. Due to these distinct features, service quality becomes a necessary task for spa service providers to understand what customers want and expect from them.

One approach to get deeper insight of the spa services and their performance is through managing “**service quality**”. Service quality is, therefore, an important issue in the tourism businesses including spa services to understand how well a delivered service meets customer expectation. Understanding these issues may help the businesses to improve customer services, enhance customer satisfaction, and better business

performance (Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015; Sureshchander, Rajendran, & Anatharaman, 2002). In order to measure service quality, the **SERVQUAL** instrument (or service quality dimensions) is necessary. SERVQUAL is a multi-dimensional research instrument designed to measure consumer expectations and perceptions of the service within the 5 dimensions: 1) reliability, 2) responsiveness, 3) assurance, 4) empathy and 5) tangibility (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Each dimension will have a set of service quality items reflecting the quality of the service in that particular dimension. Table 1 presents an example of the SERVQUAL instrument that will be measured customer expectation regarding the spa service providers. In this study, **tourist reviews** about spa services would be content analyzed in relation to the SERVQUAL dimensions.

Table 1: Operationalization of SERVQUAL dimensions into spa services

SERVQUAL dimensions	SERVQUAL measurement in spa services
1. Reliability: ability to perform service accurately and to provide the service as promised.	Ex: Spa therapist completes a treatment within agreed time. Spa therapist performs her task professionally.
2. Responsiveness: willingness to assist customers and provide prompt service	Ex: Spa staff offers prompt service when customer arrives. Spa staff are friendly and helpful.
3. Assurance: ability to inspire trust and confidence/credibility	Ex: Spa staff provides privacy for customers during service. Spa therapist uses a quality product.
4. Empathy: caring service or individual attention	Ex: Spa therapist understands the specific needs of customers for spa treatment. Spa therapist asks customer about preferred massage.
5. Tangibility: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials.	Ex: Spa rooms are beautifully decorated. Spa equipments are new and modern.

2.5 Previous studies about spa industry and service quality

Given one of the current study objectives is to examine tourist reviews in relation to spa service quality, it is necessary to review previous literature about spa industry and service quality because service quality is an important tool for spa establishments to provide customers with the good experience and services. **Reviewing this topic** will help us to gain a better understanding about service quality in spa industry.

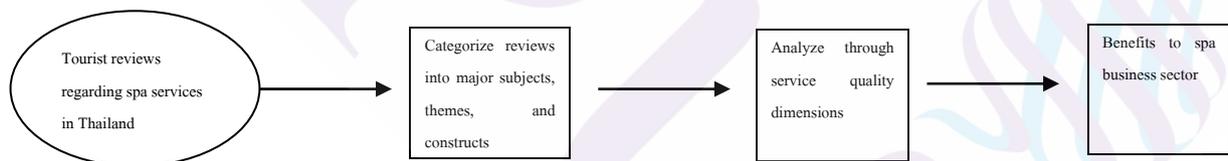
For example, **Gonzalez & Brea (2005)** investigated the relationship among service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intention in Spanish health spas. The study revealed that both service quality and customer satisfaction had positive and significant influence on behavioral intention. In particular, customer satisfaction was also a mediating variable between service quality and behavioral intention. In spa services, the authors pointed out that service quality had a greater direct impact on customers' behavioral intention than the indirect path through customer satisfaction (mediator). Examining customer expectation and perception of service quality for spa establishments in eastern region of Thailand, **Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch (2014)** revealed that the level of actual service (perception) was higher than what customers expected (producing positive gaps). The study indicated that all of the gap between customer expectation and perception were positive; suggesting satisfactory performance. Among the five dimensions of service quality, the tangible dimension showed the least positive gap. Regarding the perceived value dimensions, the study revealed that affective value was rated with the highest mean score, followed by in-use value and redemption value. A recent study by **Lo, Wu, & Tsai (2015)** examined the important attributes and dimensions of service quality in China's hotel spas. The study revealed the three most important attributes of service quality in hotel spas, which were professional employees, spa hygiene, and relaxing atmosphere. Grouping the similar attributes of service quality in China's hotel spas, the study identified the five dimensions: tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These five dimensions were similar to the original SERVQUAL dimensions identified in a study of Parasuraman et al. (1988). Among the five dimensions, only the four dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy) were found to be statistically significant in influencing customers' positive emotions.

In conclusion, given the limited literature about spa industry and service quality, scholars have undertaken the empirical studies to deeply understand the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intention. These previous studies indicated that service quality of spa establishments had the direct influence on customer loyalty, word-of-mouth, and recommendations. In addition, the service quality dimensions were indicated as a key factor associated with customer satisfaction and positive emotions. In spite of the quantitative studies, **there is a lack of qualitative effort** to examine

another dimension of service quality in the spa industry. A study of tourist reviews (from travel related websites) regarding their experiences of spa services may be another dimension to understand the spa service quality. This qualitative approach will yield tourists' actual feedback toward the spa services, and helps to expand the *limited literature* about spa service quality through the secondary data sources.

2.6 Research framework

Since this study is a documentary research (tourist reviews), a research framework will not be presented in terms of independent and dependent variables. Instead, it will be a framework explaining a flowchart showing how this study is conducted. **Firstly**, there is an existence of tourist reviews regarding spa services in Thailand in a secondary source (website). However, scholars have not yet made use of these available data to generate the benefits for spa business sector. **Secondly**, through this study (analyzing spa tourist reviews), the data would be analyzed and categorized into 1) major subjects 2) positive and negative themes and 3) positive and negative constructs. **Thirdly**, the positive and negative reviews would be later analyzed in relation to service quality dimensions (i.e. reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibility) to deliver more useful results that can assist the spa business sector. **Finally**, the analyzed data (findings) would be useful for the spa business sector to gain a deeper understanding of what customers expect and desire, and helps them develop or improve their services.



Chapter 3

Research Methodologies

This chapter aims to describe research methodologies employed in this study which are population, samples, sampling method, research instrument, data collection, and data analysis.

3.1 Population and sampling

Customer (tourist) reviews regarding spa services in Thailand were the focus and the population of this study. These reviews come from customers (tourists) who had used or experienced with spa services. After the services, they may wish to make a review by telling, sharing or reflecting their experiences or perceptions about the spa services in a travel related website. Before analyzing the reviews, spa business (spa establishments) that customers had used were needed to be identified. In this study, spa businesses have to be registered with the Ministry of Public Health. These registered spas are the ones that have met certain standards required by the Ministry of Public Health, and they should be promoted for wellness tourism in Thailand. As noted, this study analyzed tourist reviews regarding spa service providers in major tourism cities in Thailand. When appropriate, one or two major cities based on the Tourism Authority of Thailand were identified and represented from each region: north, northeast central, east and south.

In addition to the secondary data (tourist reviews), an interview method was also employed to support the secondary findings. This method aimed to interview tourists (customers) who had used spa services in Bangkok. Since the numbers of tourists using day spas is unknown, a non-probability sampling method by a convenient sampling was employed at various spa establishments in Bangkok.

3.2 Data collection

Customer reviews were collected through the secondary sources (e.g. Trip Advisor or other related review websites if available) during March – April 2018. Trip Advisor, a famous travel review website (based in USA), is regarded as the important and useful travel review website because it provides the reviews of travel-related products around the world. International journals accept a publication from the analysis of secondary data like Trip Advisor, and previous research also used this website to analyze customer reviews in hotel and restaurant studies (see Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015; Sparks & Browning, 2010; Au, Buhalis & Law, 2014). However, the data from secondary sources may have some limitations when compared to a questionnaire survey method in terms of complete information, the criteria for data collection (selecting samples) in this study were set as follows:

1. Name of the registered day spas should be found in the travel review websites.

Only those found in these websites will be taken for data collection.

2. Day spas with 5 or more foreign customer reviews will be collected to provide reliable data.

3. The reviews in travel review websites will be collected for a maximum of 1-year period based on past studies' conduct due to sufficient information.

Regarding the interview method, since this approach was a **minor method** to support the main findings from the secondary sources, an approximation of 100 samples (foreign customers) was deemed to be appropriate. In order to select 100 interviewees, a simple random approach (drawing) was used to randomly select 10 spa establishments in Bangkok. Later, the interviews were made for approximately 10 interviewees per one spa through a convenient method; giving a total of 100 samples. Researcher and well-trained graduate students helped to collect the data at spa establishments by business permission as well as during data analysis.

3.3 Data analysis

Content analysis was used for this study (based on guidance from past studies) because it is a systematic replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on rules of coding (Krippendorf, 1980), and flexibility to analyze qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006 cited in Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015). After gathering the data, the reviews (consisting of several comments/sentences) were **firstly** analyzed and identified into an individual comment. It should be noted that, generally, one tourist will write one review about his/her spa experience. Inside one review, it may contain several comments (issues or subjects). This particular comment would be counted for one frequency as presented in chapter 4, and would be later grouped into major *subjects*.

Secondly, each individual comment was further analyzed and classified them into the positive and negative issues. **Thirdly**, these positive and negative issues were categorized into different *themes* relating to spa services. **Fourthly**, several themes were grouped to establish a *construct*. **Fifthly**, all tourist reviews were analyzed again in relation to the service quality dimensions based on the 5 SERVQUAL dimensions: Tangibility, Responsiveness, Reliability, Assurance, and Empathy. **Finally**, the information from the interview method was content analyzed and used to support the findings from tourist reviews. In addition to content analysis, descriptive statistics were used to describe the data in terms of frequency and percentage. Also, academics and students were employed to help for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4

Research Findings and Discussions

The purpose of this chapter is to present research findings and discussions. There are 5 sections as follows.

- Section 4.1:** General information of day spas and spa reviews
- Section 4.2:** Categorizing of spa reviews into dimensions and constructs
- Section 4.3:** An analysis of spa reviews and service quality dimensions
- Section 4.4:** Interview findings
- Section 4.5:** Research discussions

Section 4.1: General information of day spas and spa reviews

Table 4.1: Number of registered day spas and spa reviews in major tourism cities

Region	Number of registered day spas	Number of spas meeting the study's criteria	Number of spa reviews
North: Chiang Mai	4	4	25
Northeast: Nakhon Ratchasima	7	7	40
Central: Bangkok	128	84	488
East: Pattaya	18	13	74
South: Phuket	26	22	96
Total	183	130	723

Table 4.1 presents the number of registered day spas in major tourism cities based on each region. According to the Department of Health Service Support (2017), Bangkok (central region) has the highest number of registered day spas with 128 day spas, followed by Phuket (south) with 26 day spas, Pattaya (eastern) with 18 spas, Nakhon Ratchasima (northeast) with 7 day spas, and Chiang Mai (north) with 4 day spas. Given the 5 major tourism cities in Thailand, there is a total of 183 registered day spas. However, only 130 (71%) day spas met the study's criteria (see chapter 3). Based on 130 day spas, there was a total of 723 spa reviews (tourist reviews) which were later taken into data analysis. **It should be noted that**, besides the 5 major tourism cities above, other cities have small number of registered day spas, therefore they were not included in the study. This study, therefore, selected only one city from each region instead (1 city 1 region).

Table 4.2: General information of spa reviews

Characteristics	Descriptions	Frequency (n=723)	Percent (100%)
Gender	Male	354	49.0%
	Female	311	43.0%
	Not indicated	58	8.0%
Age	20 - 30 years	79	11.0%
	31 - 45 years	261	36.0%
	46 - 60 years	231	32.0%
	61 or older	108	15.0%
	Not indicated	44	6.0%
Region	Asia	333	46.0%
	Europe	245	34.0%
	Australia/New Zealand	58	8.0%
	Americas	36	5.0%
	Not indicated	51	7.0%

Table 4.2 provides the general information of spa reviews (number of reviewers). An analysis of demographic details indicated that among 723 reviews, 49% were males and 43% were females. Most tourists who made reviews were in the age between 31 - 45 years old (36%) and 46 - 60 years old (32.0%). They mainly were Asians (46%) and Europeans (34%) while the rests came from Australia/New Zealand (8%) and the Americas (5%).

Section 4.2: Categorizing spa reviews into major subjects, themes, and constructs

In this section, there are 5 Tables categorizing spa reviews into major subjects, themes, and constructs. Table 4.3 presents spa reviews categorized by major subjects. Tables 4.4 - 4.7 categorize spa reviews into positive & negative themes and main constructs.

Table 4.3: Spa reviews categorized by major subjects

Subjects	Frequency
1. Services of staff & spa therapists	660
2. Staff hospitality	524
3. Products & treatments	501
4. Rest & relaxation experience	428
5. Decoration & environment	355
6. Spa facilities	329
7. Recommendations & non-recommendations	314
8. Prices	213
9. Language & communication	197
10. Complimentary services	136
11. Location & accessibility	119
12. Booking & reservation	67
13. Marketing & management	59
14. Others (e.g. payment, tips)	21
Total	3,923

According to Table 4.3, an analysis of 723 spa reviews (scripts) produced 3,923 comments (incidents) regarding spa services. Following Memarzadeh & Chang (2015) using a frequency analysis, this frequency analysis was conducted to rank these 3,923 comments in terms of how frequently they were cited. These comments were later categorized into 13 major subjects. Based on the frequency order, they are 1) services of staff & spa therapists, 2) staff hospitality, 3) products & treatments, 4) rest & relaxation experience, 5) decoration & environment, 6) rooms and facilities, 7) recommendations, 8) prices, 9) language & communication, 10) complimentary services, 11) location & accessibility, 12) booking & reservation, 13) marketing & management. In addition to the major subjects, other minor issues may be, for example, payment and tips.

Based on the 13 major subjects of spa services as shown in Table 4.3, they were further analyzed based on positive and negative reviews and later categorized into different themes (Table 4.4) and main constructs (Table 4.5).

Table 4.4: Analyzing and categorizing positive spa reviews into different themes

Themes	Frequency	Examples of statements
1. Good skills of spa therapists	418 (17.7%)	<p>“The massage skills of the therapists I had were awesome”</p> <p>“Masseur will reconfirm on the area that you would like to concentrate before proceed with the massage which I personally think is really good and I had never experience before”</p> <p>“The therapist was very skilled and made the whole experience relaxing”</p> <p>“The staff are extremely professional and the massagers and treatments are done with the utmost care”</p> <p>“The pressure used was right and they asked the right questions and ensured the pressure they were using was right for you”</p> <p>“They are skillful massage therapists and have high standards”</p> <p>“We chose 5 different massages, all were excellent”</p>
2. Friendliness of staff	402 (17.1%)	<p>“Receptionist staff were excellent and very accommodating”</p> <p>“Reception was courteous”</p> <p>“Good serviced mind of staff”</p> <p>“Great welcoming and amazing consumer service”</p> <p>“The staff are super friendly”</p> <p>“The staff are friendly and made us feel so relaxed”</p> <p>“Massage therapists were all very friendly & good”</p> <p>“Kind, polite, professional staff”</p>
3. Relaxing experiences	338 (14.3%)	<p>“Quiet and relax environment”</p> <p>“Massage is so relaxing for me”</p> <p>“Soft music played and it smelled of lemongrass and peppermint”</p> <p>“There is a calming smell of lemongrass-lavender essential oil being diffused into the air”</p> <p>“A real sense relaxing atmosphere”</p> <p>“I feel really relaxing and comfortable”</p> <p>“Atmosphere was calming and pleasant”</p>
4. Cleanliness	306 (12.9%)	<p>“Beautiful and clean surrounding”</p> <p>“The spa is spotlessly clean”</p> <p>“The facility is extremely clean</p> <p>“Clean and awesome place”</p> <p>“The place was nice and clean”</p> <p>“The place was very clean (sheets, bathroom, everything)”</p>
5. Beautiful decoration & environment	302 (12.7%)	<p>“The grounds and facilities are really beautiful and peaceful”</p> <p>“The spa has a nice tranquil environment and is well decorated.</p> <p>“The place is nicely decorated”</p> <p>“Beautiful and peaceful surrounding”</p> <p>“Very neat and wonderful atmosphere”</p>

6. Recommendations, repeat visit	180 (7.6%)	<p>“I really recommend everyone to visit this place and you will never regret it”</p> <p>“Highly recommended as the place is super clean and new”</p> <p>“I would highly recommend this spa and will definitely be going back”</p> <p>“I really recommend everyone to visit this spa and you will never regret it”</p> <p>“I would recommended my friend and I surely would visit again”</p> <p>“I highly recommend their full body oil massage and feet massage”</p> <p>“I would recommend this spa if you want relax and feel peaceful”</p> <p>“I will go there again for sure and will recommend to all our friends”</p>
7. Complimentary services e.g. free refreshments, tea, snacks, desserts, and transportation	129 (5.4%)	<p>“Their complimentary mango sticky rice and tea offers to you at the end”</p> <p>“They provided a welcome drink for us”</p> <p>“You'll get a welcome-drink/tea as you arrive”</p> <p>“Enjoyed a cup of tea before the massage”</p> <p>“We were pickup from our accommodation and returned”</p> <p>“Free pick up service was available for some packages. It was great to have some door to door transport”</p> <p>“The driver picks you up from your hotel and is very on time, perfect”</p> <p>“They can arrange pick up service from my hotel before and after spa treatment”</p> <p>“Pick-up and drop-off at your hotel is also complimentary within the city”</p>
8. English language	109 (4.6%)	<p>“We were greeted warmly by a receptionist who had great English”</p> <p>“Staff speak good English and are attentive and cheerful”</p> <p>“Telephone booking staff is good at English”</p> <p>“Therapists here can speak and understand English well. I have no problem with the massage and foot spa”</p> <p>“English of receptionist is excellent and very good understanding”</p> <p>“The therapist can understand good English and did a great job for the massage”</p> <p>“The lady in-charge can speak fluent English and explain the spa packages clearly”</p>
9. Good services & operations	75 (3.2%)	<p>“We did not have to wait long before we were asked to go to the room”</p> <p>“I was invited to sit and enjoy welcoming drink whilst my hostess ran through the procedures”</p> <p>“We were greeted warmly by a receptionist who had great English, found our booking and directed us to go change our outdoor footwear for flip-flops and we were given a numbered electronic locker key”</p> <p>“We were greeted warmly and underwent the usual preliminaries of tea and foot wash and we were asked what type massage we wanted”</p> <p>“A big thanks to lady receptionist who helped to arrange my spa booking and transport to / from the spa”</p> <p>“I was greeted with a friendly smile and proceeded to enjoy an excellent Thai massage”</p>
10. Product knowledge	64 (2.7%)	<p>“We were warmly welcomed and suggested various spa menus”</p> <p>“Receptionist was very knowledgeable and explained the various spa/massage</p>

		packages” “Front staff tell me and explain about the different treatments which is very good”
11. Other subjects (e.g. compensation, marketing, good products)	41 (1.8%)	“An apologetic gift was offered since we had waited for more than 20 minutes for our treatments” “We got free points for using next time” “There is a promotion for using 2 treatments together” “Good quality oils and herbal compress”
Total	2,364 (100%)	

According to Table 4.4, the first theme of **positive spa reviews** that were most cited is “good skills of spa therapists” (17.7%) while the second theme is “friendliness of staff” (17.1%) and the third theme is “relaxing atmosphere” (14.3%). The fourth dimension is “cleanliness” (12.9%), followed by the fifth theme “beautiful of decoration & environment” (12.7%), and the sixth theme “recommendations” (7.6%). The seventh theme is “complimentary services” (5.4%), while the eight theme is “language & communication” (4.6%), followed by the ninth theme “good services” (3.2%), and the tenth theme “product knowledge” (2.7%).

Table 4.5: Main constructs of positive spa reviews

Main constructs & themes	Frequency (2,364)
1. People & services (42.6%)	
1.1 Good skills of spa therapists (17.7%)	418
1.2 Friendliness of staff (17.1%)	402
1.3 Good English language (4.6%)	109
1.4 Good services (3.2%)	75
2. Emotional & physical elements (39.9%)	
2.1 Relaxing experiences (14.3%)	338
2.2 Cleanliness (12.9%)	306
2.3 Beautiful decoration and environment (12.7%)	302
3. Marketing related issues (17.5%)	
3.1 Recommendations (7.6%)	180
3.2 Complimentary services (5.4%)	129
3.3 Product knowledge (2.7%)	64
3.4 Others (1.8%)	41

Table 4.5 presents 3 main constructs of positive spa reviews: 1) people & services (42.6%) 2) emotional & physical elements (39.9%) and 3) marketing related issues (17.5%). These 3 main constructs were emerged by grouping similar themes into main construct. Among the 3 constructs, people & services is the largest construct. Under the first construct (people & services), there are 4 themes while the second construct (physical elements) has 3 themes. There are also 4 themes under the third construct of marketing.

Table 4.6: Analyzing and categorizing negative spa reviews into different themes

Themes	Frequency	Examples of statements
1. Poor skills of spa therapists	258 (22.7%)	<p>“The massage quality is not properly trained”</p> <p>“The therapists are not up to standard, the service is bad”</p> <p>“They couldn’t follow my instructions and did not respond to my requests”</p> <p>“They overused the massage oil which were not well absorbed by our skin”</p> <p>“During the massage we asked for it to be stronger but didn’t seem to help”</p> <p>“Their foot therapy is terrible. They pressed very hard on my foot and not worth for money”</p> <p>“My boyfriend feels painful at times during the massage but they could not understand and ignored him”</p> <p>“The standard of message was really below average, especially when you pay high price with unprofessional service”</p> <p>“The main downside is that the ladies doing the massages were both talking to each other for the whole hour, they didn’t ask how hard we wanted the massage, if we were allergic to anything and she used the wrong oil on me at first”</p>
2. Poor behavior or etiquette of spa therapists	224 (19.7%)	<p>“Etiquette of the therapists were not good”</p> <p>“I got a different masseur and she was extremely rude, not smile, and rush to finish her work. I did not enjoy my massage this time”</p> <p>“The therapist was rude from beginning to end, no smile at all, no attention to details, the massage was rough and without passion”</p> <p>“Therapist is horrible. The lady rushed through the process and you can feel everything is done extremely quick”</p> <p>“My therapist didn’t help me to get up and out of the massage table until I asked”</p> <p>“Therapists talked to each other often which was very annoying”</p> <p>“I just had enough of the rude uncaring receptionists which gave away my appointment because I was a little late - though I was coming every week almost same time”</p> <p>“The massage staff always go away during massage, and talk during massage. Make me feel not really relax”</p> <p>“I had requested for a shower after the whole services but was denied by the massager”</p> <p>“What disappointed me the most is the receptionist who did not smile at all and failed to explain to us properly what is the difference between those massages were”</p>
3. Non-recommendations for using spa services	134 (11.8%)	<p>“Would not suggest this place at all unless you don’t have a choice”</p> <p>“I will not come back for sure”</p> <p>“I would not recommend this pricy spa”</p> <p>“Can't recommend this place and will not be returning”</p> <p>“Would not recommend to try this spa”</p>

4. Noise disturbance	109 (9.6%)	<p>“Only thing to be aware of is that the massage rooms are separated by only curtains so you can hear noise from the reception area which bother us”</p> <p>“The two ladies kept talking with each other for the whole time, making it a bit hard to relax completely”</p> <p>“Another bad thing is the masseurs talk a lot among themselves while giving massage which is very irritating at times”</p> <p>“The masseur is very noisy, always talking to her co-worker on the other room, so it’s very irritating”</p>
5. Weak English language	88 (7.7%)	<p>“The staff at this spa didn’t understand English”</p> <p>“Receptionists don’t appear to speak much English”</p> <p>“The two therapists we encountered hardly know English so we gave up to explain to them”</p> <p>“The masseurs did not understand my requests because they are poor English”</p>
6. Poor staff/receptionists	76 (6.7%)	<p>“The lady at the front desk was condescending and rude”</p> <p>“The attitude of the receptionist put me off this place for life”</p> <p>“The lady at the reception was a little rude and unwelcoming and mostly interested in getting the money and that’s it”</p> <p>“Receptionists here lack of smiling face”</p>
7. Poor facilities and atmosphere	68 (5.9%)	<p>“The atmosphere of the spa is cold”</p> <p>“Room too cold and the music too loud”</p> <p>“Bath and shower did not work very well”</p> <p>“The treatment room, ceiling and walls were full with molt”</p> <p>“Too many mosquitos and we had to repeatedly ask for a repellent”</p> <p>“My biggest complaint was the air conditioning in the room that was blowing on me constantly and it was cold”</p>
8. High price, too expensive, not worth the money	59 (5.2%)	<p>“It is more pricy than the street spas and also worse than those, against our expectation”</p> <p>“However, I think the price is a little higher than other spas”</p> <p>“With the price tag, I’m sure one can get better experience somewhere else”</p> <p>“The price was super expensive too for 1 hour service”</p> <p>“The spa here is not worth the money”</p> <p>“The spa is over price with ordinary service”</p>
9. Poor products	56 (4.9%)	<p>“We also feel the aroma oil used is not in good quality”</p> <p>“Facial cream and mask are not good quality products”</p> <p>“I don’t know what massage oil they use, smells very awful”</p> <p>“Avoid facials as they do not seem to use good products to provide this treatment”</p>

10. Uncleanliness	47 (4.2%)	<p>“The toilet had bad smell”</p> <p>“Bathrooms and shower need some improvements”</p> <p>“Towels are not clean (wet)”</p> <p>“Towels are smelly and some spots on it”</p> <p>“Cockroaches were walking in the massage room. I was really shocked especially when almost naked”</p> <p>“I was so disappointed with the condition and cleanliness of the place. The washroom floor was wet and lack cleaning service”</p>
11. Others (e.g. limited products, marketing)	16 (1.4%)	<p>“No choice of massage oil at all”</p> <p>“The manager tries to sell a high price package for me”</p> <p>“Front desk did not offer any discounts even we buy 3 packages”</p>
Total	1,135 (100%)	

With regard to Table 4.6, the first theme of **negative spa reviews** that were most cited is “poor skills of spa therapists” (22.7%) while the second theme is “poor behavior or etiquette of spa therapists” (19.7%) and the third theme is “non-recommendations for using services” (11.8%). The fourth theme is “noise disturbance” (9.6%), followed by the fifth theme “weak English language” (7.7%), and the sixth theme “poor staff/receptionists” (6.7%). The seventh theme is “poor facilities and atmosphere” (5.9%), while the eight theme is “high price and too expensive” (5.2%), followed by the ninth theme “poor products & treatments” (4.9%), and the tenth theme “uncleanliness” (4.2%).

Table 4.7: Main constructs of negative spa reviews

Main constructs & themes	Frequency (1,135)
1. People & services (66.6%)	
1.1 Spa therapists (56.7%)	
1.1.1 Poor skills of spa therapists (22.7%)	258
1.1.2 Poor behavior or etiquette of spa therapists (19.7%)	224
1.1.3 Noise disturbance from spa therapists (9.6%)	109
1.1.4 Weak English language (4.7%)	53
1.2 Front desk staff (9.9%)	
1.2.1 Poor services of front desk staff (6.7%)	76
1.2.3 Weak English language (3.2%)	35
2. Marketing issues (23.3%)	
2.1 Non-recommendations (11.8%)	134
2.2 High price (5.2%)	59
2.3 Poor spa products (4.9%)	56
2.4 Others (1.4%)	16
3. Physical elements (10.1%)	
3.1 Poor facilities and atmosphere (5.9%)	68
3.2 Uncleanliness (4.2%)	47

Table 4.7 presents 3 main constructs of negative spa reviews: 1) people & services (66.6%) 2) marketing issues (23.3%) 3) physical elements (10.1%). The names of negative constructs are similar to those of the positive constructs, and they were emerged by grouping similar themes into main construct. Among the 3 constructs, people & services is the largest construct. Under the first construct (people & services), there are 2 key components which are spa therapists and front desk staff. Each component has sub-themes (see Table 4.7). Whereas, the second construct (marketing issues) is comprised of 4 sub-themes, while there are 2 sub-themes under the third construct of physical elements.

Section 4.3: An analysis of spa reviews and service quality dimensions

In order to provide more useful findings of tourist reviews regarding spa services, both positive and negative reviews are further analyzed in relations to the 5 dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL) as shown in Table 4.8 (positive reviews) and Table 4.9 (negative reviews). Previous studies regarding service quality in spa industry has been carefully reviewed and adopted as a guideline for analyzing the data (e.g. Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Lo et al., 2015).

Table 4.8: An analysis of positive spa reviews and service quality dimensions

Service quality dimensions	Frequency	Examples of statements
1. Reliability: ability to perform services accurately/correctly (e.g., staff performance, work skills, and English proficiency)	419 (24.7%)	“Kind and professional staff” “The massage skills of the therapists I had were awesome” “Massage therapists were all very friendly & good” “The staff are professional and excellent in their services” “Therapists were extremely professional and courteous” “The masseur did a great job and made me feel relax” “She is clearly very experienced both in waxing and in massage service” “Therapists are well trained and do a great job” “The practitioners knew the right balance of pressure and it was evident they were well trained” “Masseurs seemed well trained and knew what they were doing” “I believe their masseuses are well trained overall and you get a good quality massage” “Therapists here can speak and understand English well. I have no problem with the massage and foot spa” “English of receptionist is excellent and very good understanding” “The therapist can understand good English and did a great job for the massage”
2. Responsiveness: willingness to assist customers and provide prompt services (e.g. interaction with customers, friendliness/politeness of staff, customer service, explanation, enquiry and answer)	375 (22.1%)	“The staff are super friendly” “Kind, polite, professional staff” “Receptionist staff were excellent and very accommodating” “We did not have to wait long before we were asked to go to the room” “I was invited to sit and enjoy welcoming drink whilst my hostess ran through the procedures” “Once you tell them what package you would like, it takes 4-5 minutes to get well serviced” “The receptionist answer all questions I want, very great” “The lady staff helped me to select a suitable treatment for me”
3. Tangibility: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and	335 (19.7%)	“The place is nicely decorated” “The facility is extremely beautiful and elegant”

environment (e.g. spa facilities, decoration, atmosphere)		<p>“The spa is nicely decorated with plants, incense and flowers”</p> <p>“The grounds and facilities are really beautiful and peaceful”</p> <p>“Beautiful and clean surrounding, or a real sense relaxing atmosphere”</p> <p>“There is a calming smell of lemongrass-lavender essential oil being diffused into the air”</p> <p>“We chose the 2-hour Thai massage, and were shown to a beautiful treatment room with a quiet atmosphere”</p>
<p>4. Assurance: ability to convey trust and confidence (e.g. cleanliness, quality of products, value of product, privacy, safety)</p>	326 (19.3%)	<p>“Everything seemed so clean and hygienic”</p> <p>“The facility is generally clean”</p> <p>“Price is reasonable and good value for money”</p> <p>“This place is not expensive with good services”</p> <p>“She gave us useful advice on choosing our treatments”</p> <p>“They use quality products with organic ingredients”</p> <p>“The lady in-charge can speak fluent English and explain the spa packages clearly”</p> <p>“Comfortable changing clothes and rooms in which you feel safe and comfortable to change”</p> <p>“We were greeted warmly by a receptionist, found our booking and directed us to go change our outdoor footwear for flip-flops and we were given a numbered electronic locker key”</p>
<p>5. Empathy: caring services or individual attention (e.g. caring staff, personalized services/treatments, understanding customers’ needs)</p>	240 (14.2%)	<p>“Masseurs are always asking if their pressure is ok”</p> <p>“Hot tea and wipe provided after the massage”</p> <p>“When I arrived I was greeted by a lovely young lady who served me with a cold drink and a wet towel to wipe my face and hands”</p> <p>“On arrival I was asked if there were any particular areas I wanted them to concentrate on”</p> <p>“The pressure used was right and they asked the right questions and ensured the pressure they were using was right for you”</p> <p>“I felt my therapist gave great attention to all my problem areas, especially my back”</p> <p>“An apologetic gift was offered since we had waited for more than 20 minutes for our treatments”</p> <p>“Therapist will reconfirm on the area that you would like to concentrate before proceed with the massage which I personally think is really good and I had never experience before”</p>
Total	1,695 (100%)	

Table 4.8 shows that most positive reviews (24.7% frequencies) are associated with reliability dimension while the second and the third ones are related to responsiveness dimension (22.1% frequencies) and tangibility dimension (19.7% frequencies), respectively. Assurance dimension (19.3% frequencies) and empathy dimension (14.2% frequencies) are ranked in the fourth and the fifth, respectively.

When considering in details, *reliability* received the most positive reviews which are related to work performance, work skills, and English proficiency of spa personnel (e.g. spa therapists were all very friendly & good at massage services) while *responsiveness* was positively cited with regard to customer interaction, customer service, friendliness of staff, and answering customers' enquiries (e.g. we did not have to wait long before we were asked to go to the room). *Tangibility* was positively reviewed about decoration and spa facilities (e.g. the grounds and facilities are really beautiful and peaceful). For *assurance*, this dimension received positive reviews regarding cleanliness of place, treatment rooms, quality of products, privacy, and safety (e.g. everything seemed so clean and hygienic). And *empathy*, it was mainly reviewed relating to caring staff, personalized services, and understanding customers' needs (e.g. spa therapists are always asking if the pressure is ok).

Table 4.9: An analysis of negative spa reviews and service quality dimensions

Service quality dimensions	Frequency	Examples of statements
<p>1. Reliability: ability to perform services accurately/correctly (e.g., staff performance, work skills, and English proficiency)</p>	315 (33.4%)	<p>“The massage started late 5 minutes and finished before 1 hour”</p> <p>“The massage was not consistent, sometimes too hard, sometimes too light”</p> <p>“The massage staff always go away during massage, and talk during massage. Make me feel not really relax”</p> <p>“The attitude of the receptionist put me off this place for life”</p> <p>“I don't think they know what they are doing at all when it comes to facials, so avoid getting one here”</p> <p>“At first I thought it probably was just my bad luck ending up with a poor masseuse but afterwards we found out that the experience was the same for all three of us. It was obvious that all three masseuses were terrible and untrained”</p> <p>“Go there for a basic Thai massage but avoid facials as they do not seem to have the equipment nor skills to provide this treatment”</p> <p>“The massage was very hard which we never experienced that hard of a massage before”</p> <p>“I wasn't quite relaxed with all the talking and annoyed when therapist constantly moved her working hand away. I don't think what she did was professional”</p> <p>“I were both unhappy with the treatment and conduct of massage therapists”</p> <p>“The staff at this spa didn't understand English”</p> <p>“Receptionists don't appear to speak much English”</p> <p>“The two therapists we encountered hardly know English so we gave up to explain to them”</p>
<p>2. Assurance: ability to convey trust and confidence (e.g. staff knowledge, cleanliness, quality of products, value of product, privacy, safety)</p>	224 (23.7%)	<p>“Staff seemed confused with the massages we wanted”</p> <p>“Therapists talked to each other often which was very annoying”</p> <p>“The two ladies kept talking with each other for the whole time, making it a bit hard to relax completely”</p> <p>“At the end of the massage, I realized it's totally not worth to pay more here with poor service”</p> <p>“Another bad thing is the masseurs talk a lot among themselves while giving massage which is very irritating at times”</p> <p>“This spa used low quality massage oil and very smelly”</p> <p>“Cockroaches were walking in the massage room. I was really shocked especially when almost naked”</p>
<p>3. Responsiveness: willingness to assist customers and provide prompt services (e.g. interaction with customers, customer service, friendliness of staff, explanation, enquiry and</p>	176 (18.6%)	<p>“Etiquette of the therapists were not good”</p> <p>“The lady at the front desk was condescending and rude”</p> <p>“Reception lady is very unfriendly and not helpful”</p> <p>“On many occasions I had a communication problem with receptionist</p>

answer)		<p>regarding bookings”</p> <p>“They couldn’t follow my instructions and did not respond to my requests”</p> <p>“My face ended up breaking out during the facial in an allergic reaction and when I told the spa personnel, They did not apologize and did nothing except tell me to wash my face”</p> <p>“I requested change of massage therapist but was told that service already started half way which unable to and afterward massage therapist used lots of strength focus on some area which caused bruise on my wife”</p> <p>“I was waiting in a massage room, reception told me that massage lady will come after 10 minutes. Finally massage lady came after 15 minutes but that 15 minutes delay was counted into the massage time of 2 hours at my cost”</p> <p>“The receptionist says wait for the service around 5 minutes but I am waiting for the massage to be ready for 15 minutes”</p>
<p>4. Empathy: caring services or individual attention (e.g. personalized services/treatments, understanding customers’ needs)</p>	153 (16.2%)	<p>“I highlighted shoulders and legs to be massaged a bit more, but the lady didn’t seem to pay any attention to this”</p> <p>“I just had enough of the rude uncaring and rootless receptionists which gave away my appointment because I was a little late - though I was coming every week almost same time”</p> <p>“No smile, and bitter look on her face made me thinks she is not happy with work there, or she just doesn't care customers”</p> <p>“Had requested for a shower after the whole services but was denied by the massager”</p> <p>“During the massage we asked for it to be stronger but didn’t seem to help”</p> <p>“The massage staff did not understand me when I told that the pressure was too hard and became painful”</p>
<p>5. Tangibility: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and environment (e.g. spa facilities, decoration, atmosphere)</p>	76 (8.1%)	<p>“Toilet paper holder and tap are broken”</p> <p>“Room too cold and the music too loud”</p> <p>“Bathrooms and shower need some improvements”</p> <p>“The massage room was too cold and too much light”</p> <p>“The air in the room smelled musty”</p> <p>“I was so disappointed with the condition and cleanliness of the place. The washroom floor was wet and lack cleaning service”</p>
Total	944 (100%)	

Table 4.9 shows that most negative reviews (33.4%) are associated with reliability dimension while the second and the third ones are related to assurance dimension (23.7%) and responsiveness dimension (18.6%). Empathy dimension (16.2%) and tangibility dimension (8.1%) are ranked in the fourth and the fifth, respectively.

When considering in details, *reliability dimension* received the most negative reviews regarding poor skills and unprofessionalism of spa therapists as well as poor English of spa employees (e.g. I were unhappy with the poor treatment and conduct of massage therapists) while *assurance dimension* received negative reviews regarding staff knowledge and privacy (e.g. staff seemed confused with the massages we wanted, and talk a lot to each other). *Responsiveness* was negatively cited with regard to unhelpful staff and poor customer service (e.g. reception lady is very unfriendly and not helpful) while *empathy* was mainly reviewed relating to less caring staff and ignoring customers' needs (e.g. I highlighted shoulders and legs to be massaged a bit more, but the lady didn't seem to pay any attention to this. For *tangibility*, it received negative reviews mainly about uncleanliness of the place, atmosphere and room temperature (e.g. room too cold and the music too loud).

Section 4.4: Interview findings

Table 4.10: General information of spa interviewees

Characteristics	Descriptions	Frequency (n=100)	Percent (100%)
Gender	Male	39	39.0%
	Female	61	61.0%
Age	20 - 30 years	12	12.0%
	31 - 45 years	42	42.0%
	46 - 60 years	37	37.0%
	61 or older	9	9.0%
Region	Asia	66	66.0%
	Europe	34	34.0%
Number of visits to Thailand	1 st time	71	71.0%
	2 nd time or more	29	29.0%
Number of visits to spas in Thailand	1 st time	82	82.0%
	2 nd time or more	18%	18.0%

Table 4.10 presents the general information of spa interviewees (tourists who used day spas). An analysis of demographic details indicated that among 100 spa interviewees, 39% were males and 61% were females. Most spa interviewees were in the age between 31 - 45 years old (42%) and 46 - 60 years old (37%). The majority were Asians (66%) while the rest were Europeans (34%). Most of them were first-time travelers to Thailand (71%) as well as the first-time visits to spas in Thailand (82%).

Table 4.11 Interview findings

Interview issues	Summary of interviews
1. What is a main purpose of using spa services?	Most respondents indicated that they used spa services mainly due to rest and relax purposes while some used spa to improve health and wellness, and the rest used spa for beauty and skin treatments.
2. What are the strengths or good points of Thai spas?	The majority indicated that the friendliness of spa staff, their hospitality and services are the strengths of Thai spa industry while some indicated that price and Thai decorations were also important factors attracting them to use Thai spas.
3. What are the weaknesses of Thai spas?	Most respondents pointed out that English language is the major weakness of Thai spas, especially small spas. Staff sometimes did not understand what customers wanted. Some respondents also indicated that spa therapists sometimes did not understand their requests. They expressed that spa therapists should provide personalized services to individual customer rather than a standardized service (same to everyone). Many respondents also revealed that prices of spa treatments were expensive, especially the famous ones.
4. What do tourists like about Thai spa?	Most respondents indicated that they like relaxing atmosphere, friendliness of staff and services. Many respondents admired about the skills of spa therapists and staff friendliness. Whereas some liked Thai styled decoration, peaceful environment and complimentary services (tea, desserts, juice and healthy cuisine).
5. What should be improved for Thai spas?	Many respondents wanted a prompt and quick process during check-in. Some spas were needed to book in advance and long queue. Many also wished to see smiling faces from spa therapists. Several respondents wanted spa staff to sincerely advise customers about spa treatments, and did not want a hard sale (forced customers to buy expensive treatments).

Section 4.5: Research discussions

This study analyzed 723 tourist reviews regarding spa services in Thailand's major tourism cities. A frequency analysis of 723 reviews produced 3,923 comments which were categorized into **13 major subjects** (Table 4.3): 1) services of staff & spa therapists, 2) staff hospitality, 3) products & treatments, 4) rest & relaxation experience, 5) decoration & environment, 6) rooms and facilities, 7) recommendations, 8) prices, 9) language & communication, 10) complimentary services, 11) location & accessibility, 12) booking & reservation, 13) marketing & management.

Based on the findings, the major subjects based on spa reviews were about services of staff, staff hospitality, products & treatments, and rest & relaxation experience. These subjects are common reviews for customers to talk about when they use spa services because they are the core components of spa experiences through the spa service process starting from selecting a product or treatment, receive the services by spa personnel, and feel relaxed during the spa services. Especially for the most cited reviews regarding the services of staff & therapists with 660 frequencies. This suggests that spa personnel (especially spa therapists) may be regarded as one of the key success factors and most important attribute for spa industry because they are the key persons who directly deliver spa experience to customers. Customers will be happy or satisfied with spa services will mainly depend on spa therapists or masseurs who provide direct services. This finding is consistent to previous empirical studies indicating that spa personnel are the most important attribute for spa industry. For example, Lo et al., (2015) found that professional therapists were the most important attribute in providing spa service quality in China. Likewise, the quality of spa therapists were placed with high expectations from customers as well (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014).

Regarding the themes of **positive spa reviews** (Table 4.4), the top three themes which were most cited are 1) good skills of spa therapists 2) friendliness of staff and 3) relaxing atmosphere. These three positive themes are similar to the above discussion because they are related to people (spa personnel) and their services. As noted, spa personnel, particularly spa therapists, may be regarded an essential factor to directly deliver spa experience (rest & relaxing experience) to customers (Ministry of Public Health, 2014). They are the key person who spends most of time interacting (servicing) with customers with high service encounters. Therefore, it could be common that spa tourists may wish to review (criticize) about the skills and services of spa therapists rather than other issues. This finding is also consistent with interview finding indicating that services of spa therapists were the top concern when using spa services.

Meanwhile, the themes of **negative spa reviews** (Table 4.5), the top three themes were about 1) poor skills of spa therapists 2) poor behavior/etiquette of spa therapists and 3) non-recommendations for using spa services. Since the services of spa therapists are the core (true) element of spa experiences and relaxing

emotions (Lo et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2012), it is very common that customers (tourists) may expect to receive favorable services from spa service providers. Once this element cannot meet their expectations, they may feel unfavorable or less satisfied with the spa service providers (spa therapists), and may want to give their feedbacks or complaints to spa establishments through the review websites. In addition, other services provided by spa staff (for example, reservation, reception, staff hospitality, and extra requests) are also perceived by customers during the service encounters. These minor services together with the core services provided by spa therapists may contribute to the overall customer satisfaction because all of these services are the essential parts of the service quality in spa industry (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al., 2015; Ministry of Public Health, 2014). Any poor services occurring during pre-services, during services and post-services may be possible to be reviewed or shared in the review websites. And if overall spa performance is below customer expectations or poor spa standards, customers may have the post-purchase behavior (or feeling), and finally decide not to revisit nor recommend patronizing that spa establishment.

With regard to the analysis of **positive spa reviews** and **service quality dimensions** (SERVQUAL), it was found that most positive reviews are associated with *reliability dimension* while the second and the third ones are related to *responsiveness* and *tangibility* dimensions. This finding is in line with early discussion about the services of spa therapists as being most positively cited reviews, and also is consistent with previous empirical studies indicating that reliability dimension was one of the most important factors contributing to customer satisfactions or emotions in spa industry. For instance, Lo et al., (2015) found that reliability and responsiveness dimensions were the most important factors affecting customers' positive emotions (or enjoyment) in spa resorts in southern China. Also, a study by Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch (2014) revealed that spa tourists had relatively high expectations on reliability and responsiveness dimensions when using spa services in Thailand. In their study, foreign customers expected to receive excellent services and customized treatments given by Thai spa providers. Being the key factors and high expectations from customers, it could be possible that spa tourists are more likely to focus and frequently review these two dimensions (reliability and responsiveness) after using spa services. Tangibility dimension was also found to be commonly cited or reviewed in the websites, probably because this dimension is mainly related to the basic components of spa business such as facilities, decoration, and atmosphere. Once tourists visit spa establishments, they will first experience or perceive this dimension before receiving core services. As this dimension is the basic element of spa business, many spa tourists may want to share or reflect their perceptions about it in the related websites (e.g. Trip Advisor).

In terms of **negative spa reviews** and **service quality dimensions**, it was revealed that most negative reviews are associated with *reliability* dimension while the second and the third ones are related to *assurance* and *responsiveness* dimensions. This finding is relatively similar to the above discussion of positive reviews, especially the reliability and responsiveness dimensions. As previously discussed, past studies found that reliability and responsiveness dimensions were the important determinant factors contributing to customers' positive emotions and their satisfaction in using spa services (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Lo et al., 2015). If the spa service providers fail to meet customer expectations, it may be possible that they want to share their unfavorable service experiences or give feedbacks to spa practitioners through the related websites. In addition, *assurance* dimension was also found to be negatively cited in Thai spa industry. This dimension relates to the ability of business to convey trust and confidence for customers such as staff knowledge, cleanliness, quality of products, value of product, privacy, and safety. Based on the finding, most negative reviews or complaints were about noise disturbance (from spa therapists) and spa cleanliness. In particular, noise disturbance (lack of privacy) from spa therapists (talking while servicing) were more frequently criticized than other issues; causing the assurance dimension. These issues will provide further recommendations for Thai spa industry as well as future development for Thailand' spa standards of Ministry of Public Health (2014).

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

This is the final chapter of the research report. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize research findings, provide recommendations, and address research limitations and future research opportunities.

5.1 Conclusions

This study had the main objectives to analyze and categorize tourist reviews regarding spa business services in major tourism cities, as well as to analyze and categorize the positive and negative spa reviews into service quality dimensions. Based on 130 spa establishments in Thailand's major tourism cities, there was a total of 723 spa tourist reviews which were taken into data analysis. Among 723 reviews, 49% were males and 43% were females. Most of them were in the age ranges between 31 - 45 years old (36%) and 46 - 60 years old (32.0%). They mainly were Asians (46%) and Europeans (34%) while the rests came from Australia/New Zealand (8%) and the Americas (5%). An analysis of 723 tourist reviews produced 3,923 comments regarding spa services. A frequency analysis was conducted to rank these comments in terms of how frequently they were cited. These comments were categorized into 13 major subjects: 1) services of staff & spa therapists, 2) staff hospitality, 3) products & treatments, 4) rest & relaxation experience, 5) decoration & environment, 6) rooms and facilities, 7) recommendations, 8) prices, 9) language & communication, 10) complimentary services, 11) location & accessibility, 12) booking & reservation, 13) marketing & management.

Given 13 major subjects, the positive reviews were furthered categorized into 10 common themes. These 10 positive themes (ranked in frequency order) were 1) good skills of therapists 2) friendliness of staff 3) relaxing atmosphere 4) cleanliness 5) beautiful of decoration & environment 6) recommendations 7) complimentary services 8) language & communication 9) good services and 10) product knowledge.

In relation to the negative reviews (tourist complaints), they were also categorized into 10 common themes. Based on the frequency order, they were 1) poor skills of spa therapists 2) poor services and operations 3) non-recommendations for using services 4) noise disturbance 5) weak English language 6) poor staff/receptionists 7) poor facilities and atmosphere 8) high price 9) poor products and 10) uncleanliness.

Later, both common positive and negative themes were further analyzed and grouped into 3 similar constructs which were 1) people & services 2) emotional & physical elements and 3) marketing issues. Each construct has sub-themes within it. These emerging constructs should provide important implications for both academically and practically.

For an analysis of service quality dimensions, it was found that most positive reviews were associated with reliability while the second and the third ones were related to responsiveness and tangibility, respectively. Assurance and empathy dimensions were ranked in the fourth and the fifth, respectively. In terms of negative reviews, it was revealed that most negative reviews were associated with reliability while the second and the third ones were related to assurance and responsiveness. Empathy and tangibility were ranked in the fourth and the fifth, respectively. Interestingly, reliability was found to be the top dimension from both positive and negative reviews.

5.2 Academic Contributions

The first academic contribution of this study is the in-depth understanding of spa review constructs through the analysis of contents (spa tourist reviews) from travel related websites. Most previous spa studies provide empirical or quantitative results by examining the relationships of independent and dependent variables in various aspects (e.g. spa tourist behaviors, spa tourist motivations, service quality, and loyalty). The spa industry is still suffering from the lack of qualitative approach to understand the spa tourist reviews and their past experiences of using spa services. This study, therefore, contributes to the spa literature by revealing 10 positive and negative themes (see Tables 4.4 and 4.6), and 3 main constructs which are 1) people 2) emotional & physical elements and 3) marketing issues. In particular, the 3 constructs (with their sub-dimensions) help to better understand about the important patterns (frames) of customer reviews regarding spa experiences in Thailand together with the useful implications for spa business.

The second academic contribution is related to the service quality dimensions. Based on the findings, the most positively cited dimensions of service quality (in frequency order) is reliability, followed by responsiveness, tangibility, assurance, and empathy dimensions. Whereas the most negatively cited dimensions is reliability, followed by assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibility dimensions. Importantly, the study found that the reliability was the top dimension for both positive and negative reviews. This particular finding suggests that spa customers prioritize or place high concern on the skills and professional services of spa therapists rather than other dimensions. Given the two major findings (constructs of spa reviews and service quality dimensions), the study thus expands and contributes to the existing knowledge of spa literature that was derived from the secondary source.

5.3 Managerial Contributions

There are 3 sub-sections under managerial contributions: 1) positive review recommendations 2) negative review recommendations and 3) service quality recommendations.

5.3.1 Positive review recommendations

It is clearly evident that a proportion of positive reviews (Table 4.4) were much higher than the negative ones (Table 4.5). This indicates that the overall performances of Thai spa establishments are doing very good. They do their jobs better or superior than customer expectations; leading to customers' favorable experiences, admirations and recommendation as shown in the findings. The current findings will help spa establishments to get in-depth information of what customers (tourists) positively reviewed and appreciated about their services. Table 5.1 (based on 3 constructs) presents positive review recommendations for spa establishments to *keep* or *maintain* their strengths (good points) in order to stay competitive in the market.

Table 5.1: Positive review recommendations

Main constructs	Recommendations
<p>1. People</p> <p>1.1 Good skills of spa therapists</p> <p>1.2 Friendliness of staff</p> <p>1.3 English language</p> <p>1.4 Good services</p>	<p>There are 4 issues for people construct:</p> <p>1.1 The most cited positive theme was about the good services of spa therapists (skillful and professional staff). This construct is regarded as the core element of spa experience. People use spa services for the benefits of wellness and relaxing experiences which should be delivered by skillful and professional spa personnel. Based on the finding, many tourists appreciated about the skills of therapists/masseurs and their understanding of guests' needs. In order to maintain this strength, spa establishments should develop consistent quality services (staff and procedures) combined with a customized and personal experience to make the spa experience superior (Wisnom & Capozia, 2012).</p> <p>1.2 Many tourists appreciated and admired about the friendliness of spa staff (e.g. front desk staff, spa therapists). Thailand is claimed to be "The Land of Smiles" and is famous for its friendly hospitality (Sangpikul, 2018). Since spa industry is a service-based business focusing on high interaction between customers and service providers, spa establishments should maintain this strength in providing friendly customer service process including pre-consumption stage (guest arrival), a consumption stage (during service), and post-consumption stage (guest departure) (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014). A recruitment of service-minded staff and a training program regarding customer services could help to develop the friendliness of spa staff.</p> <p>1.3 In relation to English language, spa tourists also admired about the English language of Thai spa staff (e.g. receptionists and spa therapists). Since many spa customers are foreign tourists, English language therefore is important to the spa services. Regular English trainings and recruitment of employees with good skills of English should be concentrated in order to create good communications and customer satisfaction.</p> <p>1.4 Based on the findings, several spa tourists positively cited about the services and operations of support staff (i.e. front staff/receptions) in terms of warm welcome, caring manner, and customer services. Support staff (especially front desk agents and receptions) is an important element to keep a spa working effectively, and contributes to customer satisfaction because they are the first and last</p>

	<p>point with direct guest contact. A well trained and skilled front desk staff should be carefully recruited by the spa establishments.</p>
<p>2. Emotional & physical elements</p> <p>2.1 Relaxing experiences</p> <p>2.2 Cleanliness</p> <p>2.3 Beautiful decoration & environment</p>	<p>There are 3 issues for emotional & physical elements:</p> <p>2.1 Regarding the relaxing experiences, this is an important element of spa experience because it may be regarded as an outcome of the spa service because customers can feel rest, relax, and pleasant during and after the spa services. As noted, many people go to spa for relaxing experience. Based on the spa tourist reviews, there are several factors to provide this relaxing experience. They may include peaceful environment, professional services, smell of spa products, music sound, light and staff noise. Spa establishments should keep these things in mind in order to provide guests with relaxing experiences. A regular check with guests and spa facility management (Wisnom & Capozia, 2012) may help to maintain the relaxing atmosphere.</p> <p>2.2 In relation to cleanliness, many tourists favored about the cleanliness and hygiene of Thai spa establishments. Since spa is selling a pleasant and relaxing experience to promote people's health and wellness, spa establishments should maintain their hygiene and sanitation. A standard operating procedure (SOP) can help to promote hygiene and sanitation by indicating what procedures should be done for cleaning tasks (Wisnom & Capozia, 2012).</p> <p>2.3 For the beautiful decoration & environment, many foreign spa tourists admired about the beautiful decoration and environments of Thai spa establishments. Some appreciated about Thai styled spas with unique decoration. Spa establishment is a place where customers come to experience a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere. A well designed spa and layout may help to enhance the beautiful decoration & environment (Wisnom & Capozia, 2012).</p>
<p>3. Marketing issues</p> <p>3.1 Recommendations</p> <p>3.2 Complimentary services</p> <p>3.3 Product knowledge</p>	<p>There are 3 issues for marketing construct.</p> <p>3.1 Many spa tourists cited about recommendations and repeat visits. In fact, based on the findings, the proportion of recommendations was much higher than those of non-recommendations. This implies that most spa tourists were satisfied with the services of Thai spa establishments due to excellent spa therapists (their skills, professionalism), good customer services, friendliness of staff, and worth the money. Satisfied customers are more likely to positively spread their word-of-mouth to others and review it on the web. These can be seen from the travel related websites (e.g. Trip Advisor). These findings can help Thai spa establishments to concentrate on these strengths and regularly maintain them.</p> <p>3.2. For the complimentary services, many spa tourists positively mentioned about the complimentary services such as free refreshments, tea, snacks, desserts, and transportation. Normally, many spa establishments serve welcoming refreshment and after service drinks. But some also provide more extra complimentary services such as snacks or healthy desserts which create a value to the spa services. Some spa establishments also provide customers with free transportation both pick-up and return. Given a good spa service combing with the extra complimentary services could reinforce customers' word-of-mouth to others as well as sharing in the related websites. However, it depends on the policies of each spa establishment to manage and offer these complimentary services.</p> <p>3.3 Many tourists also admired about staff's knowledge spa products and services, especially front desk staff who advise customers about the products/services that meet their needs and wants. Generally, customers will expect front desk staff to be a key person who can correctly advise them about spa products and services. It is important for spa establishments to regularly train their front desk staff to be knowledgeable and informative person to advise customers about all products and services.</p>

5.3.2 Negative review recommendations

Although the negative reviews have small proportion when compared to the positive ones but these negative reviews are a good source of secondary data (or mirror) to inform Thai spa establishments about their weaknesses or poor services based on the perceptions of foreign customers (foreign tourists). These findings will help spa establishments to get valuable feedbacks (mirrors) regarding their weaknesses, poor services or mistakes occurring during their services. Due to the increasing importance of online reviews in services-based businesses (including spa business), spa establishments should pay their attentions to these weaknesses to improve their services and meet customer expectations. The following recommendations for negative reviews are based on the 3 main constructs: people, physical elements, and marketing issues.

Table 5.2: Negative review recommendations

Main constructs	Recommendations
<p>1. People</p> <p>1.1 Spa therapists</p> <p>1.1.1 Poor skills of spa therapists</p> <p>1.1.2 Poor behavior or etiquette of spa therapists</p> <p>1.1.3 Noise disturbance</p> <p>1.1.4 Weak English language</p> <p>1.2 Front desk staff</p> <p>1.2.1 Poor services</p> <p>1.2.2 Poor behavior or etiquette of front desk staff</p> <p>1.2.3 Weak English language</p>	<p>There are 2 issues for people construct: spa therapists and front desk staff.</p> <p>1.1 Spa therapists</p> <p>1.1.1 Most cited negative reviews were about poor skills of spa therapists. As early noted, one of the top concerns for spa customers is the quality of therapists/masseurs which relates to their friendliness, product knowledge, and spa skills. In particular, most customer complaints were about the skills or expertise of therapists/masseurs (e.g. not well trained staff, less skilled, not understanding customers' needs/requests). In-house training programs may be required for less skilled staff. In order to understand customers' needs or specific requests (e.g. more pressure, less pressure), communicating with customers regarding their needs or preferences can help therapists/masseurs to provide appropriate services (Brown, 2018; Tarver, 2015).</p> <p>1.1.2 The second most negative reviews were related to poor behavior or etiquette of spa therapists. In spa services, customers not only focus on the skills of spa therapists but they also concern on therapists' friendliness, hospitality and behavior. Spa Therapist is a key person who provides a real spa experience, and interacts with customers during their services. Unfriendly character, poor hospitality, or improper behavior may cause customer dissatisfaction or disappointment. Based on the findings, these issues were frequently cited in the reviews. In order improve behavior or etiquette of spa therapists and front desk staff (1.2.2), a proper in-house training may be required. In addition, a customer survey may be conducted at the reception before guest departure to assess both front desk staff and spa therapists.</p> <p>1.1.3 Next was about noise disturbance from spa therapist. As the main purposes of most spa tourists is to have pleasant and relaxing experiences (Monteson & Singer, 2004; Lo et al., 2015). Noises from staff talking to each other can negatively affect customers' relaxing atmosphere when using spa services. Spa establishments should set rules for therapist and masseurs to keep their noises as minimal as possible during guest services. Mobile phones should not be allowed during guest services (Brown, 2018; Ministry of Public Health, 2014; Tarver, 2015).</p> <p>1.1.4 Regarding weak English language, even though English language may be a common issue for many Thai employees working in the tourism and hospitality industry, but it can be improved. Many spa tourists in Thailand are foreigners, and they use English to communicate with Thai spa staff. There are</p>

	<p>several spa technical terms used in English. It is a job of the spa establishments to provide appropriate in-house English training for their staff. In particular, receptionists and spa therapists should have good knowledge of English because they are in direct contact with customers (Ministry of Public Health, 2014). A recruitment of spa personnel with good English skill could be another choice. These recommendations also apply to front desk staff as well (1.2.3).</p> <p>1.2 Front desk staff:</p> <p>1.2.1 Many complaints were found to be about poor services from front desk staff (receptionists) regarding their unfriendly or inhospitable services. It should be noted that the first contact or first impression occurs of spa services starts at the reception. Customers will first interact with front staff before they are escorted to the treatment rooms. Spa establishments should keep this in mind that a key person who creates the first impression is receptionists or front staff. Recruitment and in-house training may help to develop staff to have good attitude, service-mind and friendly characters.</p>
<p>2. Physical elements</p> <p>2.1 Poor facilities and atmosphere</p> <p>2.2 Uncleanliness</p>	<p>There are 2 issues for physical elements.</p> <p>2.1 Many spa tourists cited about poor facilities and atmosphere in terms of room temperature and loud music. Since most spa treatments require customers to undress or almost nude in order to get the services, spa therapists may ask customers about the room temperature if it is too warm or too cold. Spa music is also one of the fundamentals to bring spa experience, and the music should promote calming and relaxing atmosphere with appropriate light sound (Brown, 2017).</p> <p>2.2 Cleanliness is one of customer expectations when they patronize spa services. Customers will be less satisfied by if they experience dirty facilities or unsanitary equipment. Many negative reviews were related to bathroom, toilet and shower facilities as well as towels/sheets. A standard operating procedure (SOP) can help to solve the cleanliness problem by indicating what procedures should be done for cleaning tasks (Wisnom & Capozio, 2012). In addition, following the guidance of Thailand's spa business standards (Ministry of Public Health, 2014) may assist the improvement of these issues. According to Blair (2017), for example, laundry must be done on a daily basis to have a plentiful stock of clean towels and sheets in service areas and changing rooms. Bathroom and shower facilities should be cleansed throughout the day, and trash must be thrown out throughout the day as well. In addition, spa equipment and supplies must be sanitized after use on each customer.</p>
<p>3. Marketing</p> <p>3.1 Poor spa products</p> <p>3.2 High price</p> <p>3.3 Non-recommendations</p>	<p>There are 3 issues for marketing construct.</p> <p>3.1 Some negative reviews were related to poor spa products. One of the important concerns for spa business is selecting quality spa suppliers. In order to maintain the quality of spa services, it is important for spa establishments to have reliable spa suppliers. In addition, several approaches may help to maintain the quality of spa products. For example, spa establishments may regularly check on the quality of their products before serving customers. Some products may require a higher level of sanitation such as facial and nail services (Blair, 2017).</p> <p>3.2 Spa tourists also negatively cited about the high price of spa services in several spa establishments. Most complaints were made about the high prices that were not worth the money. These complaints may imply that the services or benefits customers receive are less than what they should pay. In general, spa services are relatively high when compared to other products. This is because spa services are people-based services and relating to the benefits or improvement of people's health and wellness delivered in a private and peaceful environment. The spa services are mainly selling a pleasant and relaxing experience. Given the high priced products, spa establishments should provide customers with the best experience and exceed customer expectation. A survey of customer satisfaction could help the</p>

	<p>spa establishments to improve their services and respond to customers' needs and wants. Marketing promotion (e.g. special packages, discounts, complimentary services) is also another approach to give customers more values.</p> <p>3.3 The last negative review was related to non-recommendations for using spa services. Many spa tourists reviewed their experiences at a particular spa establishment and finally not recommend patronizing it. The non-recommendation from previous customers may affect the reputation and trust of the spa establishments because many prospective customers may hesitate to visit the cited spa establishments. Based on the findings, most non-recommended issues were associated customer dissatisfactions in the following matters: 1) high price but poor service 2) poor skills of spa therapists 3) lack of understanding customers' needs/wants and 4) unfriendliness/unhelpfulness of spa personnel. According to these findings, it seems that most problems are concerned with "people". In order to improve customer satisfactions, spa establishments should focus on the development of spa personnel (especially spa receptionists and therapists) which may involve several processes such as staff recruitment, in-house trainings, and human resources development. The above recommendations may also help to relieve the problems.</p>
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5.3.3 Service quality recommendations

There are 2 parts for this section: positive and negative service quality dimensions.

For positive service quality recommendations, the main recommendations for spa establishments are to keep and maintain the quality, standard, and performance of the services delivered to customers. For instance, most positive reviews were associated with *reliability dimension*; suggesting that reliability dimension is a key function in spa business. Spa establishments should pay attention to the skills and performances of spa therapists. In order to maintain the *responsiveness*, spa establishments should focus on the jobs of front desk staff to provide prompt, attentive, and friendly customer services, especially managing short waiting time for before and after services. Whereas, *tangibility dimension* (e.g. spa facilities, decoration, atmosphere) should be regular monitored to provide good spa experiences for customers. Spa establishment should build customers' trust and confidence (*assurance dimension*) by monitoring hygiene & cleanliness, using quality products, maintaining customer privacy (reducing noise), and safety in spa establishments. To maintain high service quality, spa staff should be well trained to deliver personalized services, and understand customers' needs (*empathy dimension*) in order to provide customers with a pleasurable and relaxing experience.

Regarding the negative service quality recommendations, this is the focus of the recommendations due to the poor service quality. Most negative spa reviews or customer complaints were in *reliability dimension*, followed by assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibility dimensions. Most complaints in the reliability dimension were related to poor skills or unprofessionalism of spa therapists. Previous study

indicated that spa customers consider the ability and skills of spa therapists particularly important in affecting their spa experiences and positive emotions (Lo et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important for spa establishments to recruit highly skilled therapists to provide customers with spa experiences. A regular training program for less skilled or new therapists is also essential to enhance reliability dimension.

For *assurance dimension*, many tourists complained about product knowledge and weak English language of front desk staff as well as spa therapists. Since most customers of spa businesses in major tourism cities are foreign tourists, it is important for spa establishments to recruit staff (both front desk and therapists) with proper qualification and good knowledge of English in order to communicate with foreign customers. In particular, front desk staff and spa therapists are in direct contact with customers. In addition, in-house trainings for English language, communication skills, spa education, and treatment consultation may be undertaken for spa personnel. These trainings for all spa personnel are essential to convey trust and confidence for customers. One important complaint under this dimension was about cleanliness (e.g. toilets, shower facilities, towels/sheets). As early discussed, a standard operating procedure (SOP) can help to solve the cleanliness problem by indicating what procedures should be done for cleaning tasks (Wisnom & Capozio, 2012).

In relation to *responsiveness dimension*, this dimension was negatively cited about unhelpful staff and poor customer service. Spa is a service-based business and requires high service interactions between employees and customers. Spa treatments are expensive, and certainly customers expect to receive a high service quality and good spa experience. Front desk staff should be well trained to anticipate the right moment to provide the right and prompt services (Snoj & Mumel, 2002). According to Lo, Qu, & Wetprasit (2013), customers should not feel unattended or wait too long. In case a customer needs anything, there should be someone there to assist. A regular monitor from spa manager to supervise customer services and standardized service procedures should be attended.

With regard to *empathy dimension*, this dimension was mainly related to less caring services and ignoring customers' needs. Many spa customers may have different personal needs or health issues. They use spa services in order to relieve their health related issues and require individual attention. Spa therapists should be trained to provide personalized services or treatments that correspond to customers' needs. Each treatment should be provided according to customers' preference, physical condition or health issues. Customer consultation or communication (asking customers) may help to improve empathy dimension.

For *tangibility dimension*, many complaints were about spa facilities and room temperature. Although most items in tangibility dimension are common elements in spa establishments, they should not be overlooked because previous studies indicated that tangibility dimension (e.g. facilities, equipment, and

atmosphere) was found to affect customers' positive emotions (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Lo et al., 2015). A regular check for spa facilities (showers, toilets) as well as a control of appropriate room temperature should be monitored. In particular, spa therapists may ask customers if the room temperature is comfortable for customers during the services.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

There are some limitations associated with this study that need to be addressed for future research opportunities. This study analyzed merely spa tourist reviews which are the secondary data. A quantitative approach like a questionnaire survey may be used to deeply understand spa customers' opinions and perceptions in various aspects such life happiness, emotions, and spa experiences. This study examined only the registered day spas which included all types of spas such as resort spas, luxurious spas, and ordinary day spas. The level of service quality of spa employees and their performances may be different, and these may affect customer reviews. Future research may separately analyze spa reviews in a similar level.

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