



การประชุมวิชาการระดับชาติ “การเรียนรู้ด้านมนุษยศาสตร์และด้านสังคมศาสตร์” ครั้งที่ 3  
คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏสวนสุนันทา  
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## A Study on the Characteristics and Service Quality of Selected Boutique Hotels in Bangkok

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### Abstract

The popularity of the boutique hotel is getting famous day by day due to the uniqueness of the hotel architectural decoration, themes, intimate services, and the new trend of travelers. There are four objectives in this research. The first objective is to investigate hotel managers' and guests' understanding about the characteristics of boutique hotels in Bangkok. The second objective is to distinguish between boutique hotel managers' and boutique hotel guests' point of view about service quality requirements in selecting boutique hotels in Bangkok. The third objective is to identify the challenges that boutique hotels in Bangkok have faced in relation to the guests' service quality requirements, and the last objective is to identify the factors that satisfy and dissatisfy guests during their stay in boutique hotels in Bangkok. The qualitative method with the semi-structured interview was chosen by the researcher to gather information from the five boutique hotel managers and twelve international tourists who had stayed or were staying in the boutique hotel in Bangkok. Additionally, the constant comparison analysis method is used to analyze the necessary data collected from the interviews. The interview was conducted in Bangkok between 25th June to 12th July, 2019. The result revealed that both boutique hotel managers and boutique hotel guests have almost the same understanding about the characteristics and service quality of the boutique hotel in Bangkok, yet they used different ways to describe their opinion about it. In conclusion, the finding showed that the boutique hotel managers in Bangkok seem to understand a lot about their customer needs and wants. However, the misunderstanding between them is still there, so the improvement is still required for the hotel to take into account, such as investing more on human resource development and focusing more on the local Thai design as a priority.

**Keywords :** Boutique hotel, Challenge, Characteristic, Perspective, Requirement, Service quality



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## Introduction

Thailand is one of the most famous tourist destinations in the world with countless tourist attractions all over the country. Tourism is surely one of Thailand's key economic growth drivers and will remain an important part of the economy in the future. As a result, the number of international tourist arrival to Thailand reached its peak with a record of 38.27 million tourists in 2018, up 7.5% from 2017 (Bangkok Post, 2019). Unsurprisingly, due to the significant growth in the number of international tourist arrival and domestic tourists in Thailand plus their huge expenditure which is contributed to Thai economy, both Thai and foreign investors have used these opportunities to invest in the hotel industry in tourist destinations in Thailand, such as Chiang Mai, Phuket, and especially the capital city of Thailand, Bangkok. Hence, all kinds of accommodations can be found in Bangkok, including luxury hotels, motels, resorts, guesthouses, hostels, and boutique hotels.

The boutique hotel is an accommodation type with a different architectural structure, minimum number of rooms and offers their guests with personalized service as small hospitality businesses (Anhar, 2001). Due to the increasing worldwide popularity of boutique hotels, especially from the United States and the United Kingdom, where the first boutique hotel was built, it has influenced a lot to the development trend in Thailand accommodation industry. However, with more and more boutique hotels opening in Bangkok, the competition among old boutique hotels and new ones are getting tougher and tougher; hence as a hotelier they have to be smart and know how to differentiate their products and services from other hotels and also have to understand customers' perception and expectation as well as the new trend which is always changing all the times. On the other hand, because there is no clear definition of “Boutique hotel” was officially made and recognized worldwide, it is hard to identify the specific characteristics of the boutique hotels and classify which hotels are truly belonging to this category. This leads to customers' misunderstanding and dissatisfaction about boutique hotels.

### There are four research objectives

RO 1: To investigate hotel managers' and guests' understanding about the characteristics of boutique hotels in Bangkok.

RO 2: To distinguish between boutique hotel managers' and boutique hotel guests' point of view about service quality requirements in selecting boutique hotels in Bangkok.

RO 3: To identify the challenges that boutique hotels in Bangkok have faced in relation to the guests' service quality requirements.



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RO 4: To identify the factors that satisfy and dissatisfy guests during their stay in boutique hotels in Bangkok.

## Literature Review

- **The characteristics of boutique hotel**

The term “boutique hotel” is started in the 1980s by Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager, who owned the Morgans Hotel in New York City, USA (Beachwood Custom, 2019). However, due to the fact that there are no official definitions of the boutique hotel, many previous researchers, scholars and some organizations have created their own definition and the characteristics of this kind of hotel based on their research and experiences.

Anhar (2001) explained, the boutique hotel should have room number not more than 150 rooms with the personalized service and can be located in many areas, such as city downtown, resort, or in the forest. However, Siggs (2004) and Ismail et al. (2014) had the same idea that the boutique hotels should offer homely feeling with personalized services to the guests by using heritage buildings and local culture as the design concept. Srinivas et al. (2013) explained the characteristics of a boutique hotel as the hotel that has modern, stylish design, offer intimate services to the guests and located in the city. Similarly, Potocakova (2015) defined boutique hotels are city center hotel with unique heritage design and high service quality. Day et al. (2013) used the term of customize service, stylish design plus high technology and modern amenities in the hotel room to identify the characteristics of the boutique hotel. Horner (2005) and Erkutlu (2006) had similar ideas about the boutique hotel as a small hotel with modern style and stylish furniture and focus more on personalized service as the priority. Dev et al. (2005) reported that the characteristics of the boutique hotel include upscale service, mid-range price, and modern and lifestyle amenities.

According to the aforementioned definitions and characteristics of the boutique hotel, which are given by many authors, it shows many similarities and some differences among them. These similarities and differences occurred because each research was conducted in different places, by different authors with different perceptions and experiences. In summary, the main purpose of the boutique hotel is to offer to the guest with a homely feeling, intimate relationship, excellent service quality, and unique experience through hotel design, architecture, and services.

- **Service quality**

Service quality is a concept that is hard to define its real meaning and measure due to the fact that it depends on consumers’ assessment, whether the service quality meets



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their expectation or not. For better understanding, dividing this word from each other and define them separately is necessary. According to Business Dictionary (2019), service refer to a valuable action or performance for satisfying a need or to fulfill a demand of the consumer. Blois (1974) defined service as the activities offered for sale, which for the buyers' satisfaction and their benefit. On the other hand, quality as value or meeting or exceeding the expectation of consumer (Ekinci, 2008). According to Juran (1988), he defined quality as the features of services which meet consumers' expectation and lead to their satisfaction. Generally, service quality is measured individually by each consumer who experienced the service, and the result of the assessment is different from one person to another person depending on their own experiences with it whether the level of service meets their needs, wants and expectation or not. In addition to this, service quality was stated as the degree and direction of the discrepancy between customers' expectations and perceptions (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

### Methodology

The qualitative method was used in this research for gathering data. The semi-structured interview was chosen by the researcher to gather information from the boutique hotel managers and international tourists who had stayed or were staying in the boutique hotels in Bangkok. twenty open-ended questions were prepared for the interview, which was divided into two parts – For boutique hotel managers (eleven questions) and tourists (nine questions). For the sample size of this study, the researcher chose to interview five boutique hotels managers and twelve international tourists, which took place in Bangkok between June 25<sup>th</sup> to July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Accordingly, the researcher decided to choose standard boutique hotels with three-star and four-star rating for this study due to their huge numbers of this type in Bangkok and their popularity among international tourists. As a result, five boutique hotels have been selected for the interview due to their hotel type, star rating and price ranges which are matched with the topic and the availability of the hotel managers.

Furthermore, twelve international tourists have been selected for the interview in Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Khao San Road, Siam Paragon, Central World and selected boutique. The reason why the researcher chose the airport as the place for collecting information because the airport is the best place where most of the international tourists gather there, especially they have much time for answering every question in details. In addition to this, Khao San road, Central World, and Siam Paragon are the best places to find international tourists who stay in the boutique hotels because of the huge numbers of



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boutique hotels within that area and the popularity of these places among tourists. Besides, the constant comparison analysis method is used to analyse the necessary data collected from the interviews.

### Data Analysis

The researcher used Constant Comparison Analysis method to analysis the data by coding the key information from the interview transcripts of the boutique hotel managers and the boutique hotel guests using manual coding. After finding the code, the researcher will be able to find out the similarities and differences of the perspective of boutique hotel managers and boutique hotel guests about the characteristics and service quality of boutique hotels in Bangkok.

### Findings

The aim of the study is to determine the perspective of the boutique hotel managers and the boutique hotel guests, whether they have the same understanding of the characteristics and service quality of the boutique hotels in Bangkok or not. In order to find out the similarities and differences between them, the comparison of both perspectives about the characteristics of the boutique hotels, service quality requirements, service quality challenges, and guest satisfying/dissatisfying factors is needed.

- **The characteristics of boutique hotel**

The characteristics of the boutique hotels have been defined by many authors around the world, which included size, location, design, service, and quality provided, according to (Omanukwue, 2011). In this research, the hotel managers certainly described the characteristics of the boutique hotels based on the five characteristics above, but they tended to emphasize on the service delivery than other characteristics. All of them chose service delivery as the priority for their boutique hotels and described service delivery as the key driver for the success of the hotel business. They concluded, if the hotel service quality is excellent, it will impress the guests' feeling and make them satisfy with the hotel. In contrast, if the service quality is not good enough or below the guests' expectation, even the hotel has the best room design, or in the best location, the guests will make their judgment for overall hotel services and products as below standard.

For the boutique hotel guests, most of them seem to distinguish the characteristics of the boutique hotels from other types based on the hotel design rather than the hotel service delivery. Most of them described the boutique hotel as the hotel with a unique



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design, small, modern, stylish, excellent service quality, personalized service, strong personality, and located in the city center or suburb.

After comparing both perspectives of the hotel managers and the hotel guests, the result reveals that both of them had almost the same understanding of the characteristics of the boutique hotels. Although the way they described and emphasized are different due to the fact that the boutique hotel managers described the characteristics by focusing on the personalized service as the priority and mentioned that the location of the boutique hotel can be located anywhere, whereas the boutique hotel guests emphasized more on the unique room design than other things and described the boutique hotel as the hotel in the city center.

- **Service quality requirements of boutique hotels**

The boutique hotel managers had more specific answers about service quality requirements in their hotels than the guests. They divided service quality requirements into two dimensions – tangible products and intangible products. For tangible products, they mentioned the design in the hotel room, the food quality, and the quality of the hotel facilities. For intangible products, they focused on employee interaction, the quality of service delivery, the hotel environment, and the relationship between the hotel employees and the guests.

On the other hand, when asking about the service quality requirements in boutique hotels to the hotel guests, most of them described it based on their feeling and expectation about the service quality in term of the employee performances and their psychological security. Only a few of them described it about the room design, facilities, or location.

Comparing both perspectives, the finding showed the similarities of their perspectives of service quality requirements of boutique hotels in Bangkok, including unique room design, excellent employee interaction, excellent service performances, and high quality of the hotel facilities. Although, there are some differences between both perspectives, the boutique hotel managers mentioned about the high quality of foods and the excellent hotel environment, whereas the guests focused on the good location of the hotels and their psychological security including their safety, security, especially privacy.

- **Service quality challenges of boutique hotels**

Based on the answers of the boutique hotels managers, which is related to the challenges of the hotels, they divided it into two types, which is come from both internal and external factors. They described the challenges of the internal factors as the challenges that occurred inside the hotel area or under the hotel’s control, such as the poor condition of the hotel building, the employee turnover, staffing limitation, language barrier, technical



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difficulties, and the hotel budgetary constraint. On the contrary, the challenges of the external factors have been described as the challenges caused by the hotel guests or caused by other external factors, such as the unethical guests, the high guests' expectation, and traffic jam, etc. These above challenges were the main obstacles which prevented the boutique hotels from matching the guests' expectations and hard to improve their service quality.

Also, there are some challenges that the boutique hotel guests have faced in relation to the hotel service quality, such as the language barrier between them and the hotel's employees, the qualities of the hotel facilities which is not good enough, the employee problems including their bad behavior and unskilled, and the unethical hotel guests. One more problem that the guests also mentioned was the difference between the hotel room and its photos posted online. Some of the hotel guests said, the photos they saw on the OTA was perfect, but when they entered the room, everything was different and really disappointed.

After comparing both perspectives about challenges they have faced regarding service quality in the boutique hotels, the finding showed that the hotel managers seem to describe more in details about challenges they have faced including internal and external factors due to their huge experiences within this industry. However, when talking about challenges, most of the guests emphasized only on the problems regarding service delivery of the hotel employees, whereas a few of them mentioned about the difference between photos of hotel rooms and its reality.

- **Guest satisfying/dissatisfying factors in boutique hotel**

All managers mentioned that it was hard to separate between the factors that make guests satisfy or dissatisfy with the hotel, but they emphasized that employee factor was essential for satisfying customers but also could to customers' dissatisfaction as well, if something went wrong. Besides employee factor, other factors also play key roles for satisfying the guests too, including hotel environment, service performances, room design, technology, quality of the hotel facilities, price, other guests' attitude, and guests' emotion.

The guests identified their satisfaction depended on how happy they were with what they received from the hotel, such as personalized service, excellent room design, good environment, good price, excellent employee interaction, etc. Likewise, for the factors that dissatisfy them were those based on what they received was below their expectation or gave them bad experiences during their stay, such as bad employees' behavior, language barrier, the room design was too simple, slow services, etc.



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Although, the guests described the factors that make them satisfied or dissatisfied with the hotel, but the answers they gave are the same as those of the hotel managers.

### Conclusion

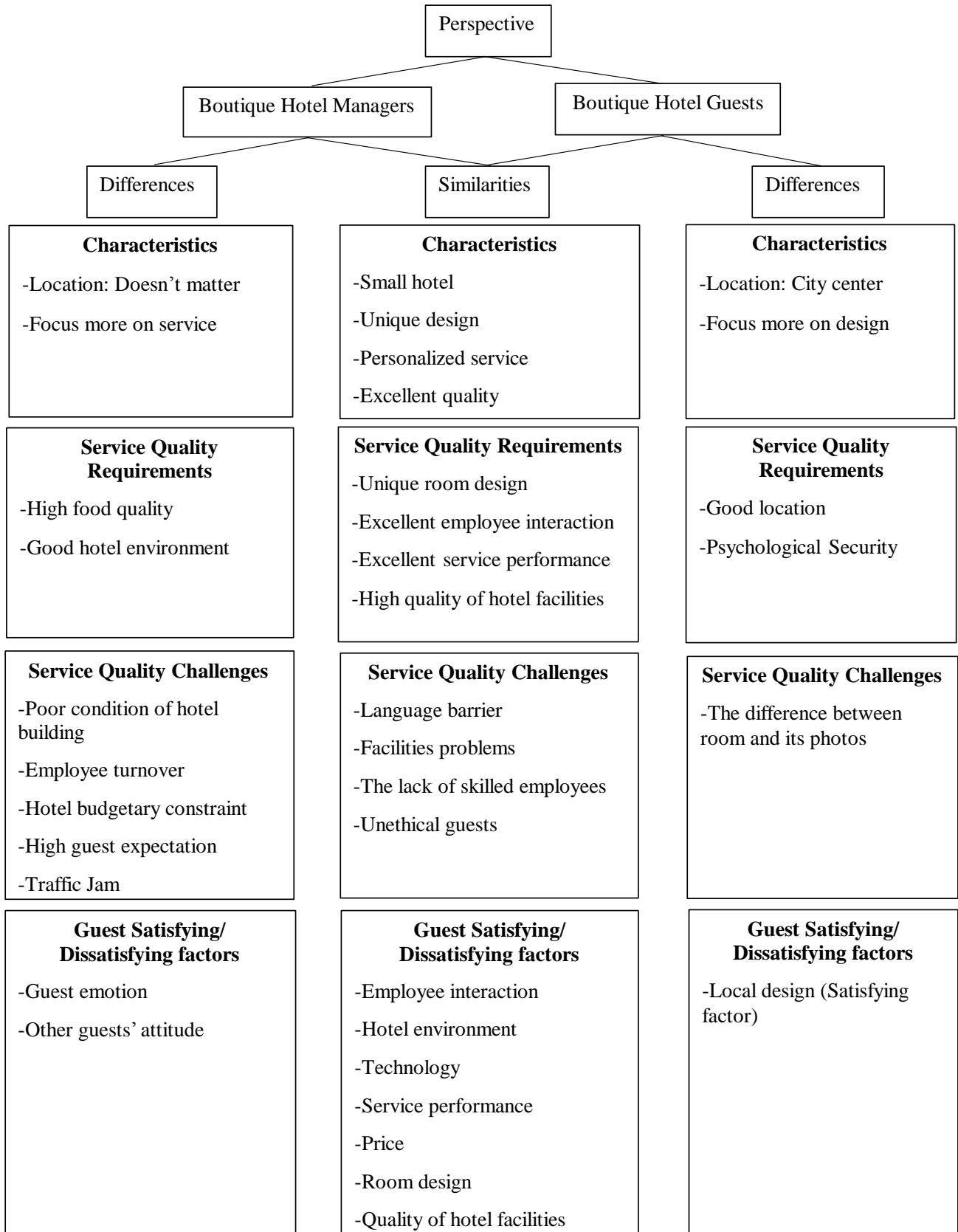
The study found that both boutique hotel managers and boutique hotel guests had almost the same understanding about the characteristics and service quality of the boutique hotels in Bangkok, yet they used different ways to describe their opinion about it. The boutique hotel managers described the characteristics and service quality of the boutique hotel as a whole based on their knowledge and working experiences in this industry, whereas the boutique hotel guests described them separately from one part to another part due to the lack of knowledge and experiences they had faced while staying in the boutique hotels. The finding also showed that the boutique hotel managers in Bangkok seem to understand a lot about their customers' needs and wants. However, the misunderstanding between them was still there, so the hotel should take into account the improvement, such as investing more on human resources and focusing more on the local Thai design as a priority.





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Key findings from the perspective of boutique hotel managers and guests





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### Implication

Nowadays, the competition in the hotel industry between hotel and hotel is very high. Hence, understanding customer needs and wants is the only way to become the champion in this industry and to ensure the long-term development of the business. This research has shown the customer needs and wants that can be used by boutique hotel managers for improving their service quality and develop their marketing strategy.

### Limitations

During the conducting of the research, numbers of limitations were encountered by the researcher, but the main limitation of this study was limited of time. In addition to this, there are not much literatures that related to the service quality of boutique hotel available on internet because most of the previous researchers tended to choose luxury hotel as their target for conducting research due to the popularity of this type of hotel among people rather than boutique hotel type which has just gained its popularity over the past decade. Another limitation of this research is the research was just conducted only in Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, which means that the result of this research cannot be applied in other cities due to the difference of population, geography, and culture.

The finding of this study is based only on the perspective of the boutique hotel managers and the boutique hotels guests about the characteristics and service quality of the boutique hotel in Bangkok. Hence, for future research, the new study should focus on the service quality of boutique hotel comparing with the service quality of other types of hotel. The result of this research will give a better idea for the guests whether they should choose the boutique hotel or other types of hotel for their holiday trip.

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