

PERCEIVED CUSTOMER LOYALTY TOWARD GREEN HOTELS: A STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS IN THE SOUTH OF THAILAND

Nontipak Pianroj

Martin de Tours School of Management and Economics, Assumption University

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the simultaneous relationships between destination image, green image, and perceived service quality on both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty through customer satisfaction and green satisfaction toward green hotels and the South of Thailand. The results illustrated that destination image has significant and positive relationships with customer satisfaction, which influences both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty toward the south of Thailand. Moreover, green image and perceived service quality have significant and positive relationships with both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty toward green hotels through green satisfaction. Furthermore, both customer satisfaction and green satisfaction have significant impacts on customer loyalty in both green hotels and the South of Thailand.

Keywords: Destination Image, Green Image, Green Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Green Hotel, International Tourist

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้ได้ทำการศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างภาพลักษณ์ของแหล่งท่องเที่ยว ภาพลักษณ์เพื่อสิ่งแวดล้อม และการรับรู้คุณภาพการบริการกับความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้าทั้งในส่วนของทัศนคติและพฤติกรรม โดยผ่านตัวแปรกลางคือความพึงพอใจของลูกค้าและความพึงพอใจต่อสิ่งแวดล้อมที่มีต่อ โรงแรมที่อนุรักษ์สิ่งแวดล้อมในภาคใต้ของประเทศไทย ผลของการวิจัยพบว่า ภาพลักษณ์ของแหล่งท่องเที่ยวมีความสัมพันธ์กับความพึงพอใจของลูกค้าและมีผลต่อทัศนคติและพฤติกรรม ความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้าต่อภาคใต้ นอกจากนี้ภาพลักษณ์เพื่อสิ่งแวดล้อม และการรับรู้คุณภาพการบริการมีความสัมพันธ์ต่อความพึงพอใจต่อสิ่งแวดล้อมและมีผลต่อทัศนคติและพฤติกรรมความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้าต่อ โรงแรมที่อนุรักษ์สิ่งแวดล้อม ทั้งนี้ ความพึงพอใจของลูกค้าและความพึงพอใจต่อสิ่งแวดล้อมมีความสัมพันธ์เชิงเปรียบเทียบกับทัศนคติและพฤติกรรมความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้าทั้งในส่วนของ โรงแรมที่อนุรักษ์สิ่งแวดล้อมและภาคใต้ของประเทศไทย

คำสำคัญ: ภาพลักษณ์สถานที่ท่องเที่ยว, ภาพลักษณ์การรักษาสภาพแวดล้อม, ความพึงพอใจกับการรักษา สภาพแวดล้อม, ความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้า, โรงแรมที่อนุรักษ์สิ่งแวดล้อม, นักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติ

INTRODUCTION

Today, the level of environmental awareness has increased, and hotel businesses are expected to conduct business in ways that are deemed environmentally or ecologically responsible. Several factors have led to shift in expectations, which include customers' demand for hotel facilities to become more environmentally friendly. Furthermore, there has been an increase in environmental regulations at all juris-

dictional levels, which make hotel companies concerned about business ethics and socially responsible business practices.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is a government organization that directly promotes Thai Tourism worldwide. TAT sets marketing policies and marketing plans every five years with different focuses on each region in Thailand and other countries in the world. To increase environmental concerns about tourism in Thailand, TAT is moving forward to "Green

Tourism". Nowadays, TAT continues to identify and propose interesting options for eco-friendly travel, such as, the Green Hotels to enrich the experiences of visitors who need environmental friendly hotels, and also, to encourage providers in Thailand's travel sector to concentrate on environmental awareness. Green hotels refer to hotels which have received Green Leaf Certification. The Green Leaf Certification Program is a eco label for those who practice environmental efficiency in complementing their hotel activities. In 2012, there were 281 certified Green Leaf hotels in Thailand (greenleafthai.org, 2012). Green hotels have to be reassessed every two years. Most green hotels continue to be reassessed by Green Leaf Certification Program according to international standards, and they attract international tourists who are looking for environmentally friendly hotels (.Green hotels in Thailand", 2012).

However, the international standards offered by the Green Leaf Certification Program to green hotels are insufficient to satisfy and retain their customers. Green hotel image and service quality are important factors in increasing customer satisfaction which may in turn result in loyal customers. Kandampully & Suhartanto (2000) recommended that a strong green image for hotels not only satisfied customers, but also encouraged the attainment of loyal customers. Perceived service quality is one of the crucial factors to evaluate hotel performances which impacts customer satisfaction (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010; Nadiri & Hussain, 2005; Vijayadurai, 2008) and leads to customer loyalty (Akbar et al., 2010; Oh, 1999).

The image of a destination also attracts and encourages people to visit (Lew, 1987). Previous studies have indicated that the destination characteristics such as natural attractions, tourism infrastructure, atmosphere, safety, and reputation influenced tourists to visit (Byon & Zhang, 2010; Garcéa et al., 2004; Lin et al., 2007). These destination characteristics represent the destination image for places. Furthermore, researchers have pointed out that if tourists are satisfied with the destination image, they are likely to visit, create positive word-of-mouth, and revisit the same destination (Chi & Qu, 2008; Chung & Shin, 2004). Even though there has been a lot of hotel research in previous literature, there are limited studies on green hotels (e.g. Lee et al., 2010). Previous studies suggested that green image has a potential influence on

customer loyalty towards green hotels (Lee et al., 2010). Moreover, Chen (2010) suggested that green image impacts customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Robinot and Giannelloni (2010) pointed out that green image influences customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. Thus, this study seeks to contribute to the knowledge by investigating the relationships between green image, perceived service quality, and customer loyalty through green satisfaction towards green hotels.

This study concentrates on green hotels in the south of Thailand, thus, the image of the destination is considered to determine customer loyalty towards the south of Thailand. Previous studies recommended that destination image influences customer satisfaction (e.g. Ibrahim & Gill, 2005; Pizam et al., 1978) which in turn affects, customer loyalty (Chi & Qu, 2008; Chung & Shin, 2004).

However, previous studies (e.g. Chi & Qu, 2008; Chung & Shin, 2004; Heung et al., 1996; Lee et al., 2010) were undertaken on either destination image or green image to examine customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Therefore, this study is conducted on both destination image and green image to determine customer loyalty towards green hotels in the south of Thailand. In addition, this study also seeks to find whether those people who are happy with destination are likely to revisit the same hotel and those who are satisfied with green hotel tend to visit the same destination.

Regarding customer loyalty, most previous literature in tourism research has investigated the relationships between destination image, green image, perceived service quality, and customer satisfaction on attitudinal loyalty (e.g. Akbar et al., 2010; Chung & Shin, 2004; Heung et al., 1996), but there are limited studies focusing on behavioral loyalty (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008). Hence, this study uses both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty to provide a better understanding in measuring customer loyalty towards green hotels in the south of Thailand.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this research are:

Objective 1: To investigate the impact of destination image on customer satisfaction which in turn influences customer loyalty.

Objective 2: To examine the impact of green

image and perceived service quality on customer loyalty toward green hotels through green satisfaction.

Objective 3: To determine the relative importance of customer satisfaction and green satisfaction in influencing both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty toward green hotels and the south of Thailand.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Destination Image

In tourism, it has been found that developing the right image for a destination leads to true expectations and in turn, satisfies visitors. The destination plays a pivotal role in influencing the choice process, the evaluation of the said destination and the future intentions of a tourist (Bigné et al., 2001). The development of each destination depends on identifying how tourists perceive the destination's tourism products and how these products are designed to satisfy the needs of the target market. Destination image is differently classified in both the functional and symbolic attributes of each destination product which leads to a clearer evaluation of their image. Beerli & Martin (2004) recommended that destinations with a strong, consistency, distinct and recognizable image, would create a positive image for the destination and would have a higher likelihood of being chosen.

Green Image

Green image refers to a specific brand of green hotels which have environmentally friendly attributes. A green hotel image is defined as "a set of perceptions of a brand in a consumer's mind that is linked to environmental commitments and environmental concerns" (Chen, 2010, p.312). Cognitive and affective image components would influence decision making behaviors including evaluation (satisfaction) and future behavioral intentions (Bigné et al., 2001; Chon, 1990; Joppe et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2010). Chon (1990) pointed out that a strong brand image is essential for a service to ensure strong positioning in order to entice potential tourists. Therefore, attempts to provide appropriate classification of cognitive and

affective image in a hotel are important for the management to improve overall customer satisfaction and encourage customer loyalty (Claver et al., 2006; Holverson & Revaz, 2006).

Perceived Service Quality

Service quality is one of the crucial factors for the success of any service organization because customers participate in the delivery and consumption of services, and they interact closely with various aspects of organizations. Mei et al. (1999), who developed the HOLSERV scale, suggested five dimensions of service quality: reliability; responsiveness; assurance; empathy and tangibles. They found that responsiveness, assurance, and empathy represent the quality of employees in the hotel business. The HOLSERV scale places emphasis on the role of the employee because they have direct interaction with customers. Furthermore, Yoo & Park (2007) found that employees are an integral part of the service process and a critical element in enhancing perceived service quality.

Customer Satisfaction

Researchers have developed and validated several models of customer satisfaction in variety of industries and countries. They have assessed customer satisfaction based on: expectancy/disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980); equity (Oliver & Swan, 1989); importance-performance (Martilla & James, 1977); and perceived overall performance (Tse & Wilton, 1988). However, expectancy/disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980) is generally accepted as the construct that best explains customer satisfaction. In the hotel industry, Dominici and Guzzo (2010) recommended that service quality impacts customer satisfaction. Also, Robinot and Giannelloni (2010) suggested that green attributes have positive significance for customer satisfaction. Moreover, customer satisfaction was a mediating influence between service quality and customer loyalty (Akbar et al., 2010). Regarding destination image, previous literature recommended that destination image influences customer satisfaction (Ibrahim & Gill, 2005) which led to visitors' intent to revisit the destination (Nowacki, 2009).

Customer Loyalty

Researchers in various contexts, including the hotel industry, have identified the attitudinal approach which conceptualizes loyalty as an attitude toward the brand (Morais et al., 2004), an attachment (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Pritchard et al., 1999), a commitment (Baloglu, 2002; Pritchard et al., 1999), and an intention (Johnson et al., 2006; Kandampully & Hu, 2007; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Researchers posited that behavioral loyalty could be measured in terms of repeat purchases of a brand over time (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). However, the measurement of behavioral loyalty in a tourism context is particularly difficult, unlike repeat purchases of consumer products, as most tourists are not likely to visit the same place frequently or regularly (Opperman, 1999). Furthermore, Anuwichanont and Mechinda (2009) stated that loyalty is hard to measure because the repetitive purchase might be due to convenience, habit or lack of alternatives. Previous studies have concentrated more on attitudinal loyalty than behavioral loyalty, especially in the hotel industry. However, the use of both attitude and behavior in a loyalty definition substantially increases the predictive power of loyalty (Pritchard & Howard, 1997). The two-dimensional composite measurement approach has been applied and supported as a valuable tool to understand customer loyalty in several fields, such as retailing, recreation, upscale hotels and airlines (Day, 1969; Jacoby & Kyner, 1973; Pritchard & Howard, 1997; Pritchard et al., 1992).

The investigation of the factors influencing customer loyalty toward green hotels involves a two-stage process. Stage one uses an exploratory research using a qualitative study of in-depth interviews. Stage two uses a quantitative study of survey with standardized questions to gather data from the target respondents.

Exploratory Research

The purpose of conducting exploratory study was to complement the literature and confirm key variables of literature in this study. To understand marketers' perspectives as well as consumers' perspectives, exploratory study results were obtained from in-depth interview of three groups: TAT officers, green

hotel managers, and green hotel customers. The content analysis approach is appropriate for this study in identifying important aspects and analyzing interview results in order to reveal people's information-related behaviors and thoughts (Malhotra, 2007). The findings are consistent with the theoretical background of this study. Some quotations here support the exploratory research findings as follows:

"It is beautiful and private atmosphere. The facilities such as accommodations and transportation are good" (Green hotel customer).

"This (green) hotel has a good idea about green concepts; it is a good marketing advantage to give a green profile when compared to the others" (Green hotel customer).

"The green hotels have more advantages over other non green hotels. Customers make decisions on environmental management. And this type of hotel usually has better services actually" (TAT officers).

"I am very happy and there is a very family-type atmosphere" (Green hotel customer).

"This is a second time in the south; I like the nature and atmosphere" (Green hotel customer).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 is developed based on the literature review, and the results of the exploratory research. (Figure 1)

The research hypotheses are classified into two groups. The first group entails the relationships between destination image, green-image, perceived ser-

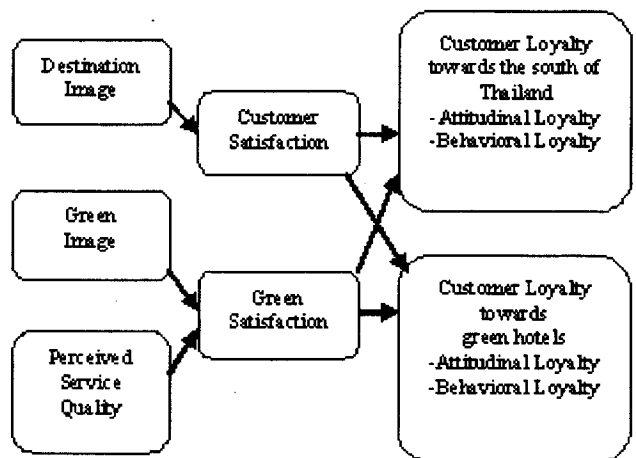


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

vice quality, green satisfaction, and customer satisfaction. The second group posits the mediating relationship between customer satisfaction and green satisfaction, and customer loyalty.

H1: Destination image is positively related to customer satisfaction

H2: Green image is positively related to green satisfaction with green hotels

H3: Perceived service quality in terms of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles is positively related to green satisfaction with green hotels

H6: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between destination image and customer loyalty

H7: Green satisfaction mediates the relationship between green image and customer loyalty in green hotels

H8: Green satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty in green hotels

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on six hotels and resorts that were successfully assessed and which received The Green Leaf Certification in the south of Thailand in 2010; Phuket (two hotels and resorts), Krabi (one resort), and Samui Island, Suratthani (three hotels and resorts) (*Green Hotels & Resorts Thailand*, 2010). The respondents were international tourists staying at six green hotels during the data collection period (June 20 to July 25, 2012). A total of 600 questionnaires were equally distributed in the six green hotels. The questionnaires were placed in guest rooms and restaurants depending on each green hotel manager's decision and suggestion. Exploratory factor analysis is used to purify the items representing constructs followed by confirmatory factor analysis to test how well the measurement variables represent the constructs before analyzing the structural equation model.

FINDINGS

A total of 431 questionnaires were returned (the response rate was 71.83%). A total of 22 uncom-

pleted questionnaires were removed from the 431 questionnaires. Data cleaning is used to ensure that the data have been entered correctly and are free from any error. All of the data entries were double checked, and then frequency tests were conducted using SPSS software to confirm that all values were within appropriate ranges. After data cleaning, 409 questionnaires were usable. Hence, the usable response rate was 68.20%.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis was performed to purify the scale to ensure its reliability before using the scale to test the hypotheses. Furthermore, EFA explored the data and provided the results about the number of factors that are needed to best represent the data (Hair et al., 2006). There are two main constructs representing multi-items: destination image and perceived service quality.

The factor loading of destination image reported only four constructs; natural characteristics (five items), tourism infrastructures and facilities (five items), attractions (five items), atmosphere and social ambience (four items). Using the criterion with eigen value of 1 or greater, these four constructs were retained, accounting for 67.12% of the total variance. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of natural characteristics, tourism infrastructures and facilities, attractions, and atmosphere and social ambience varied from 0.85 to 0.89 which exceed the recommended level of 0.70 (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally, 1978).

There are four constructs representing perceived service quality. They are reliability (five items), assurance (five items), empathy (five items), and tangibles (six items). Each initial eigen value of four constructs was greater than one which exceeded the acceptable level, accounting for 75% of the total variance. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.92 to 0.93 which exceed the recommended level of 0.7 (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally, 1978).

The result of the exploratory factor analysis were validated to conduct the confirmatory factor analysis.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The results revealed that the chi-square goodness-of-fit test $\chi^2/df = 2.54$, $p < 0.001$ showed that the

model fits the data well. The baseline comparisons fit indices model showed a marginal acceptable fit for the hypothesized model that was close to 0.90 (NFI = 0.85; RFI = 0.83; IFI = 0.90; TLI = 0.89; CFI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.061). The measurement model of green hotels in the south of Thailand revealed the NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI values were close to 0.90, indicating an acceptable fit which supports its construct validity, convergence validity and discriminant validity. The results of CFA demonstrated that structural equation model (SEM) could be further tested.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

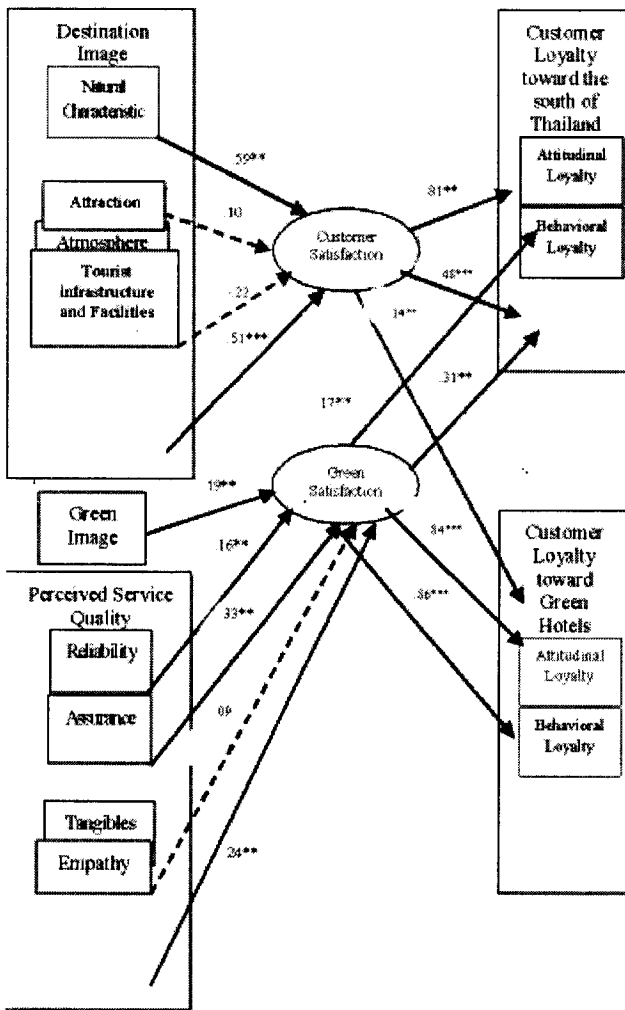


Figure 2: Structural Equation Model of Perceived Customer Loyalty toward Green Hotels

Notes: $\chi^2/df = 2.73$, $p < 0.001$; NFI = 0.83; RFI = 0.82; IFI = 0.89; TLI = 0.88; CFI = 0.89; RMSEA = 0.065

The results in Figure 2 reveals that the chi-square goodness-of-fit test $\chi^2/df = 2.73$, $p < 0.001$. The baseline comparisons fit indices model shows a marginal acceptable fit for the hypothesized model (NFI = 0.83; RFI = 0.82; IFI = 0.89; TLI = 0.88; CFI = 0.89; RMSEA = 0.065). In addition, the square multiple correlation (r^2) indicates that 81% of the changes in customer satisfaction is explained by destination image, and 90% of the variance in green satisfaction is accounted for by green image and perceived service quality. For the variation in customer loyalty toward the south of Thailand, 85% of the variance in attitudinal loyalty and 50% of the variance in behavioral loyalty jointly influences customer satisfaction and green satisfaction. For the variation in customer loyalty toward green hotel, 86% of the variance in attitudinal loyalty, and 82% of the variance in behavioral loyalty jointly influences customer satisfaction and green satisfaction. Therefore, the structural relationships among the constructs reflect the hypotheses statements in this study and the results of hypothesis testing are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Hypotheses Test Results

The Hypothesized Relationships	Hypotheses Test Results
H1: Destination image is positively related to customer satisfaction.	Partially Supported
H2: Green image is positively related to green satisfaction with green hotels.	Supported
H3: Perceived service quality in terms of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles is positively related to green satisfaction with green hotels.	Partially Supported
H4: Customer satisfaction is positively related to customer loyalty among green hotels.	Supported
H5: Green satisfaction is positively related to customer loyalty in green hotels.	Supported
H6: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between destination image and customer loyalty.	Supported
H7: Green satisfaction mediates the relationship between green image and customer loyalty in green hotels.	Supported
H8: Green satisfaction mediates relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty in green hotels.	Supported

DISCUSSION

The results of this study achieved the research objectives and answered the research questions. The findings are discussed in the next section.

The results of the demographic characteristics of respondents and their experiences staying at green hotels and the south of Thailand show that most are male, 25 to 35 years old, had completed a bachelor degree, and had a professional occupation. These findings indicate that most of the respondents staying at the green hotels were relatively young, highly educated, and professional. In addition, the results show that the majority of international tourists visiting Thailand came from European and East Asian countries. These results are quite consistent with the information about the percentage nationality share of international tourist arrivals in Thailand provided by the Department of Tourism. Moreover, the results also illustrate that the promotional policy of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in focusing on European tourists and East Asian tourists seem to be effective due to the high percentage of respondents who revisited green hotels and the South of Thailand. Hence, these findings imply that most respondents are loyal customers. In addition, the average mean score of customer loyalty showed that most respondents have both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. However, respondents are likely to have attitudinal loyalty rather than behavioral loyalty toward the South of Thailand while they are likely to have both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty toward green hotels

Four constructs, natural characteristics, tourism infrastructure and facilities, attractions, atmosphere and social ambience represent destination image in this study. However, only two constructs, natural characteristics and atmosphere and social ambience have a significant relationship with customer satisfaction about the destination. Consistent with a previous study conducted by Pizam et al. (1978) in the US, natural characteristics have a significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction. Moreover, a significant and positive relationship between atmosphere and social ambience and customer satisfaction is also consistent with the study conducted by Ibrahim and Gill (2005) in Barbados. In addition, the results show that natural characteristics such as natural scenery, a clean environment, pleasant weather, and unique flora and fauna

are more important in influencing customer satisfaction compared to atmosphere and social ambience such as political stability, easy access, and safety. It is indicated that destinations which offered natural scenery, a clean environment, pleasant weather, and unique flora and fauna have highly attracted and satisfied customers which is supported by the study of LeBlanc and Nguyen (1996) and Hu and Wall (2005). Moreover, the findings are also consistent with the exploratory study results that green hotel customers were mostly satisfied with the natural characteristics and atmosphere in the south of Thailand.

The results indicate that tourism infrastructure and facilities and attractions are not significantly related to customer satisfaction. The findings are consistent with the study conducted by García et al. (2004) in Valencia, Spain. In their study, tourism infrastructure and facilities were not found to have a relationship with customer satisfaction. However, the findings are inconsistent with the study conducted by Hankinson (2004; 2005) in business tourism organizations, UK. Based on the findings, green hotel customers are found to prefer natural scenery, a clean environment, pleasant weather, unique flora and fauna, political stability, easy access, and safety rather than good facilities and cuisine, good level of price, and value for money while visiting the south of Thailand. Moreover, since the majority of international tourists in this study are from developed countries, the cost of living in Thailand might appear to be relatively low for them and they might not consider attractions such as the level of price and value for money.

Furthermore, customer satisfaction has a mediating effect between destination image and customer loyalty. It is indicated that if green hotel customers are satisfied with the south of Thailand, they are likely to have attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty toward the south of Thailand. The findings are consistent with previous studies which found that customer satisfaction has a mediating effect between destination image and attitudinal loyalty (Chung & Shin, 2004); and between destination image and behavioral loyalty (Chi & Qu, 2008).

In addition, the results also determined that if green hotel customers are satisfied with the south of Thailand, they are likely to have attitudinal loyalty toward green hotels in revisiting intention, willingness to provide positive word-of-mouth and recommendations

to others, and the willingness to stay at similar green hotels if unavailable. However, customer satisfaction with green hotels does not necessarily lead to behavioral loyalty. This finding is also supported by the study by Bigné et al. (2001) who suggested that high level of satisfaction with the destination image has an important role in influencing future intentions and creating positive word-of-mouth about tourism products, such as accommodation.

The findings also indicated that green image is significantly and positively related to green satisfaction. The results are consistent with previous literature (Faullant et al., 2008; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). The findings also supported the study of Chen (2010) who pointed out that the higher the level of green image, the greater the level of green satisfaction. Furthermore, the results also confirmed that there is a significant and positive relationship between green image and customer loyalty through green satisfaction toward green hotels. It is illustrated that the higher the level of green satisfaction, the greater the customer loyalty towards green hotels. If green hotel customers are satisfied with green hotels, their attitudinal loyalty tends to increase the intention to revisit, the willingness to provide positive word-of-mouth, to make recommendations to others, the willingness to stay at similar green hotels if their first choice is unavailable, and behavioral loyalty such as recommendation and positive word-of-mouth. The findings were supported by Robinot and Giannelloni (2010) who studied attributes of green hotels and concluded that green hotels should maintain a high level of green attributes which could satisfy and retain green hotel customers. These findings are consistent with the exploratory study results. In conclusion, green image is an important factor to satisfy and attain loyal customers toward green hotels and the South of Thailand. Maintaining green image for customers not only enhances the competitiveness of hotels but also encourages customers to revisit the South of Thailand.

Regarding perceived service quality, the results show that reliability, assurance, and tangibles were significantly and positively related to green satisfaction. Empathy was not related to green satisfaction and is inconsistent with the study of Mei et al. (1999). However, the results are consistent with previous studies that green hotel customers are concerned and satisfied with reliability, such as handling service prob-

lems, performing the service correctly at the first time, providing precise service information, and providing prompt services by the staff (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010; Vijayadurai, 2008), assurances in terms of safety and security (Vijayadurai, 2008), and tangibles, such as quality of facilities and equipment (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010; Nadiri & Hussain, 2005) provided by green hotels.

Among the components of perceived service quality, assurance has a greater influence in determining green satisfaction, followed by tangibles and reliability. The results indicate that green hotel customers are highly concerned with safety and security during their stay at green hotels. These findings are congruent with the study by Nadiri and Hussain (2005) about European tourists in Northern Cyprus hotels which provide operating hours convenient to customers and where customers feel safe in transactions with hotels. However, this study did not support the findings of Hu et al. (2009) on hotel guests in Mauritius, which maintained that empathy, such as staff giving individual attention to customers and staff understanding customers' specific needs, has the greatest impact on customers satisfaction.

Furthermore, the results also demonstrated that there is a significant and positive relationship between perceived service quality and customer loyalty through green satisfaction toward green hotels. It is indicated that the greater the level of green satisfaction, the higher the level of the customer loyalty towards green hotels. The findings are consistent with the study of Hu et al. (2009) which was conducted with hotel guests in Mauritius and Akbar et al. (2010) who conducted the study with hotel guests in Penang, Malaysia.

In addition, the findings indicate that perceived service quality has a significant and positive relationship with both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty toward the South of Thailand through green satisfaction. The results showed that when green hotel customers are satisfied with the perceived service quality of hotels, they would have both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty toward the South of Thailand.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings provide valuable contributions and recommendations to both academics and practitio-

ners in the hotel and tourism industry. For academics, the combination of destination image and green image can extend knowledge to previous models, and the composite of attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty can provide a better understanding of measuring customer loyalty than previous studies. In addition, the results provide a better understanding than previous literature in determining the relative importance of customer satisfaction and green satisfaction on customer loyalty. For practitioners, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and green hotels need to work together to enhance destination image, green image, and perceived service quality. Moreover, the cooperation of TAT and green hotel managers can enhance environmental awareness training programs to green hotel staff every year. This training can provide a better understanding of environmental awareness in Thai tourism and worldwide. At the same time, TAT could provide updated information which reflects TAT policy to green hotels staff. Furthermore, the cooperation of all parties including international tourists is necessary to maintain the environment and environmental policies can be extended to all regions in Thailand. It will not only enhance hotel revenue but also other related tourism businesses because when international tourists are happy with the green image and perceived service quality, they are likely to revisit the same hotels and destinations. In addition, the governmental policy of safety regulation is also strongly needed to convince international tourists to revisit green hotels and the south of Thailand.

References

- Akbar, S., Puad Mat Som, A., Wadood, F., & Alzaidiyeen, N. J. (2010). Revitalization of service quality to gain customer satisfaction and loyalty. *International Journal of Business and Management* 5(6), 113-122.
- Anuwichanont, J., & Mechinda, P. (2009). The impact of perceived value on spa loyalty and its moderating effect of destination equity. *Journal of Business & Economics Research*, 7(12), 73-89.
- Backman, S. J., & Crompton, J. L. (1991). Differentiating between High, Spurious, Latent, and Low Loyalty Participants in Low Leisure Activities. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 9(2), 1-17.
- Baloglu, S. (2002). Dimensions of customer loyalty: Separating friends from well wishers. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 43(1), 47-59.
- Beerli, A., & Martin, J. D. (2004). Factors influencing destination image. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31, 657-681.
- Bigné, J. E., Sanchez, M. I., & Sanchez, J. (2001). Tourism image, evaluation variables and after purchase behavior: Inter-relationship. *Tourism Management*, 22, 607-616.
- Bowen, J., & Chen, S.-L. (2001). The relationship between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 13(5), 213-217.
- Bowen, J., & Shoemaker, S. (1998). Loyalty: A strategic commitment. *Cornell H.R.A. Quarterly*, 2, 12-25.
- Byon, K. K., & Zhang, J. J. (2010). Development of a scale measuring destination image. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 28(4), 508-532.
- Chen, Y. (2010). The driver of green brand equity: green brand image, green satisfaction, and green trust. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 92(3), 307-319.
- Chi, C., & Qu, H. (2008). Examining the structural relationships of destination image and destination loyalty: An integrated approach. *Tourism Management*, 28, 624-636.
- Chon, K. (1990). The Role of Destination Image in Tourism: A Review and Discussion. *The Tourist Review*, 45(2), 2-9.
- Chung, K.-H., & Shin, J.-I. (2004). The relationship between destination cues of Asian countries and Korean tourist images. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 14(2), 82-100.
- Churchill, A. (1979). A paradigm for developing better measures of marketing constructs. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 16, 64-73.
- Claver, E., Andreu, R., & Quer, D. (2006). Growth strategies in the Spanish hotel sector: Determining factors. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 18(3), 188-205.
- Day, G. S. (1969). A two-dimensional concept of brand loyalty. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 9(3), 29-35.

- Dominici, G., & Guzzo, R. (2010). Customer satisfaction in the hotel industry: A case study from Sicily. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 2(2), 3-12.
- Faullant, R., Matzler, K., & Fu?ller, J. (2008). The impact of satisfaction and image on loyalty: The case of Alpine ski resorts. *Managing Service Quality*, 18(2), 163-178.
- García, H., Saura, I., García, R., & Gallarza, M. (2004). The "sun and beach" tourism destination image: An application to the case of Cuba from the spa tourist-origin market. *Tourism Review*, 59(1), 16-24.
- Green Hotels & Resorts Thailand*. (2010). Bangkok: Tourism Authority of Thailand
- Green hotels in Thailand*. (2012). Retrieved May 5, 2012, from www.greenleafthai.org
- greenleafthai.org. (2012). Green hotels in Thailand. Retrieved May 5, 2012
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, G. J., Anderson, R. E., & Tatham, R. L. (Eds.). (2006). *Multivariate Data Analysis* (6th ed.). New Jersey: Pearson.
- Hankinson, G. (2004). The brand images of a tourism destination: A study of the saliency of organic images. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 13(1), 6-14.
- Hankinson, G. (2005). Destination brand image: A business tourism perspective. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 19(1), 24-33.
- Heung, V. C., Mok, C., & Kwan, A. (1996). Brand loyalty in hotels: An exploratory study of overseas visitors to Hong Kong. *Australian Journal of Hospitality Management*, 3(1), 1-11.
- Holverson, S., & Revaz, F. (2006). Perceptions of European independent hoteliers: Hard and soft branding choices. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 18(5), 398-413.
- Hu, H., Kandampully, J., & Juwaheer, D. (2009). Relationships and impacts of service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and image: An empirical study. *The Service Industries Journal*, 29(2), 111-125.
- Hu, W., & Wall, G. (2005). Environmental management, environmental image and the competitive tourist attraction. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 13(6), 617-635.
- Ibrahim, E. E., & Gill, J. (2005). A positioning strategy for a tourist destination, based on analysis of customers' perceptions and satisfactions. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 23(2), 172-188.
- Jacoby, J., & Kyner, D. B. (1973). Brand loyalty vs. Repeat purchasing behavior. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 10(1), 1-9.
- Johnson, M. D., Herrmann, A., & Huber, F. (2006). The evolution of loyalty intentions. *Journal of Marketing*, 70, 122-132.
- Joppe, M., Martin, D. W., & Waalen, J. (2001). Toronto's image as a destination: A comparative importance-satisfaction analysis by origin of visitor. *Journal of Travel Research*, 39, 252-260.
- Kandampully, J., & Hu, H.-H. (2007). Do hoteliers need to manage image to retain loyal customers? *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 19(6), 435-443.
- Kandampully, J., & Suhartanto, D. (2000). Customer loyalty in the hotel industry: The role of customer satisfaction and image. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 6(12), 346-351.
- LeBlanc, G., & Nguyen, N. (1996). An examination of the factors that signal hotel image to travelers. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 3(1), 32-42.
- Lee, J., Hsu, L., Han, H., & Kim, Y. (2010). Understanding how consumers view green hotels: How a hotel's green image can influence behavioral intention. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 6(18), 901-914.
- Lew, A. A. (1987). A framework of tourist attraction research. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 14(4), 553-575.
- Lin, C. H., Morais, D. B., Kerstetter, D. L., & Hou, J. S. (2007). Examining the role of cognitive and affective image in predicting choice across natural, developed, and theme-park destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46, 183-194.
- Malhotra, N. K. (Ed.). (2007). *Marketing Research: An Applied Orientation* (5th ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Martilla, J. A., & James, J. C. (1977). Importance-performance analysis. *Journal of Marketing*, 41(1), 13-17.
- Mei, A. W. O., Dean, A. M., & White, C. J. (1999). Analyzing service quality in the hospitality industry. *Managing Service Quality*, 9(2), 136-143.

- Mohsin, A., & Lockyer, T. (2010). Customer perceptions of service quality in luxury hotels in New Delhi, India: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 22(2), 160-173.
- Morais, D. B., Dorsch, M. J., & Backman, S. J. (2004). Can tourism providers buy their customers' loyalty? Examining the influence of customer-provider investments on loyalty. *Journal of Travel Research*, 42(3), 235-243.
- Nadiri, H., & Hussain, K. (2005). Perceptions of service quality in North Cyprus hotels. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 17(6), 469-480.
- Nowacki, M. M. (2009). Quality of visitor attractions, satisfaction, benefits and behavioural intentions of visitors: Verification of a model. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 11, 297-309.
- Nunnally, J. (Ed.). (1978). *Psychometric theory* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Oh, H. (1999). Service quality, customer satisfaction and customer value: A holistic perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 18, 67-82.
- Oliver, R. (1980). A cognitive model of the antecedent and consequences of satisfaction decisions. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 17(September), 46-49.
- Oliver, R., & Swan, E. (1989). Consumer perceptions of interpersonal equity and satisfaction in transactions: A field survey approach. *Journal of Marketing*, 53(April), 21-35.
- Opperman, M. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(Special issue), 33-34.
- Pizam, A., Neumann, Y., & Reichel, A. (1978). Dimensions of tourist satisfaction with a destination area. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 53, 314-322.
- Pritchard, M., Havitz, M., & Howard, D. (1999). Analyzing the commitment loyalty link in service contexts. *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, 27(3), 333-348.
- Pritchard, M., & Howard, R. (1997). The loyal traveler: Examining a typology of service patronage. *Journal of Travel Research*, 35(4), 2-11.
- Pritchard, M., Howard, R., & Havitz, E. (1992). Loyalty measurement: A critical examination and theoretical extension. *Leisure Sciences*, 14, 155-164.
- Robinet, E., & Giannelloni, J. (2010). Do hotels' "green" attributes contribute to customer satisfaction? *Journal of Service Marketing*, 24(2), 157-169.
- Tse, D. K., & Wilton, P. C. (1988). Models of consumer satisfaction formation: An extension. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 25(2), 204-212.
- Vijayadurai, J. (2008). Service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intention in hotel industry. *Journal of Marketing & Communication*, 3(3), 14-25.
- Yoo, D. K., & Park, J. A. (2007). Perceived service quality: Analyzing relationships among employees, customers and financial performance. *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*, 21(9), 908-926.
- Zeithaml, A., Berry, L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The behavioral consequences of service quality. *Journal of Marketing*, 60, 31-46.

About the author:

Nontipak Pianroj graduated with a PhD in Marketing from Martin de Tours School of Management and Economics, Assumption University. She can be reached at sala_oil@yahoo.com.