

The Assessment of Spa Service Quality with 2 Dimensions : Subjective and Objective Assessment Dimensions

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Abstract

Service quality is an important element for spa business in delivering the services that correspond to customers' expectations and satisfactions. However, most spa business and scholars seem to understand service quality through one side dimension which is subjective assessment (customers' personal feeling). Indeed, service quality can be further separated or classified into objective dimension (fact-based opinion). Assessing service quality through a combination of subjective and objective measurement is expect to yield the greater benefits for spa business to improve their service quality more accurately, leading to higher customer satisfaction and repeat purchase. The aim of this article is, therefore, to discuss the service quality assessment with the contribution to provide a better understanding of the two dimensions of service quality (subjective and objective measurement) and its implementations for spa business as well as other service/tourism industries (e.g. hotels, tour operators, restaurants). A service business that implements the service quality assessment on both two dimensions will be more likely to gain higher potential and better improvement in service quality corresponding to customer satisfaction.

Keywords : Customer assessment, Service quality, Spa business

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**การประเมินคุณภาพการบริการในธุรกิจสปาแบบ 2 มิติ :
มิติจากความรู้สึกของลูกค้าและมิติความเห็นเชิงข้อเท็จจริง**

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บทคัดย่อ

คุณภาพการบริการเป็นองค์ประกอบที่สำคัญสำหรับธุรกิจสปานในการให้บริการที่สอดคล้องกับความคาดหวังและความพึงพอใจของลูกค้า อย่างไรก็ตามที่ผ่านมา ทั้งผู้ประกอบการธุรกิจสปาและนักวิชาการดูเหมือนจะเข้าใจในท่านองเดียวกันว่า การประเมินคุณภาพการบริการมาจากการประเมินความรู้สึกส่วนตัวของลูกค้าเพียงมิติเดียว (personal feeling) แต่แท้จริงแล้ว คุณภาพการบริการยังสามารถแบ่งออกเป็นมิติที่วัดจากความเห็นเชิงข้อเท็จจริงได้อีกด้วย (fact-based opinion) ดังนั้น การประเมินคุณภาพการบริการให้รอบด้านโดยผสมผสานการประเมินจากการวัดความรู้สึกส่วนตัวของลูกค้ากับความเห็นเชิงข้อเท็จจริง จะให้ข้อมูลและเสียงสะท้อนกลับที่มีความซัดเจนและรอบด้านมากกว่า ซึ่งจะช่วยให้ผู้ประกอบการธุรกิจสปาระสามารถพัฒนาหรือปรับปรุงคุณภาพการบริการได้อย่างตรงจุด บทความนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่ออธิบายเพิ่มเติมเกี่ยวกับการประเมินคุณภาพการบริการโดยแบ่งออกเป็น 2 มิติ คือ การวัดความรู้สึกส่วนตัวของลูกค้า (subjective assessment) และการสอบถามความเห็นเชิงข้อเท็จจริง (objective assessment) เพื่อเป็นประโยชน์และให้ความรู้ความเข้าใจที่ลุ่มลึกและซัดเจนขึ้นสำหรับการประเมินคุณภาพการบริการในธุรกิจสปา รวมทั้งอาจประยุกต์ใช้แนวคิดนี้ในธุรกิจบริการอื่นที่เกี่ยวข้อง ผู้ประกอบการธุรกิจบริการที่ประยุกต์ใช้การประเมินคุณภาพการบริการทั้ง 2 มิติ จะมีศักยภาพและโอกาสในปรับปรุงคุณภาพการบริการเพื่อตอบสนองความพึงพอใจของลูกค้าได้มากยิ่งขึ้น

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Introduction

Spa tourism has been gaining in popularity over recent decades (Han, Kiatkawsin, Kim & Lee, 2017) due to the increasing demand of consumers to enjoy a better quality of life and well-being (Quintela, Costa & Correia, 2016). In Thailand, the spa market has grown rapidly owing to the increasing health-consciousness of Thai and international consumers (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017), the expansion of the spa businesses, the popularity of spa services, the welcoming hospitality, and the inexpensive cost (Ministry of Public Health, 2019). Today, spa tourism is one of the major tourism leisure activities currently promoted by the Thai government to stimulate the country's economic growth (Klaysung, 2016; Ministry of Public Health, 2019).

As one of the major tourism leisure activities, spa business provides the services or experiences that involve a direct service encounter between spa staff and customers. Most spa products are services-oriented and strongly affected by staff services and their performances. The spa business, therefore, is a high-contact service industry which mostly requires staff to provide customized services for customers (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Sangpikul, 2019). Customers perceive the quality of spa services through staff performance. Service quality is, therefore, vital to the spa business in terms of staff's ability to provide customers with high value spa experiences that meet customer expectations.

Given the importance of service quality, many scholars are interested to conduct research about spa service quality during the past decade both in Thai context (e.g. Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Sangpikul, 2019) and international literature (e.g. Klaysung, 2016; Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017; Lo, Wu, Tsai, 2015). This is because service quality is an important issue for service businesses in delivering the services that correspond to customers' expectations and satisfactions. Inside service quality, scholars are more likely to understand that the measurement of service quality is judged through customers' personal opinion about the services (how the service is). However, there are some attributes of service quality that customers can judge based on the fact of the service (what is given/offered). With this regard, many scholars may overlook to further analyze that the measurement of service quality may be separately into personal judgment and fact-based judgment.

According to a review of past studies about spa service quality (e.g. Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Choi, Kim, Lee, & Hickerson (2015); Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019), it was observed that some measurement items were relevant to customer opinion regarding the service or staff performance. For example, some studies asked customers about how they perceived the quality of the service, or the friendliness of spa employees. Whereas, some items were associated with the fact or the practice customers could identify or observe. For instance, several studies gave questions for customers if spa employees asked them about their personal needs before the treatment

or the service was given promptly (without delay). Given such information, it is arguable to make an assumption that the service quality measurement may be further categorized into personal opinion and fact-based opinion. In other words, personal opinion may refer to subjective judgment which is generally involved with customers' personal feeling or emotion about the services and staff's hospitality (e.g. willingness, friendliness, smiling). Meanwhile, fact-based opinion may refer to objective judgment which is mainly associated with the fact or what customers can evidently identify or observe during the services (e.g. physical environment, service procedure or product information). However, in hospitality and tourism literature, rare effort has discussed about the subjective and objective assessment in service quality.

Given this gap in the literature, this article may be the first discussion in tourism and hospitality literature with an objective to discuss the service quality with 2 dimensions through the subjective and objective assessment. The discussion will yield more extended knowledge or another aspect of service quality in hospitality and tourism literature so that spa business and other service providers (e.g. hotels, airlines, restaurants, tour operators) can apply this knowledge to their businesses. A service business that implements both subjective and objective measurement will be more likely to gain better service quality and better business performance due to receiving more customer responses than one side feedback from personal judgment. The following outline of the article will be 1) concept of subjective and objective assessment 2) spa literature 3) the analysis of service quality in relation to subjective and objective assessment, and 4) conclusion, contribution, and implementation for spa business.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of subjective and objective assessment

This part will discuss a concept of subjective and objective assessment before further analyzing it in relation to the service quality measurement. In fact, the subjective and objective assessment is not a new concept in academic studies. These two terms have been common used in several fields of social sciences. A review of literature indicates that the concept of subjective and objective assessment is not a theory or the principles. Scholars used and applied them in their studies based on the common or basic meanings of the words. According to Cambridge Dictionary (2020), subjective is the state of personal beliefs or feelings, rather than based on facts while objective is an approach that based on real facts and not influenced by personal beliefs or feelings. In other words, facts are usually claimed to be objective and opinions are relatively subjective (Chigot, 2005; Rasdi, Ismail, & Garavan, 2011). As implied by the meanings, scholars from different fields have widely and freely used them to find out appropriate answers, methods or solutions to their studies. In a formal meaning, subjective assessment may refer to a measure that deals with what people feel, judge or interpret about a product or service,

and the subjective information is based on personal feeling, opinions, interpretations, and emotions (Boyle & Lathrop, 2013; Zehrer, Smeral, & Hallmann, 2017). In contrast, the objective assessment generally refers to a measure that deals with what people can count, measure or identify something, and the objective information is obvious, fact-based, measurable or observable (Chang et al., 2004; Zehrer et al., 2017). In order to provide an overview of the use of subjective and objective assessment in various disciplines, related past studies are analyzed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Analysis of related studies about subjective and objective assessment

Related studies	Subjective assessment	Objective assessment
Chieot (2005) used the subjective and objective assessment to examine the effects of sound in offices in Sweden. The study had the objective to test if sound in offices affected employees' work performance by using two instrument which were subjective indicators (e.g. stress, work attention, work privacy) and objective assessment (e.g. test, puzzles, behavior changes). The study found that noise pollution from work offices such as people talking, mobile phones and office equipment could disturb and reduce employees' work performance. The study argued that subjective and objective assessment were effective tools to examine employees' work performance in various situations.	personal judgment	Tests, behavior, observation
Rasdi, Ismail, & Garavan (2011) investigated the factors affecting objective and subjective career success of managers working in Malaysian public sector. The objective career success was measured by fact-based judgment on salary, bonus, vacations, and other benefits while the subjective career success was measured by respondents' personal perception on work position, job responsibility and job satisfaction. The study revealed that the objective and subjective career success of Malaysian managers in public sector were influenced by different factors such as individual factors (e.g. self-efficacy, self-esteem, career aspirations) and organizational factors (e.g. organizational support and organizational socialization). The authors stressed the importance of incorporating both objective and subjective measures in order to more fully understand career success.	personal judgment	numeric information
Dianat, Vahedi, & Dehnavi (2016) examined the association between objective and subjective assessments of environmental ergonomic factors in three manufacturing plants in Iran. The study collected objective data from environmental factors including noise, lighting and heat in the working environment (through numeric information), and obtained subjective information from employee satisfaction, job performance, health and safety (through individual perception). The study found that noise, lighting and heat in the working environment negatively affected workers' satisfaction, job performance, health and safety, and suggested for more appropriate control on working environment factors. The authors suggested that quantitative objective measurement should be supplemented by qualitative subjective assessment to provide more specific and details about the environmental conditions in workplace and consequently to improve workers' productivity.	personal perception	numeric information

Related studies	Subjective assessment	Objective assessment
Wei, Meng, & Zhang (2017) examined the factors influencing Chinese citizens' outbound destination choice to Europe/USA based on the objective (e.g. demographics and time/money constraints) and subjective measures (e.g. happiness). The results revealed that the demographic characteristics and time and money constraints (objective variables) significantly influenced Chinese citizens' outbound destination choice while happiness (subjective variable) was not found such relationship. The study implied that using objective and subjective variables in order to provide comparable and reliable results.	personal opinion	demographics information
Liu, He, & Xu (2019) applied the subjective and objective information to evaluate the advancement of government-private-partnership projects in China. To evaluate the project advancement, a reasonable assessment method was required. The researchers used a combination of subjective and objective information to calculate the attribute weights for the evaluation. The subjective information was collected through the interviews with project stakeholders in terms of their personal opinion (good, medium, bad) while the objective information was collected through the numbers (statistics) from websites. The study found that 19 projects in China had different level of advancement, and required government monitor. The authors claimed that the objective information and the subjective information were complementary in the project evaluation process.	personal opinion	numeric information

According to Table 1, there were studies examining subjective and objective assessment in various disciplines such as human resource management, public administration, applied sciences, and tourism. They used subjective and objective information/approaches in different aspects, for example, to measure work quality, to improve work performance, or to measure the achievement of the projects. According to the analysis, past studies used and applied the subjective and objective approaches (e.g. variables, factors, information) in their studies in order to provide more accurate, reliable or complementary solutions or answers to their problems. This is because the purposes of subjective and objective assessment are different and serve different benefits. Scholars use subjective assessment to obtain people's personal judgment on certain issues while objective assessment is employed to obtain more reliable sources or fact through observation, changed behavior/performance and numeric data. Combing two (or more) approaches are argued to yield more accurate, more reliable information, and less bias (Rasdi et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2019). All studies argued that using the combination of both subjective and objective approaches can avoid prejudice/bias, and will yield more satisfactory, appropriate or reliable results rather than using only one approach. This suggests that the subjective and objective approaches (assessments) can be applied to a wide range of studies due to greater benefits.

With these reasons, this article aims to further analyze if the measurement of service quality could be categorized into subjective and objective assessment due to earlier argument (assumption). If yes, the finding will provide the extended knowledge or another aspect of service quality in hospitality and tourism field so that scholars and service industries can make use of it to specifically measure the quality of staff, quality of the service, service process or even physical facilities more accurately/appropriately. It should be noted that the use of subjective and objective approaches/assessment from the above studies may focus on different features of subjective and objective concept depending on the content of each study (e.g. HR, public sector, applied sciences). With this article, it will analyze the subjective assessment in terms of what spa services (attributes) customers are more likely to judge based on their personal feeling/opinion (e.g. staff performance, hospitality) while the objective assessment will analyze in terms of what attributes of spa services (fact of the service) customers can evidently identify or indicate from the services (e.g. process, physical environment). Next parts will be the review of spa literature and relevant topics.

General information about spa

The term ‘spa’ originally referred to health through water, but nowadays spa is understood to refer to water-based facilities that offer diverse types of treatments and care for health, relaxation and beauty (Hashemi et al., 2015). A spa business provides services related to health promotion. The main products of spa businesses are massage and body treatments, and they may have additional services such as beauty treatments, saunas, exercise for health, nutrition programs, yoga and meditation courses (Ministry of Public Health, 2019). According to the International Spa Association (2012), there are seven major types of spas: day spa, club spa, medical spa, mineral spring spa, resort & hotel spa, cruise ship spa, and destination spa.

In Thailand, the majority of health-related establishments are day spas, and they are widely found in major tourism cities where many tourists use day spa services during their leisure time (Ministry of Public Health, 2019). In general, a day spa is a business that provides facilities on a day-use basis by primarily offering rejuvenating and renewing spa treatments. Day spas usually offer a wide range of spa treatments in a calm and nurturing environment and in private treatment rooms so that each client can receive a personal service (Day Spa Association, 2008). People use the services of day spas to revitalize their physical and mental health (Lo et al., 2015). Day spas are directly related to wellness tourism, which refers to health and well-being-related travel through physical, psychological, or mental activities (Dimon, 2013). During holiday trips, tourists may seek various services and activities to enhance their wellness and well-being from day spas such as beauty treatments, body massages, Thai massages, and other health-related activities.

In addition, the Ministry of Public Health (2003 cited in Chieochankitkan, 2013) also has classified spa establishments in Thailand into 3 categories:

1) Spa business for health refers to a business that concerns for the care and reinforcement of health. Major services are related to the massage for health, and use of water for health. Other minor services include sauna for health, exercise for health, nutrition and dietary, yoga, meditation, use of herb and healthy products, as well as alternative medicine.

2) Massage business for health refers to a business that aims to relax muscle tension, fatigue, and stress with massage techniques including friction, wringing, press, manipulation, traction, compress, sauna/steam or any techniques according to the science and art of massage for health.

3) Massage business for beauty refers to a business that mainly provides massage services for beauty such as a beauty salon. The purpose of this business is to provide various techniques including friction, wringing, press, manipulation, traction, compress, sauna/steam or any techniques according to science and art of massage for beauty.

Service quality and spa studies

Spa business mainly sells an ‘experience’ that includes beauty care, massage services, and health-related treatments (Wuttke & Cohen, 2008). The spa experience does not only rely on physical services, but also includes mental well-being by including relaxation and resting activities (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008). As previously stated, the spa business is a service-oriented business in which the service is mainly delivered by people. Most spa products are services (e.g. treatments and beauty care). These services are highly related to staff performance. In this regard, customers perceive the quality of spa services through the assessment of how the services correspond to their needs and expectations. Due to these distinct features, service quality is important for spa service providers in understanding what customers expect and need.

One approach to gain deeper insights into spa services and their performance is through service quality which was defined as a function of the difference between expectations and performance along the quality dimensions (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1988). In other words, service quality as a conceptualization, is a comparison of perceived expectations of a service with perceived performance (Lewis & Booms, 1983). It is a concept that describes the evaluation of how well a delivered service meets customer expectations (Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015; Lo et al., 2015). Ideally, most scholars usually measure service quality based on the actual service performance (actual perception) due to less complexity rather the comparison between expectation and performance because of more complexity (Lo et al., 2015; Akbar, 2013). In the business setting, the service providers (e.g. hotels, spas) often assess service quality directly from customers’ actual perception in order to improve their services and enhance customer

satisfaction (Sangpikul, 2019). Service quality is, therefore, an important issue for tourism businesses, including spa establishments, in order to understand how well their services meet customer expectations. Understanding these issues may help businesses to improve customer services as well as to enhance customer satisfaction and business performance (Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015; Lo et al., 2015). In order to measure service quality, SERVQUAL model (or service quality dimensions) is employed. SERVQUAL is a multi-dimensional research instrument designed to measure consumer expectations and perceptions of the service in terms of 5 dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1988): 1) reliability 2) assurance 3) tangibility 4) empathy and 5) responsiveness. These five dimensions may be referred as RATER model, an abbreviation from the first letter of each of the five dimensions. Previous studies used RATER model to examine spa service quality through various contexts (Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Gonzalez & Brea, 2005; Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019).

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 gaps 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 et al. (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. Another study, Sangpikul (2019) examined customers' e-complaints at day spas in Thailand's major tourism cities, and analyzed them in relation to service quality

dimensions. With the content analysis through the data collection from TripAdvisor, the study found that the major e-complaints were related to the poor skills of spa therapists, poor services, and non-recommendations for using spa services. In relation to service quality dimensions, the most complaints were associated with reliability, assurance, and responsiveness, respectively.

Given the existing literature, it seems that service quality is an essential tool for spa service providers in understanding what customers expect and need. Understanding in-depth of service quality will give more rooms for spa business to improve their services more appropriately. Unfortunately, past studies may overlook to further analyze that the service quality may be further categorized into sub-groups. Based on past studies' findings as reviewed above, the first sub-group related to the measurement that was relatively judged by customers' personal opinion. For example, past studies asked customers to judge if spa staff were friendly and polite or spa environment was comfortable and relaxing. This judgment seems to be likely influenced by several factors such as customer expectation, their personal feeling or emotion (Rasdi et al., 2011; Sangpikul, 2019). Meanwhile, the second sub-group was more likely to be judged on what (fact) customers could identify from the services. For instance, the studies asked customers to judge if spa staff delivered the services as promised or if spa staff asked customers about their personal needs. The latter judgment seems to be based on the fact or what is actually given to customers during the services (sometimes yes/no answer). Given this analysis, it can be argued that the measurement of service quality may be classified into personal judgment (subjective assessment) and fact-based judgment (objective assessment). In order to prove this argument (see Tables 2 and 3), it is necessary to further analyze the measurement of service quality in the next section.

The analysis of service quality measurement from past studies

This part will analyze the measurement of service quality with a purpose to confirm (prove) if service quality items from past studies can be categorized into the subjective and objective assessment. A literature review indicates that most spa studies developed service quality items (measurement items) through a mixture (no classification) of subjective and objective dimensions. Scholars may overlook to deeply analyze or classify service quality into more meaningful constructs in terms of 2 dimensions (personal feeling and fact/observed services). Table 2 presents the mixture of service quality items from past studies (i.e. Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Choi, Kim, Lee, & Hickerson, 2015; Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019), whereas the author also analyzes and classifies them into subjective and objective dimensions. This analysis will help to better understand what is "subjective service quality" and "objective service quality".

Table 2: Analysis of service quality measurement from past studies

Sources	Mixture of service quality items from past studies	Subjective service quality (personal judgment)	Objective service quality (fact-based judgment)
Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Spa staff perform excellent service. -Spa staff take good care of customers. -Spa staff offer prompt service. -Spa establishment performs according to agreed promises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Spa staff perform excellent service. -Spa staff take good care of customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Spa staff offer prompt service. -Spa establishment performs the duty according to agreed promises.
Choi, Kim, Lee, & Hickerson (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The quality of spa water and treatments was excellent. -The service of staff is good. -The staff gives details about spa facilities and programs. -There were several spa programs to choose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The quality of spa water and treatments was excellent. -The service of staff is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The staff give details about spa facilities and programs. -There were several spa programs to choose.
Lo et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The employees are professional in providing services. -The employees are polite. -The employees explain the charges clearly. The spa has convenient operating hours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The employees are professional in providing services. -The employees are polite. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The employees explain the charges correctly. -The spa has convenient operating hours.
Sangpikul (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Spa environment is beautiful. -Spa staff are welcoming and friendly. -Spa staff ask customer's health needs. -Spa staff can speak English fluently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Spa environment is beautiful. -Spa staff are welcoming and friendly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Spa staff ask customer's health needs. -Spa staff can speak English fluently.

According to Table 2, regarding the subjective service quality, customers were asked to judge how they felt or perceived about spa services based on their personal opinion. Different people may have different perceptions on the subjective approach and make various (different) judgment (Sangpikul, 2019). In contrast, for the objective service quality, customers were also asked to indicate if they received or experienced certain services from spa employees based on their fact-based judgment. With the objective approach, people are more likely to perceive the fact of the service/process in a similar

way than the personal judgment (Boyle & Lathrop, 2013). Given this analysis, it is evident (proved) that the measurement of service quality items can be categorized into personal judgment and fact-based judgment. In other words, personal judgment may be specifically called “subjective service quality” while the fact-based judgment may be specifically called “objective service quality”. Next, to ensure and to re-check the above argument in service quality, it is necessary to perform another analysis of subjective and objective assessment in relation to the 5 dimensions of service quality before a conclusion.

The analysis of subjective and objective assessment with the 5 dimensions of service quality

This part will further analyze if the subjective and objective assessment can be fully applied to each dimension of service quality before making a final conclusion. It aims to give more applicable and concrete approach to the use of subjective and objective assessment in service quality dimensions so that scholars and spa managers may apply them more appropriately in their work or business. Table 3 presents the analysis of subjective and objective assessment with the 5 dimensions of service quality. The measurement items are employed from past studies again (i.e. Chieochankitkan & Sukpatch, 2014; Choi et al., 2015; Lo et al., 2015; Sangpikul, 2019), whereas the author also analyzes and classifies them into subjective and objective assessment under each dimension of service quality.

Table 3: Analysis of subjective and objective assessment with the 5 dimensions of service quality

Service quality dimensions and measurement items	Subjective service quality (subjective items)	Objective service quality (objective items)
1. Reliability (ability to perform services accurately/correctly) - Receptionist provides good customer service. - Spa therapist performs excellent services. - Spa therapist is skillful in the services provided. - Spa therapist provides you with the service as promised. - Receptionist tells you the detailed information about spa facilities. - Receptionist explains you the prices correctly.	- Receptionist provides good customer service. - Spa therapist performs excellent services. - Spa therapist is skillful in the services provided.	- Spa therapist provides you with the service as promised. - Receptionist tells you the detailed information about spa facilities. - Receptionist explains you the prices correctly.

Service quality dimensions and measurement items	Subjective service quality (subjective items)	Objective service quality (objective items)
2. Responsiveness (willingness to assist customers and provide prompt services) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receptionist is always willing to help customers. - Spa employees are polite and friendly. - Spa employees answer your enquiries promptly. - Receptionist/therapist delivers prompt services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receptionist is always willing to help customers. - Spa employees are polite and friendly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spa employees answer your enquiries promptly. - Receptionist/therapist delivers prompt services.
3. Empathy (caring services or individual attention) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spa therapist knows/understands your needs. - Spa therapist provides you with customized services. - Spa employees ask your needs before giving the service. - Spa employee conducts health survey before the treatment. - Spa entrepreneur has a choice of treatment rooms for customer to select. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spa therapist knows/understands your needs. - Spa therapist provides you with customized services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spa employees ask your needs before giving the service. - Spa employee conducts health survey before the treatment. - Spa entrepreneur has a choice of treatment rooms for customer to select.
4. Tangibility (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and environment) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spa employees are well groomed. - Spa place has a comfortable environment. - Spa place is not crowded. - Treatment room has proper temperature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spa employees are well groomed. - Spa place has a comfortable environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spa place is not crowded. - Treatment room has proper temperature.
5. Assurance (ability to convey trust and confidence) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spa products are good quality. - Customers feel safe in their transactions. - Spa equipment are hygienic. - Cleanliness of spa facilities. - Treatment room is quiet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spa products are good quality. - Customers feel safe in their transactions. - Spa equipment are hygienic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cleanliness of facilities. - Treatment room is quiet.

According to Table 3, it shows that the measurement items of service quality from each dimension can be well applied and categorized into subjective and objective service quality. For example, given the subjective assessment of reliability dimension, customers were asked to judge about staff's performances or customer service. On the other side, the objective assessment asked customers to judge about the promised service, product

information and service price. In another case of responsiveness dimension, customers were asked to personally judge about the friendliness of staff (subjective), meanwhile they were also asked to indicate if the service or treatment was given promptly or done without delay (objective). Following Table 3, subjective and objective assessment can be well implemented to each dimension of service quality. In particular, realizing that service quality can be measured subjectively and objectively will help spa managers to design or modify the measurement items more specifically in order to assess the quality of their services more properly.

This part will discuss for the benefits of subjective and objective service quality. Given the past studies' findings (before knowing the concept of subjective and objective service quality), some studies gave recommendations mainly on the service improvement (subjective side) regarding staff's skills and work performances, and may ignore or overlook the objective side (e.g. Lo et al., 2015). Also, several scholars were more likely to make recommendations based on each dimension in general or wide scope, rather than be more specific in certain areas, making the recommendations somewhat unclear (e.g. Sangpikul, 2019). For instance, given the poor service of treatment or unsatisfactory customer service (reliability), past recommendation was likely to focus on staff's skill training or staff development rather than other aspects of reliability dimension. But when we learn about the subjective and objective service quality, the recommendation under reliability dimension will involve with 2 sides. One is to focus on skill training to yield the expected service and to make customers satisfied (subjective side) while another one will emphasize on the objective side (what customers can observe or identify from the service) such as staff's promise, staff's knowledge and correct payment. Likewise, if a treatment service is excellent (high service quality) but receptionist does not inform customer about an availability of promotional rate when check-in plus a mistake on customer bill. Given this situation, how a guest can judge if the spa business has high service quality on reliability dimension. What happens here is that most scholars seem to focus on giving the recommendations to provide the excellent service (how customer feels) but may overlook to pay attention to what customers are observing (objective side), which both sides will contribute to high service quality (not only one side). Take another example of assurance dimension, it is a common practice to keep spa rooms and all equipment hygiene to enhance high service quality (subjective) but if the business provides a treatment room that customer can hear people talking outside all times (objective) with no privacy. This example may well reflect that the spa business seems to focus on the hygiene standard because customers can subjectively perceive it but may overlook the fact-based judgment that people not prefer noise disturbance during the service.

Given the above explanation, now spa managers can see wider scope of service quality in detail and learn what service is judged by customers' personal opinion and fact-

based judgment (based on Tables 2 and 3). They may learn more to provide higher service quality that the business should not focus only one side of the service but it should also care about what customers can objectively perceive or experience. The subjective and objective service quality, therefore, can help spa managers to manage or improve their services or tasks more thoroughly and appropriately in most areas by not focusing only one area. In addition, they may also learn to apply what attributes of services can be measured either subjectively or objectively for better service improvement to make customers more satisfied.

Conclusion, contribution, and implementation

To conclude, this article is an initial discussion to analyze the concept of subjective and objective assessment and service quality in the hospitality and tourism, given the case of spa business. It has achieved its purpose by proving that the measurement of service quality items can be categorized into subjective and objective approaches; extending the knowledge about service quality measurement. As an analyzed-based work, this article has a different way of writing an academic article by starting with an enquiry or making an assumption if the service quality could be categorized into personal judgment and fact-based judgment. Then, it made literature review and analyzed the service quality measurement with 2 stages in order to prove and ensure that the service quality items were able to be classified into what is called “subjective assessment” (personal judgment) and “objective assessment” (fact-based judgment). Through the 2-stage analyses, finally it was evident and confirmed that the service quality measurement (including individual item and each dimension) can be categorized into subjective and objective assessment. Therefore, the article can give the important contribution to academic community as well as the implication for spa business and other service industries.

To contribute, this article contributes to the deeper understanding of spa service quality in terms of subjective and objective assessment. It has expanded the aspect or scope of service quality in spa business by classifying this concept into “subjective service quality” and “objective service quality” or in another word “subjective and objective assessment of service quality” that can be applied to other service industries (e.g. hotels, airlines, tour operators). Given earlier discussion in the literature review, many studies usually measured service quality items directly from customers’ actual perception (perceived performance) due to less complexity rather than the difference between expectation and perceived performance (more complexity). This article, therefore, is appropriate to define a measurement of service quality in terms of perceived performance for future studies. A measurement of subjective service quality may refer to an evaluation of perceived service performance through personal or emotional judgment

while a measurement of objective service quality is an evaluation of perceived service performance through fact-based judgment.

Furthermore, a review of literature indicates that past studies were more likely to emphasize the measurement of service quality on subjective approach rather than the objective judgment due to the lack of related literature and understanding about the subjective and objective service quality in hospitality and tourism field. Understanding this aspect of service quality will help scholars and spa practitioners 1) clearly understand what is called “subjective” and “objective” in service quality and 2) modify, adjust or balance the measurement items of service quality to reflect both customers’ subjective and objective judgments, and 3) plan, design or modify the measurement items more appropriately to suit research objectives and contents. The analyses in Tables 2 and 3 are a good learning source for building a survey instrument for either an academic or a business purpose. For a measurement scale, a review of literature indicates that typically most scholars used a rating scale (Likert scale) in terms of level of agreement (strongly agree/strongly disagree) to measure customer perception of service quality (Han et al., 2017; Lo et al., 2015). Alternatively, some scholars used the same rating scale but in terms of level of satisfaction (very satisfied/very unsatisfied) to measure customer satisfaction towards the service quality (Cevik & Simskek, 2017; Gonzalez & Brea, 2005). With slightly different objectives/purposes, both measurement scales are appropriate to be applied. In addition, some objective items may be modified to be yes or no answer.

For future research direction in tourism and wellness industries, scholars may apply the concept of subjective and objective service quality to their studies either a quantitative or qualitative approach. For instance, the quantitative approach, researchers may measure customer perception or relationships/impacts of subjective and objective service quality on dependent variables such as customer satisfaction, customer emotion, spa experience, repeat purchase and word-of-mouth communication. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach, researchers may use the subjective and objective service quality assessment for interview purpose or to analyze the secondary data or documentary information (e.g. online customers’ reviews) to further understand the construct (a group of comments) of customers’ personal judgment and fact-based feedback from using spa services. Both approaches contribute to the literature of spa service quality.

To implement, according to the article, it is argued that the assessment of spa service quality should be measured on both 2 dimensions (subjective and objective assessment) because they will help spa managers to get more detail of customers’ points of view on different aspects (getting more information). Since the measurement of service quality (SERVQUAL) has been criticized in some aspects that they may not fully applied or covered to certain services of various service businesses (Lo et al., 2015; Tamagni, Micheli, & Zanfardini, 2003), it is suggested that some subjective and objective items may be identified/modified from customers and spa managers’ points of view in order to suit the

nature of the business. Thanks to the discussion of subjective and objective service quality in this article, scholars and spa managers may modify the measurement items in subjective and/or objective dimension to fit their contexts more appropriately. For instance, the subjective assessment may be used to ask customers about their feeling or judgment about the services in terms of staff's hospitality, friendliness, professional experiences and service skills. Whereas, the objective assessment may be used to ask customers about what they can identify or tell about the fact of the services (e.g. service procedure/process, facilities, product information, and physical environment). The subjective assessment will benefit spa managers by receiving the information from customers' feeling in regard to the services, staff performances/skills, and staff personality/character. The service improvement may be concentrated on the development of staff skills and training to deliver the better service quality as customers expect. Meanwhile, the objective assessment will benefit spa managers regarding service procedures/process and physical elements. With the fact-based feedback, the service improvement may be emphasized on staff's knowledge about spa products and services, spa procedures and the development of physical environment. Improving service quality through the objective approach is argued to be easier than the subjective one because it is fact-based assessment, and customers can obviously or evidently provide their feedback. Interestingly, the objective dimension may assist spa managers in adding fact-based service quality measurement such as health-related check-up, health examination or new/modified services to provide differentiated or better services. Overall, using both the subjective and objective customer assessment will be a great tool for service managers to enhance their business services and customer satisfaction, leading to higher business success. Other service industries relying on service quality (e.g. hotels, tour operators, restaurants, wellness business) may learn and apply a concept of subjective and objective assessment to improve their services more effectively. A service business that understand their performance through subjectively and objectively are more likely to gain better service quality and higher customer satisfaction due to receiving customers' complete information.

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