

Service Marketing Strategy Model of Thai Halal Restaurant for Preparation to AEC

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to study the factors influencing customer loyalty of halal restaurants in Thailand which united both quantitative and qualitative research together. Samples were customers at halal restaurant around Thailand which were selected by multi-stage sampling. Questionnaire and interview form were used to collect data from consumers at halal restaurants, 507 samples from Thai consumers and 498 samples from non-Thai consumers and the data was separately analyzed to see if there are some differences between Thai and non-Thai model. The statistics employed in this research was structural equation modeling (SEM). Both models were good fit with empirical data. The results can be concluded that service marketing mix factor and internal marketing had influences on customer loyalty of halal restaurant in Thailand through perceived service quality. This study suggests that halal restaurant operators should focus on their service marketing mix, especially physical environment, along with internal marketing, especially employee satisfaction and motivation, to enhance their customer loyalty.

Keywords: Service marketing Strategy, Thai Halal Restaurant, Internal Marketing,
Perceived Service Quality, Customer Loyalty

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพลเชิงสาเหตุของปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้าในธุรกิจร้านอาหารฮาลาลในประเทศไทย ใช้เทคนิคการวิจัยแบบผสมผสานการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพและการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณ กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ศึกษาคือ ผู้บริโภคอาหารที่ร้านอาหารฮาลาลในประเทศไทย เป็นชาวไทยจำนวน 507 คน และชาวต่างชาติจำนวน 498 คน สุ่มตัวอย่างแบบหลายขั้นตอน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยได้แก่ แบบสอบถามและแบบสัมภาษณ์ โดยแยกการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเป็นโมเดลชาวไทย และชาวต่างชาติ เพื่อให้เห็นว่ามีความแตกต่างกันหรือไม่ สถิติที่ใช้ในการทดสอบสมมติฐาน ได้แก่ สถิติวิเคราะห์สมการโครงสร้าง โดยโมเดลกลยุทธ์การตลาดบริการของร้านอาหารฮาลาลสำหรับลูกค้าทั้งโมเดลชาวไทยและโมเดลชาวต่างชาติ มีความสอดคล้องกับข้อมูลเชิงประจักษ์ในระดับดี จากผลการวิจัยพบว่าส่วนประสมการตลาดบริการและการตลาดภายในมีผลต่อความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้าโดยส่งผ่านการรับรู้คุณภาพและบริการ ดังนั้น ผู้ประกอบการร้านอาหารฮาลาลควรให้ความสำคัญกับปัจจัยส่วนประสมการตลาดบริการ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในด้านลักษณะทางกายภาพ ควบคู่กับการตลาดภายใน โดยเฉพาะด้านความพึงพอใจของพนักงาน ซึ่งจะส่งผลต่อความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้าทั้งชาวไทยและชาวต่างชาติ

คำสำคัญ : กลยุทธ์การตลาดบริการ ร้านอาหารฮาลาลไทย การตลาดภายใน การรับรู้คุณภาพบริการ ความจงรักภักดีของลูกค้า

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Thailand is becoming a part of the single market system under the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), where boundless business and economic take place. Moreover, Import and export between AEC countries would be boundless business due to free tax agreement and not only goods that would be traded freely but also human resources would flow between AEC countries without work permit (Ministry of Commerce, Department of Trade Negotiation [MOC.], 2011). In addition, AEC will consist of around 270 million muslims, the largest Muslim population globally. For that reason, the demand for halal food that is growing inevitably, which is the great opportunity for Thai halal food producers.

In this new economic community, Thailand is aimed to be a country for tourism and aviation (MOC, 2011). Service industry in Thailand could gain advantages from this change, especially for food service provider. In accordance with DinarStandard and Crescentrating (2012), halal food alternative is ranked number one with 66.8% for muslim travelers when they choose their destinations. In order to response to the changes, therefore; the restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand should focus more on their marketing strategy. To achieve in halal restaurant business, the business should learn what are the important factors influencing the sustainable growth of business and this study would enhance halal restaurant business to develop their effective service marketing strategy.

OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH

This research aims to develop the model of service marketing strategy of Thai halal restaurant business for preparation to AEC by focusing on the influence of service marketing mix factor, internal marketing and perceived service quality on customer loyalty of halal restaurant in Thailand.

RELATED THEORY, CONCEPT AND RESEARCH

1. Service Marketing Mix Concept

The classical 4Ps, product, price, place, and promotion, were originally developed by McCarthy (1960). Nevertheless, the feeling remains that some other classification, still to be born, will develop better conceptual distinctions among the large variety of marketing decision variables” (as cited in Waterschoot & Bulte, 1992, p.83). Realizing that 4Ps are not enough for service management, another 3Ps were added which are process, physical environment, and people, for competitive ability of services business (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011, p. 44).

Each elements of service marketing mix is important to service business, people, physical evidence, and process have significant impact on both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Kaura & Datta, 2012). In Malaysian food industry, halal, price, service quality, branding, and tangibility

have significant impact on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty and consumers are confident with halalness of food providers that have reliable halal logo, price conscious, and satisfied with clean evidence of foodservice (Abdullah, et al., 2012). Similarly, Wang and Chen (2012) found that servicescape, waiting experience, and food quality affects on perceived overall service quality and value. Likewise, service location and product have impact on customer satisfaction and repurchase intention in franchise restaurant (Yang, 2009). In fast food industry in Pakistan, product, service quality, call center, and online accessibility are also significant factors to enhance customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Bakhat, M.S. & Aziz, S., 2012). Based on these researches, the elements of service marketing mix plays important role towards perceived service quality and customer loyalty, therefore; the following hypotheses were proposed:

H₁: Service marketing mix factor has both direct and indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality.

H_{1a}: Service marketing mix factor has direct effect on customer loyalty.

H_{1b}: Service marketing mix factor has indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality.

2. Internal Marketing Concept

As people factor is very important in service business, internal marketing concept has been studied and applied by many researchers such as George (1977), Thompson, Berry, and Davidson (1978), Murray (1979), and Sasser and Arbeit (1976), etc.

To satisfy customers, the firm must first satisfy their employees (George, 1977, p.91 as cited in Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993, p. 220). Likewise, Berry (1984) viewed employees as internal customers and jobs as internal products to satisfy employees (Berry, 1984, p.272 as cited in Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993, p. 220). Furthermore, Berry and Parasuraman (1991) defined that ‘Internal marketing is attracting, developing, motivating and retaining qualified employees through job-products that is satisfy their needs. Internal marketing is the philosophy of treating employees as customers ... and it is the strategy of shaping job-products to fit human needs’ (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991, p. 151 as cited in Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993, p. 220). Similarly, Berry’s concept, Gronroos’s concept focuses more on customer orientation other than employee satisfaction and motivation. According to Gronroos (1981), p.237, ‘the objective of internal marketing is to get motivated and customer-conscious personnel’, which is another important aspect as customer satisfaction is the expected outcome. To deliver good quality service, a firm does not need only customer-conscious personnel but also good collaboration of employees. Therefore; the internal marketing concept is to effectively integrate all important customer related functions of the service firm (Gronroos, 1981 as cited in Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993, p. 220).

In restaurants where many people are focusing on food quality, however, excellent service should also be focused as reported in many service researches. The firm should focus on improving employees' customer oriented behavior and service quality by developing internal marketing as there is significant impact between internal marketing and service quality (Roshani, Gholamreza and Mahammadlaskari, 2013). Additionally, Employee training is the first step to improve service quality which finally leads to customer satisfaction (Wang, Lee and Chen, 2012). Likewise, Kim and Han (2013) found that job satisfaction had both direct and indirect impact on customer loyalty through service quality and also had direct and indirect impact on customer satisfaction through service quality. Based on these researches, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₂: Internal marketing has both direct and indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality.

H_{2a}: Internal marketing has direct effect on customer loyalty.

H_{2b}: Internal marketing indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality.

3. Perceived Service Quality Concept

Service quality is the perception of customers who assess the quality of service by comparing their expectation with their service experience. A famous service provider must deliver the service with equal or beyond their customer expectation (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1985). Whereas, Bolton & Drew, 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988 as cited in Cronin & Taylor, (1992) defined that service quality is a form of attitude related to satisfaction. Perceived service quality is a long-term attitude in overall evaluation, and satisfaction is a specific measure of a transaction (Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988 as cited in Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Despite the difficulty of quality service measurement, many authors proposed the concepts of quality service measurement. One of the most commonly used concept for service quality measurement is SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988) which defined service quality into 5 dimensions which are; 1) Tangibility: appearance of physical elements 2) Reliability: dependable and accurate performance 3) Responsiveness: promptness and helpfulness 4) Assurance: credibility, security, competence, and courtesy 5) Empathy: easy access, good communications and customer understanding.

According to many researches, perceived service quality is positively associated with customer loyalty such as Malik, Yaqoob, and Aslam (2012) found that price perception, service quality, and brand image had significantly positive correlation with customer loyalty. For restaurants, perceived service quality has positive correlation with customer satisfaction, customer revisit, and intention to recommend (Ramseook-Munhurrin, 2012). This similar result was also found in Malaysian fast food industry where

service quality has positive impact on overall service quality and customer satisfaction (Bougoure & Neu, 2010). Therefore; the following hypothesis was proposed.

H₃: Perceived service quality has direct effect on customer loyalty

4. Customer Loyalty Theory

Loyal customer could be a consistent source of revenue over long period. Moreover, loyal customers repeat their purchase and recommend products and services to their friends and related groups (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011, pp. 338–339).

Reichheld and Sasser (as cited in Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011) found that the longer customers are with a firm, the more profitable they are. Moreover, they found that there are 4 factors which can help a firm generate more profit from loyal customers i.e. 1) Increased purchases generate more profit. 2) Reduced operating cost help the firm to have more profit. 3) Referrals to other customers help the firm to expand customer base and finally, generate more profit. 4) More profit from premium price (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011, pp. 338–339).

The conclusion is in line with many researches, greater customer satisfaction results in customer loyalty (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Bearden and Teel, 1983; Fornell, 1992; LaBarbera and Mazursky, 1983; Oliver 1980). Moreover, customer loyalty can help the firm generate more profit as loyal customers tend to purchase more frequently, try new products or services of the firm, recommend products and services to others, and provide honest suggestion to the firm (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Especially for restaurants, word-of-mouth has significant effect on restaurants' reputation (Zhang, Ye, Law & Li, 2010).

According to Oliver (1997) as cited in Abdullah, Abdulrahman and Hamali (2012), loyalty is a deeply held commitment to repeat purchases of a preferred product or service consistently in the future, regardless of situation influence and marketing efforts. While Kendrick's definition includes the variables of purchase frequency and amount spent per order or visit (Kendrick, 1998 as cited in Abdullah, Abdulrahman and Hamali (2012). Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) defined customer loyalty as consistent satisfaction and/or repeat purchase of product/service from a particular firm.

In accordance with reviewed concepts and literature, the conceptual model was constructed as follow;

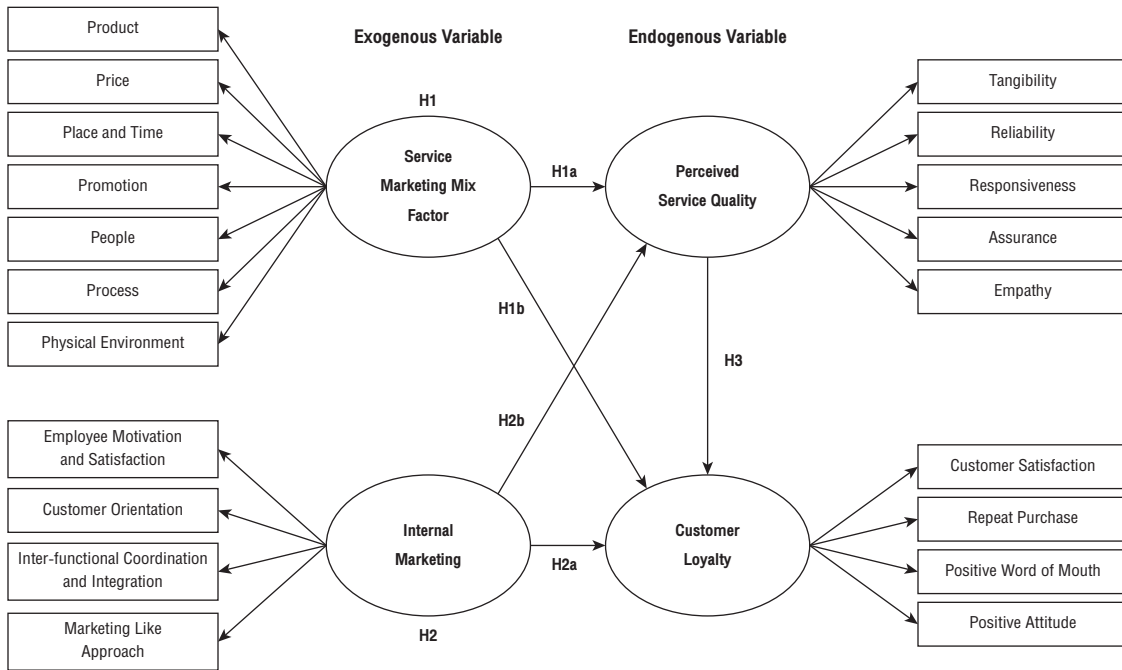


Figure 1: Research conceptual framework and hypotheses

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, only halal restaurant consumers in Thailand were studied for 2 models which are Thai and non-Thai consumer model. In-depth interview with 5 halal restaurant experts, 1 halal certification expert, 2 halal restaurant managers and 2 halal restaurant owners, was conducted to be as a guideline for questionnaire. Multi-stage random sampling was employed as follow;

- 1) Total of 257 halal restaurants located around Thailand were divided into 5 regional areas i.e. Bangkok and metropolitan, central, northern and north-eastern, eastern, and southern area, and calculated into proportion.
- 2) Proportion of each region was used to calculate number of sample required from each region.
- 3) With the average 20 samples for each model from each restaurant, the number of 27 selected restaurants was derived selected by simple random sampling from each region.
- 4) 20 samples from each restaurant were selected by systematic random sampling which every fifth customer coming into the restaurants were selected to fill in the questionnaire.

Total number of required samples for each model is at least 480 samples. 540 questionnaires had been distributed for each model which 507 questionnaires from Thai consumers and 498 questionnaires

from non-Thai consumers were returned. The hypothesized relationships were then tested with structural equation model. In-depth interview has been conducted again with restaurant owners to confirm the constructed model.

The measurement variable applied in this research is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Measurement of Variable

Goodness-of-fit measure	Good Fit Criteria	Acceptable Level
χ^2/df	< 2	2–5
CFI	$CFI \geq 0.95$	$0.90 < CFI < 0.95$
GFI	$0.95 < GFI < 1.00$	$0.90 < GFI < 0.95$
AGFI	$0.90 < AGFI < 1.00$	$0.85 < AGFI < 0.90$
SRMR	< 0.05	< 0.08
RMSEA	$0 < RMSEA < 0.05$	$0.05 < RMSEA < 0.08$

Note. From Statistic analysis for social and behaviorial research by Angsuchoti, S., Wijitwanna, S. and Pinyopanuwat, R. (2008), p.29.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to Thai consumers’ demographic characteristic, more than 80% of customers age between 18–45 years old with good education. This new generation likes dining out and trying new food in halal way. They receive new information through online media such as facebook, instagram, and website. Halal restaurants should focus on their interest to attract and maintain Thai Muslim customers.

For non-Thai consumers, around 75% of customers are Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean. And likewise, more than 80% of them age between 18–45 years old with average education higher than Thai people in both international and Islamic education. This group comes both with tour companies and by their own. Keeping contact with tour companies and promote through official website are good communication channel for non-Thai Muslim customers.

According to the confirmatory factor analysis of Thai consumer model, it was found that each component of service marketing mix factor had factor loading ranging from 0.94–0.64; physical environment, people, process, and product were rated higher than 0.80. For internal marketing, each component had factor loading ranging from 0.93–0.86. In terms of perceived service quality, each component had factor loading ranging from 0.90–0.80. Lastly, each component of customer loyalty

had factor loading ranging from 0.88–0.80. If the factor loading value is lower than 0.30, the data is not acceptable for further analysis. (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006)

With structure equation modeling, the relationships hypothesized in this study were analyzed. Figure 2 illustrates the structural equation model indicating the good fit for the hypothesized model.

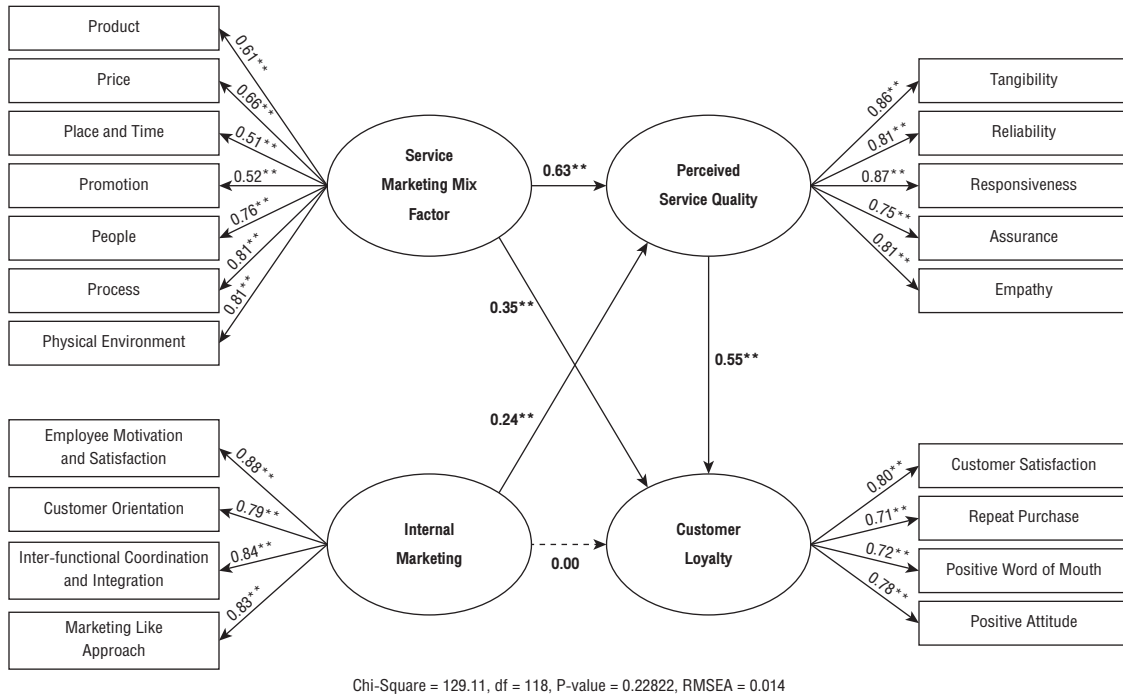


Figure 2: The results of Structural Equation Modeling analysis (Thai Consumers)

In accordance with SEM analysis result, for Thai consumer model, service marketing mix had both direct and indirect influence on customer loyalty with the highest influence by physical environment and process. In addition, service marketing mix also had high direct effect on perceived service quality which responsiveness and tangibility are most important dimension to generate more loyalty. Although internal marketing had no direct effect on customer loyalty, internal marketing still had indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality. Additionally, the perceived service quality had strong direct influence on customer loyalty which means customers certainly perceived good service from 5 dimensions of perceived service quality. Therefore H_{1a} , H_{1b} , H_{2b} and H_3 are supported.

Since local consumers are more comfortable in terms of their transportation, place and time were least important for them. In terms of internal marketing, it can be implied that most of halal restaurants were small and owned by local Muslims, local consumers feel more relax when they use the service; formal manner might not be much significant. Therefore; internal marketing has no direct influence on customer loyalty in this model.

For non-Thai consumer model, according to the confirmatory factor analysis of non-Thai consumer model, it was found that each component of service marketing mix factor had factor loading ranging from 0.88–0.49; place and time, physical environment, and promotion were rated higher than 0.80. For internal marketing, each component had factor loading ranging from 0.90–0.82. In terms of perceived service quality, each component had factor loading ranging from 0.88–0.71; tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness were rated higher than 0.80. Lastly, components of customer loyalty had factor loading ranging from 0.93–0.81. According to these factor loading results, all values are higher than 0.30 which is acceptable to be analyzed further by SEM.

With structure equation modeling, the relationships hypothesized in this study were analyzed. Figure 3 illustrates the structural equation model indicating the good fit of for the hypothesized model.

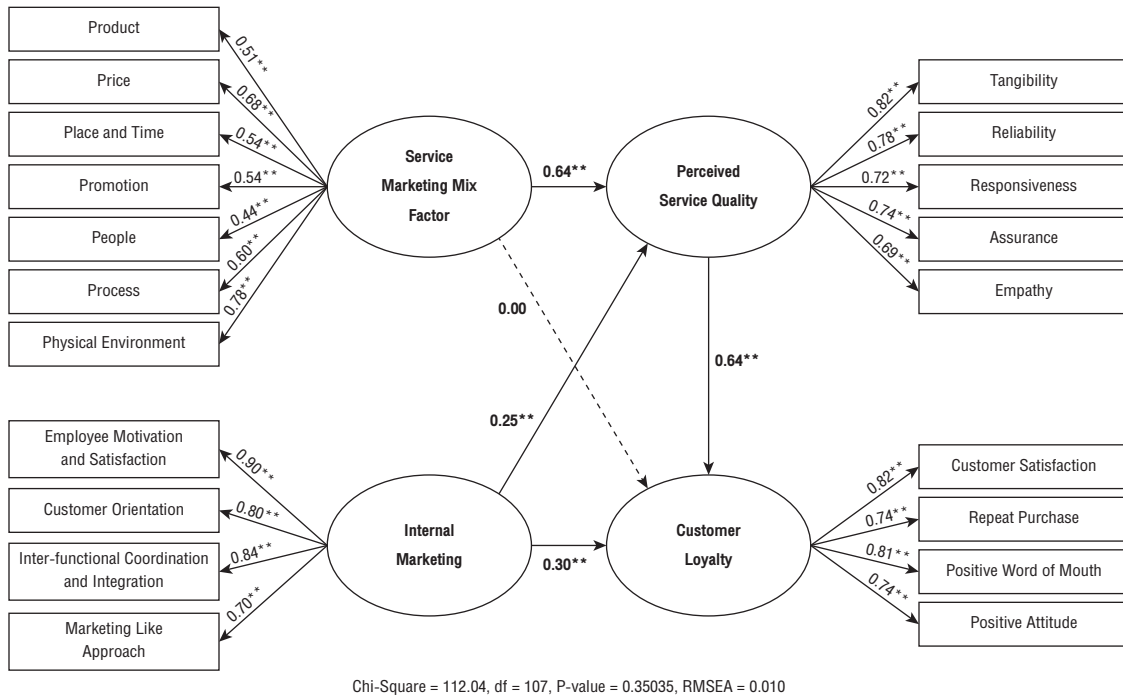


Figure 3: The results of Structural Equation Modeling analysis (Non-Thai Consumers)

According to SEM analysis result, for non-Thai consumer model, although service marketing mix has indirect influence on customer loyalty, its indirect influence was higher than direct influence of internal marketing which means all service marketing mix components are yet important to boost customer loyalty. And since internal marketing also has both direct and indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality, all components of internal marketing are also significant factor. Furthermore, perceived service quality had strong direct impact on customer loyalty through its 5 dimensions of service measurement. Therefore H_{1a} , H_{2a} , H_{2b} , and H_3 are supported.

Hypotheses results of Thai and non-Thai consumer model can be summarized as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Hypothesis Test

Hypotheses	Thai Consumer		Non-Thai Consumer	
	Supported	Rejected	Supported	Rejected
H1: Service marketing mix factor has both direct and indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality.				
H1a: Service marketing mix factor has direct effect on customer loyalty.	✓			✓
H1b: Service marketing mix factor has indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality.	✓		✓	
H2: Internal marketing has both direct and indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality.				
H2a: Internal marketing has direct effect on customer loyalty.		✓	✓	
H2b: Internal marketing indirect effect on customer loyalty through perceived service quality.	✓		✓	
H3: Perceived service quality has direct effect on customer loyalty.	✓		✓	

The different outcome of non-Thai consumer model is that service marketing mix has no direct effect on non-Thai customer loyalty which could result from their different purpose of dining. Most of Muslim travelers need to have halal food during their stay in Thailand; their purposes are not mainly for leisure like local consumers but rather for Islamic fundamental need. Internal marketing has more direct influence on customer loyalty as foreigners are not familiar with local service provider; they expect good standard manner more than Thai customers do.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW RESULT

According to the in-depth interview result with 2 managers and 2 owners of halal restaurants, all of them agreed that not only service marketing mix but also internal marketing were important factors in restaurant management which can be perceived in 5 dimensions of perceived service quality. Halalness of food was fundamental component for halal restaurants. Besides halalness of food, physical environment was the most significant factor as hygiene was crucial for food and other physical components convinced and attracted customers to visit restaurants. Internal marketing was the next factor which halal restaurants had to focus after improving their service marketing mix. Internal marketing was not well known thoroughly among halal restaurant operators, however, they tried to train their employees to have good manner and deliver good service. Perceived service quality was quite new to halal restaurant operators as most of them did not recognize these service measurement dimensions. Consequently, internal marketing is the area that halal restaurant operators are trying to develop and perceived service quality is the area that they need to learn more.

Regarding the different result between Thai and non-Thai consumers, they agreed that Thai people are more flexible with mistakes and formal manner. Moreover, Thai consumers need more various food feature and other value added functions as they are dining for leisure rather than only for Islamic fundamental need like travelers.

CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study contributes to a conceptual model that considers service marketing mix and internal marketing as antecedents to customer loyalty. The results confirm that the higher input of service marketing mix and internal marketing leads to superior customer loyalty. Physical environment has the highest impact on both Thai and non-Thai consumers; which is in line with Wang and Chen (2012) who studied about the relationship of full-service restaurant attribute and found that servicescape and waiting experience had strong effect on perceived service quality finally resulting in customer loyalty. Consequently, halal restaurant operators should prioritize this factor and also other components respectively. In terms of internal management, employee motivation and satisfaction is ranked highest among internal marketing components for both Thai and non-Thai consumer model which means halal restaurant operators should not only focus on customer satisfaction but also their employees' satisfaction and motivate them with things such as interesting job, good benefit etc. which is corresponding to Ahmad, Wasay and Malik (2012) who studied about impact of employee motivation on customer satisfaction found that employee motivation can be directly used to boost customer satisfaction. In addition, the research found that more perceived service quality among customers would create more loyalty which is in accordance with Ramseook-Munhurrun (2012), finding that tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy are necessary for restaurant customers everywhere. These input factors would finally result in high perceived service quality and subsequently generate customer loyalty.

According to the research results, halal restaurant operators can apply the model with Thai and non-Thai consumers as shown in Figure 4 and 5;

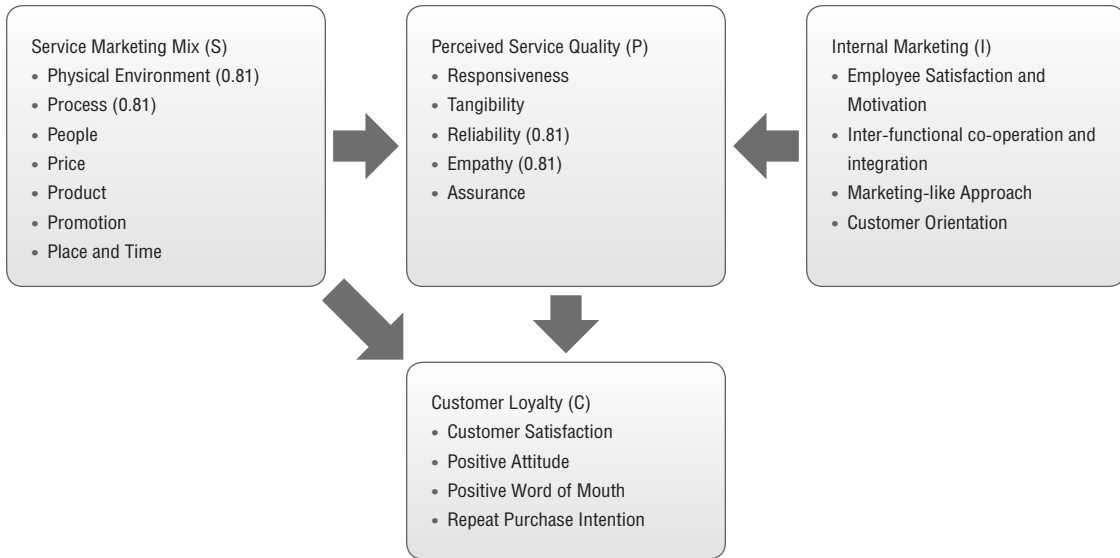


Figure 4: Service Marketing Strategy Model of Thai Halal Restaurant for Preparation to AEC: Thai Consumer Model (PSIC)

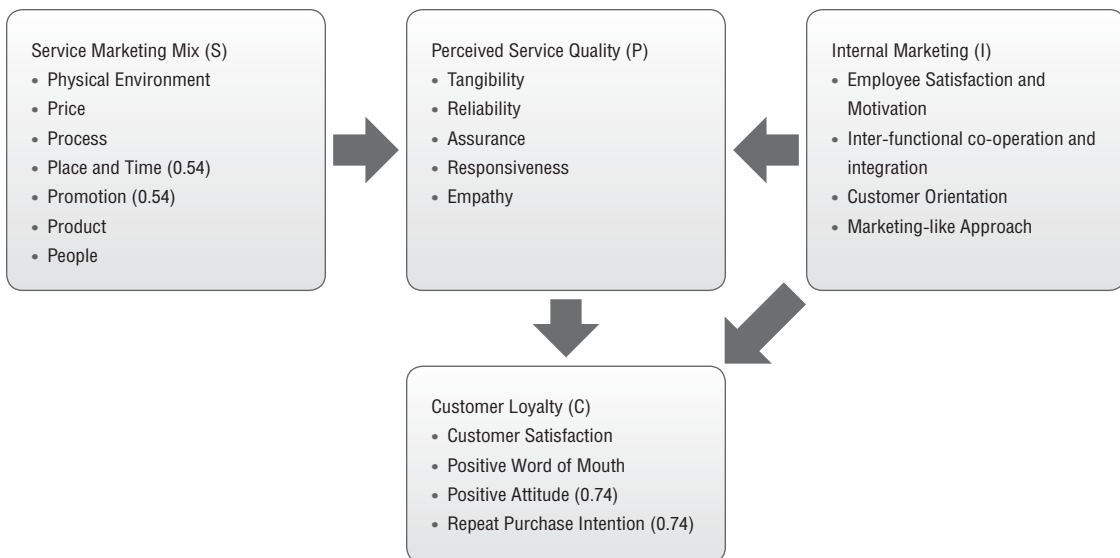


Figure 5: Service Marketing Strategy Model of Thai Halal Restaurant for Preparation to AEC: Non-Thai Consumer Model (PISC)

According to PSIC model in Figure 4, which is for Thai consumers, customer loyalty was most influenced by service marketing mix, especially for physical environment (e.g. clean, beautiful, and functional with praying room, clean restroom, and parking space) and process with speed and accuracy. In order to attract Thai customers, halal restaurants operators should put high effort in their service marketing mix components as dining out for Thai consumers means they need something different from home dining.

Although internal marketing had no direct effect on customer loyalty, its indirect effect through perceived service quality was significant. Employee motivation and satisfaction should also be focused to improve restaurant service quality. These inputs from 2 aspects, i.e. service marketing mix and internal marketing, would create high perceived service quality which directly generates customer loyalty.

In accordance with Figure 5, Non-Thai Consumer Model (PISC), internal marketing had direct influence on non-Thai customer loyalty which is quite different from Thai customers. This could imply that foreign customers pay more attention to service manner and have less interest in service marketing mix as they visit as travelers. Their need is to have halal food to serve their Islamic fundamental need and to receive standard service. However, service marketing mix is yet important to create perceived service quality which finally enhances foreign customer loyalty in restaurant business. Physical environment still plays an important role among foreigners. Moreover, foreign customers require official halal certification or official announcement to ensure halal quality of restaurants. Accordingly, official halal certification and providing information through official website are important for foreign consumers.

As ASEAN Economic Community begins, the business competition is growing more intense. The competitors are not only in Thailand but also are from AEC countries. Additionally, consumers are more various in nationality and culture. Halal restaurants should prepare themselves to effectively response to these changes. Service marketing mix and internal marketing are significant factors for halal restaurants to enhance customers' perceived service quality and create customer loyalty which can help generating more profit to restaurants.

RESEARCH LIMITATION

This research gathered information only from halal restaurants operating in Thailand because of limited time and budget. The study can generate more dynamic result if the data can be collected from Thai halal restaurants operating in other countries to explore different needs of local people in different countries.

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