Service Quality in Hotels: A Perspective from Staff during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Winayaporn Bhrammanachote[1], Nathdanai Pratuangboriboon[2], and Yothin Sawangdee[3*]

[1]Faculty of Management Sciences, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, Thailand

[2]Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Lampang Rajabhat University, Thailand

[3*]Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand

Abstract

The paper aims to clarify the relationship between hotel staff and quality of services during the Covid-19 pandemic in Chiang Mai province, Thailand. It has two following research objectives, first is to examine the effect of training on employee performance whether they adequately understand, maintain good hygiene, and adjust themselves to the market with Covid-19. The second research objective is to determine the importance of hygiene and the impact of hygiene to quality of service. Data collected from the target group using a self-report questionnaire between January 2021 and April 2021. The number of 138 questionnaires were received. The data analysis of this study was done in the form of a first order confirmatory analysis by considering what each latent and each group were. After that, it was combined into the structural equation model (SEM) believing that the antecedent factors of training had an effect on the mediator marketing and service quality. This research aims to point out that two latents; training and hygiene are believed to be important. They have affect in marketing and eventually quality of services.

Keywords: 1) Hotel staff 2) Quality of services 3) Covid-19 pandemic 4) Structural Equation Model

[1] Lecturer, Department of Business Administration; E-mail: winayaporn_bhr@g.cmru.ac.th

[2] Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration; E-mail: nathdanai@g.lpru.ac.th

[3*] Associate Professor, E-mail: yothin.saw@mahidol.ac.th (Corresponding Author)

Introduction

Without doubt, Covid-19 has damaged the global hospitality industry. The devastating effects of this pandemic have had a psychological, economic, and sociocultural impact on numerous internal and external stakeholders in the industry (Foroudi, Tabaghdehi and Marvi, 2021, p. 1), which will forever be etched on the minds of all individuals throughout the world. Glimmers of hope for reopening the country to tourism have been quickly dashed. As governments around the world have closed off their borders, imposed travel restrictions, and ordered businesses to close until further notice to decrease the spread of the virus (World Health Organization, 2020). This global pandemic has created discomfort and panic in networks associated with tourism and hospitality, which seem to encounter uncertainties and undesirable facts while trying to recover after their financial losses.

Although Covid-19 measures are being taken to combat the spread of Covid-19, the disease's persistence lose people's confidence in international travel. Tourists are faced with quarantine measures that they normally experience during on a vacation. In the eyes of business leaders, operations staff must maintain their standard performance, however, effective strategies are required to regain travelers' confidence. Business opportunities should be retrieved as fast as possible while collaborating with government officials to diminish the health crisis (Jiang and Wen, 2020, p. 2564). The most important thing is, when businesses start to reopen, this gives employees a sense of hope. As they have financial security, they will be able to support their families and have enough money to pay for their basic needs.

In addition, small businesses feel hopeful when they see customers paying to for their products or using their services. Job loss can be harmful to people's mental stress. They feel insecure and they may feel desperate about their survival. This may also lead to reckless behaviour that endangers their lives. Employees who continued to work during the Covid-19 experience higher levels of psychological distress, drug use, and alcohol use (Bufquin, et al., 2021, p. 2). This is a call for the hotel industry worldwide to apply their resources to foster resiliency and sustainability by addressing the diverse components. Business practitioners need to interact with each other and shape the current framework of how businesses operate. However, although the crisis has hindered business operations, especially with the recession of the hotel business and its lack of confidence, in such a crisis, business institutions will turn it into an opportunity for survival by developing a crisis management system and service quality systems for employees, based on Zhang, Zhang and Hsu (2023, p. 5476) stating that institutional factors play an important role in crisis management.

Quality of service is a key success in achieving long-term profit in the service industry (Shahin and Dabestani, 2010, p. 40). Hossain and Leo (2009, p. 338) explains service quality as the evaluation of the excellence and superiority of the service encountered. Those customers who experience positive feelings, attitudes, and experiences toward during the

service consumption will subsequently lead to customer loyalty (Liat, Mansori and Huei, 2014, p. 315). In the tourism context, service quality is important to customer satisfaction, a company's reputation, and corporate image. Therefore, managing quality contributes to the overall effectiveness of a quality management system and fulfills customers' needs and desires.

In the province of Chiang Mai, Thailand, local business heavily relies on tourism to support community life. Revenue generation for hospitality has suffered due to a lack of visitors. Many hotel workers were laid off from their jobs. Even if Thai government allow all hotels to operate at full capacity, the issue of health and safety is still a priority. Visitors cannot easily travel unless they show proof of Covid-19 certificate. All sector of hospitality industry need to meet a high-standard of sanitation, because lack of sanitation could jeopardize their health (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020, p. 634). It will be essential for Chiang Mai hotel managers to provide training and development to staff concerning hygiene. Personal hygine should be branded into marketing and service quality, as staff are the frontline of care for guests (Kim, Chun and Lee, 2005, p. 7)

In a service environment, hygiene should be regarded as top priority into all operations within the hotel as it helps travelers make better reservation decisions regarding the best places to stay and eases the worries about getting sick (Yu, Seo and Hyun, 2021, p. 2). Now more than ever, before the issue of health must be seriously considered as part of the working environment in the hospitali-

ty industry in order to assuage the travelers' fears (Wen, et al., 2020, p. 3) about contracting covid in hotel rooms and facilities. Observing travelers' decision-making behaviours should be incorporated into the mission plan of hotels and emphasized. Businesses may adapt their philosophies to guests' diverse consumption needs. Therefore, staff can assure that steps are taken to keep guests safe and healthy. While the issue of sanitation and hygiene has been a long-term policy concern, the practicality of the matter needs to be evident to the eyes and feelings of guests who use the service. Standard precaution for prevention need to be focused, constant, transparent. Real-time communication between management and staff is required (Lanz, et al., 2020, p. 2). Communication transparency is especially important, associated with a safe climate and motivating workers to perform their duties effectively (Kim, Kim and Lee, 2021, p. 1).

The market demand for better approaches to ensuring travelers' well-being and health has become part of the business protocol. It requires an efficient effort to ensure all contact points meet standards while maintains a positive atmosphere for guests to engage in shopping, site seeing, dining, and casual leisures. Therefore, hotel staff such as housekeepers, porters, cooks, and dining room staff must keep all things clean in order to present a hygienic image of the business.

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between hotel staff and service quality during the Covid-19 pandemic in Chiang Mai. Believing that the quality of service comes from the structural equation model consisting

of staff training, hygiene, and marketing strategy. The hotel businesses must emphasize on staff who acts as the service providers, who will therefore deliver the best services to customers. To attain the research aim, research questions and research objectives are the following.

Research Questions

With the aim and objectives, the research study asks the following questions:

1. To what extent are the training provide to hotel staff influences the understanding of hygiene?

2. To what extent is the hygiene has effect on quality of service?

Research Objectives

This study has two following research objectives:

1. to examine the effect of providing training to employees to enable them to adequately understand, maintain good hygiene, and adjust themselves to the market with the Covid-19

2. to determine on how hygiene is important and influence on quality of service.

Literature Review

1. Hotel staff

The tourism and hospitality industries are essential sources of income for a country. Hence, many countries attempt to drag the attention from tourists around the world to their destinations to improve their nation's life (Ali, et al., 2021, p. 15). Hotels are recognized as a vital component in the tourism industry and hotel staff needs to satisfy guest's needs, including accommodation, services, restaurants, and other facilities. Anwar and Shukur (2015,

p. 65) noted that hotel staff is an important factor in business success, because employees deliver and provide services to guests. If hotel staff provides the right service to their guests, they will have positive experience and might come back again. In contrast, if hotel staff does not deliver the right service, it leads to negative effects such as negative word-of-mouth and not returning to the hotel. Thus, it is mandatory that hotel management should satisfy their employees.

Many organizations have invested in training and development of employees to enhance their efficiency, resulting in an increasing employees' level of job satisfaction. On the relationship between satisfaction and job performance, Li, Chang and Ou (2020, p. 6) have found that job satisfaction has a significant positive impact on work performance. Anwar and Shukur (2015, p. 67) indicated that an individual's level of satisfaction is related to organizational production and achievement. Moreover, job satisfaction is strongly associated with a low level of employee turnover (Ghafoor, 2012, p. 31).

Although hoteliers argue that the hospitality employment is low skilled and get low paid, employees are the largest and most unique asset of the hotels (Vetráková, Šimoˇcková and Pompurová, 2019, p. 2). Hotel employees affect the image of the hotel based on their interaction with customers and they must modify the development and provision of the services. Therefore, the quality of hotel employees plays an important role and is a key factor that affects the running of a hotel, its prosperity, and its sustainable development

(Park, Jung and Lee, 2019, p. 2).

The hotel functions are varied and work in harmony with each other. First, the front office is one of the most important departments in the hotel where all front desk staff are responsible for representing the hotel in guest service while also managing everything step by step that is in line with the correct posting. Secondly, the bellboy is responsible for helping carry luggage for guests from the moment they arrive at the hotel until they enter the room. Door Attendant is responsible for opening the car door, hotel door when guests arrive, assisting and serving guests at the hotel doorstep. While the reservation agent is responsible for confirming the booking when the guest is booking a room from various channels, selling additional services when appropriate, preparing a guest list and other relevant reports to the supervisor. The telephone operator answers and manages incoming and outgoing calls, as well as managing the phone calls in case there is a requirement for wake-up calls and answering questions about the hotel. Finally, the concierge is responsible for confirming reservations for the customers in restaurants, tour accommodation, limousine rides, or other services.

It can be seen that the work duties of the hotel staff are all equally important. Employee training is an important and indispensable part of human resource management. The importance and value of employee training has long been recognized. (Mcclelland, 2002, p. 7) Srichada and Chaisaengpratheep (2018, p. 230) supported that the service quality and staff training are interrelated to customers, unlike employees who are not trained.

2. Quality of services: marketing, training staff, and hygiene

Due to the massive disruption of the coronavirus pandemic has influenced the hotel operations, causing demand to ensure the services provided. Drawing on our research objectives, we now discuss in detail how training, hygiene, and marketing significant to quality of service.

2.1 Training related to marketing strategies

The extent and degree to which quality service is valued shapes the working environment, allowing staff and workers to understand their duties, as well as to see the importance of training. This establishes a precedent for employees to be conscious of their actions and, when making decision, to search for the best way to offer best services to guests. Employee training supports the development of staff's skills and abilities. Training fosters mastery of the basics of a position while acquiring a more natural capacity to meet or help meet customers' needs (Aquilani, et al., 2017, p. 189). Studies have indicated that training is part of the process of delivering total satisfaction to the targeted group. Whether it is the working model or standards that guide the nature of the work, the methods applied must always be re-evaluated by human resource management. This must be done to design a proper training program that ensures that employees are confident that what they are doing. The performance should be oriented towards specifications concerning the satisfaction of the guests using the facilities for personal or business functions (Anwar and Shukur, 2015, p. 65). Hence, we assume that training is a significant

factor in planning marketing strategies (H1).

2.2 Training related to employee hygiene practices

As hotels around the world begin to open for business, while Covid-19 is not yet completely over. Management team has to lead staff to attract customers' to make reservations at hotels. Concerning the issue of hygiene, hotel organizational staff must focus intensively on assuring that guests will get good service from professional service providers. Shin and Kang (2020, p. 1) claimed that one way to enhance safety via training on hygienic practices and to reduce customers' anxiety is for hotels applying 'innovative automatic and robotic technologies for social distancing'. They claimed further that 'it is important to reduce interaction with employees and other customers. Technology systems should be prepared for contactless check-in and check-out systems, digital key systems, face recognition systems, and cleaning robot systems' (Shin and Kang (2020, p. 7). While hotel guests choose to have a hotel's dining services, hotel staff should be responsible for food safety in the time of Covid-19. We assume that training has a statistically significant effect on employee hygiene practices (H2).

2.3 Hygiene related to marketing

Selepe and Mjoka (2018, p. 1) stated that 'hygiene knowledge is very important' and that 'it helps in the reduction of the contamination of food, thus the chances of food-borne illness outbreaks are reduced'. They also found that 'most food handlers do have knowledge on [sic] hygiene practices'. Furthermore, 'hygiene practices play a very significant role in ensuring that food preparation is safe for consumption and is free from contamination'. Yu, Seo and Hyun (2021, p. 2) indicated that 'customers emphasized not only the hygiene of the spaces they use, but also the hygiene of hotel staff and the spaces designated for staff'. They recommended that hotel managers should come up with different marketing strategies to raise awareness and trust. In essence, hotels must develop their service process to meet emerging customer needs, improve facilities and customer services, conducting extensive marketing strategies through advertising and promotional campaigns (Hao, Xiao and Chon, 2020, p. 7). Based on the description above, we hypothesize that hygiene has a statistically significant effect on marketing (H3).

2.4 Marketing strategies related to employee performance

Internal marketing strategy is a concept that drive the internal firms product personified in the employees (Amangala and Wali, 2013, p. 1). Hotel marketing managers employ marketing mix theory to meet their objectives and achieve targets regarding sales, profit, customer satisfaction, brand image, reputation, and quality inspection by health officials or corporate evaluation (Hui, et al., 2020, p. 264). There are basically four groups of product marketing mix: products, prices, distribution channels, and marketing promotion, but the service marketing mix consists of 7Ps, with additional emphasis on employees, service processes, and physical environment (Kongsinchainand and Jarutaweenukool, 2020, p. 365). Thus, the success or failure of the organization depends not only on the product, but also on the quality of human resources.

However, as employers try to make employees more knowledgeable and the organization more competitive, training is a must-have within the organization. This would lead into employee morale and customer satisfaction, while service quality improves, even during the economic crisis or off-peak season, which may reduce training plans to avoid future problems (Srichada and Chaisaengpratheep, 2018, p. 230). According to the explanation, we hypothesize that marketing strategies result in statistically significant changes in employee performance (H4).

3. Covid-19 pandemic in Chiang Mai

Covid-19 has made impact on the Thai hotel industry as foreign visitors have cancelled traveling plans due to fear and the government imposing flight restrictions to safeguard the public health (Head, 2020). The hospitality businesses in Chiang Mai have been going through some financial hardships to keep things afloat as it is one of the most favorite destinations in Thailand for rest and relaxation and heavily reliant on foreign travelers to spend their money on goods and services (Pinchuck, 2020). Chiang Mai was ranked 24th place in the World and 5th place in Asia according to the 2013 Travelers' Choice Destinations award due to its geographical location, cultural and natural wonderland with ethnic diversity, a multitude of attractions, and friendly hospitality. Chiang Mai is a place where luxury tourists and backpackers can enjoy the greatest Thailand holiday (Suanmali, 2014, p. 1).

In 2019, 100 billion Baht in revenue from 10.8 million visitors, of which 70 percent were Thais and 30 percent foreigners, were recorded in Chiang Mai (Tanraksa, 2022).

Unfortunately, for business operators linked to providing services to travelers, many of them have suffered a huge financial loss from the tourism revenues due to the visitors fear of being infected by Covid-19. However, now Chiang Mai tries to recover after the coronavirus scare recede and remain a favored tourist destinations by promoting tourism and improving economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Tanraksa, 2022).

4. Hotel management during Covid-19

The hospitality industry has suffered, hotel staff confront with loss of income and unemployment as a result of the cutting of expendable overhead costs. Cost reduction becomes necessary according to government policy that strongly encourage people to practice social distancing and self-quarantine for 14 days. It helps to prevent Covid-19 dampen enthusiasm to travel (Cha, 2020, p. 2). Painstaking efforts have been made to get the hospitality industry and relevant businesses back on track, but there have been surges of infection that have led to further lockdowns in some regions to curb the infection rate. Workers have experienced anxiety, depression, and the fear that things will get worse for them because the Covid-19 pandemic seems to be out of control (Xiao, et al., 2020, p. 2). Hotel staff and employees have gone through a tumultuous experience as they watched other hospitality businesses around them shut down, making them wonder whether they will be next to fall through the cracks into hopelessness, where they will become the next victim of poverty or infection and suffer a slow death. All these concerns have cause severe worries about the future and distract workers from focusing

on their jobs (Karatepe, Saydam and Okumus, 2021, p. 935).

Therefore, it is a great significance for hospitality organizations to seek solutions for managing employees' mental health in the context of the global pandemic (Jung, Jung and Yoon, 2021, p. 1). Yang, et al. (2021, p. 1.) recommended that hotels must utilize what assets they have, such as dining, to survive for the time being. They should make up the full service dining experience in restaurants to be at home in stead. They can create an ultimate sensory experience by detailing the food culture and ingredients, demonstrating how the food is prepared, providing pieces of advice in terms of setup at home, and suggesting the best way of consumption. Kokkamhaengm and Saengsuwan (2015, p. 80) along with Thongyam (2017, p. 223) pointed out that quality of service has a positive direct influence on customer satisfaction, especially the readiness of service providers to respond to customers at all times. This brings the confidence and consistency in service standard providing to customers. When customers receive and satisfy with good services and have great service experiences, they will return and repeat the purchase of that services. Therefore, improving the quality of service to meet the needs of customers will lead to loyalty in using the service.

The management guidelines of hotels during the Covid-19 pandemic proposed by Hawaree and Povathong (2021, pp. 226-228) that small hotels lowering room rates to attract tourists with lower prices than during the normal marketing period being used as promotions to receive more Thai and long-term tourists. While the medium-sized hotels adjusting the target group to accept more Thai tourists because foreigners are not yet able to enter the nation. Since different sizes of hotels have different expenses, a reduction of management costs should be organized. For instance, staff lay off, increase promotion channels to sell hotel rooms, limit resources to open with limited capacity, thus allowing the business to survive for a certain period of time (Garrido-Moreno, García-Morales and Martín-Rojas, 2021, p. 2).

The hotel's adaptation strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic include physical aspects (renovation of hotel space to meet the needs of new target groups); marketing (room price reduction) to make a long-stay promotion; doing side business such as restaurants, pastry shops, cafes, remodeling of the hotel's point of sale business); adapting services and safety (cleaning and vaccination of employees; public relations about the tourism situation); or room and occupancy adjustments (changing the target audience differently; expanding the target audience from the original) (Hawaree and Povathong, 2021, p. 226).

From reviewing the literature, the structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyze the following hypotheses:
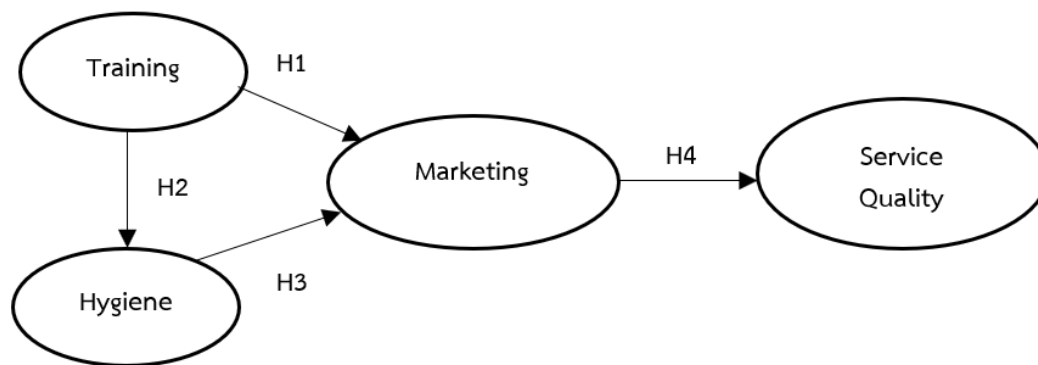
H1: Training has a statistically significant effect on marketing strategies.

H2: Training has a statistically significant effect on employee hygiene practices.

H3: Hygiene has a statistically significant effect on marketing.

H4: Marketing strategies result in statistically significant changes in employee performance.

Conceptual Framework

Methods

Participants

The quantitative data were collected from the questionnaires between January 2021 and April 2021. Out of a total of 138 respondents, three-quarters were women (105 cases), and one quarter were men (33 cases). According to the Chiang Mai Provincial Administrative Organization, in 2022, there are 656 hotels located in the urban area, 938 hotels located throughout Chiang Mai province. On the basis of this information, we can say that most of our samples played a major role in taking care of their families. All the respondents were married, lived in the urban area of Chiang Mai, and had school-aged children. The average number of years of work experience in hotel businesses was approximately 22 years.

Since the exact number of service providers (hotel employees) is unknown, the researchers calculated the quantitative sample size based on the ratio between sample units: variable. Shumacker and Lomax (2010, p. 41) noted that the sample unit should be between 10 to 20 times when compared to the variables. Thus, the suitable number of respondents or hotel service providers in the

Chiang Mai province of this research is 180. The calculation of this sample size comes from 12 indicator variables multiplied by 15 times (between 10-15) is equivalent to 180 samples.

Once the sample size was obtained, the researchers allocated the sample size by using the proportional stratified random sampling technique. The sample groups of hotel ememployees can be classified as hotel managers and departmental heads 32 cases, front office in 41 cases, housekeeping in 35 cases, restaurant staff in 16 cases, and other service providers in the hotel 14 cases. The researchers clarified the details of the research and requested permission from the business owners before distributing questionnaires to hotel employees.

Background of sample and distribution characteristics of the data of the hotel staff who responded to the questionnaire are as followed: six of the respondents were aged 21–30 (4.35 percent of the sample; 5 men, 1 women); these respondents may be called young adult group. They had been working for only a short time, but they had a focus on career security. Most were single and had a duty to support paretns. The 31–40 age group

are married and mostly have only one child (19 men and 3 women). The 41–50 age group have only one child (30 women and 5 men, which is 25.36 percent). The 51–60 age group are senior adults (71 women and 4 men, which is 54.35 percent). Their main income is from the hotels. These people are working as housekeeping or kitchen staff. The children of the respondents in this age group were in high school.

Instrument

Data were collected from the target group using a self-report questionnaire. The researchers developed the questionnaires from reviewing the literature on quality of service, training, hygiene, and marketing strategy in preparation to recover hotel activity and manage the crisis in times of Covid-19 pandemic (Promnil and Polnyotee, 2023, pp. 2-3). Using a hotel network and a hotel club connection in Chiang Mai for support. Questions 1–3 (q1–q3) were focused on service quality, q4–q6 on marketing, q7–q9 on hygiene, and q10–q12 on training. The unit of analysis is the individual. The main component and hotel strategies are measured to cover workers' perspectives.

A questionnaire was examined for content validity by 5 expert academics in examining internal concordance with an Index of Item - Objective Congruence (IOC) of 0.76 and checking the instrument's confidence among 30 people with a coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha. A confidence score of 0.97 was obtained and the questionnaire was distributed in a public place at a relaxation massage service facility.

The SPSS program is used in the analysis of basic data such asnumbersr,percent-agese, mean, standard deviation, dispersion coefficient Pearson correlation coefficient. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Path Analysis were used by AMOS 23 program. Besides, qualitative research data were processed and obtained from the analysis of documents and interview's note-taking. The researchers then write a concrete description of the situation and draw conclusions from the results of the study. The interpretation of all information is therefore to confirm and synthesize the validity of the results of the study.

This research aims to point out that latents: training and hygiene are believed to be important and affect marketing and eventually quality of services, shown in Figure 3. We aim to measure with the structural equation model (SEM) because it can be indicative of the reliability of the statistics used. To collect data, structured questionnaires were developed which were divided into 2 parts: part 1 was personal information consisting of the gender and age of respondents and part 2 was about employee training, educating and/or improving the service quality of employees. The researcher has chosen 5 points Likert scale questionnaire which divides the scale of interpretation into 5 levels: 5 means Strongly Agree; 4 means Agree; 3 means Neutral; 2 means Disagree; 1 means Strongly disagree.

The results of the confirmatory component analysis show various index values, for instance, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of more than 0.50 and the Construct Reliability (CR) of more than 0.60 (Hair, et al., 2006, pp. 772-779). In the evaluation of the Data Model Fit, the key statistical values used to verify con-

sistency (Fit) between the empirical model and theoretical model must not be statistically significant. This means that P-value is more than 0.05. Upon an examination, it was found that the empirical model and the theoretical model is inconsistent, then the researchers should prove these statistics: (1) Chi-Square/ Degree of Freedom (x2 df) should be lower than 2.00 (Byrne, 2001, p. 126) (2) Root Mean Square Error of Approximation or RMSEA) should be lower than 0.05 (Angsuchote, Wijitwanna and Pinyopanuwat, 2011, p. 23) (3) Good of Fit Index or GFI should be as close to 1 as possible (Tanaka and Huba, 1989, p. 235) (4) Comparative Fit Index or CFI should be between 0-1. However, if the number is close to 1, it indicates a good fit of the model (Bentler, 1990, pp. 238-246) (5) Root Mean Square Residual or RMR should be lower than 0.05 (Angsuchote, Wijitwanna and Pinyopanuwat, 2011, p. 22). The researchers then take the Standardized Regression Weights, Standard Error (S.E.), t-Value, Critical Ratio (CR), and the Square Multiple Correlation (R2) obtained from the analysis results prepared as a measurement equation.

The prove of all research hypotheses, the researchers presented statistics showing the relationship between all variables with the Standardized Regression Weights, -Value, and p-Value. Then the researchers used the Standard Error of b coefficients (S.E.), -Value or Critical Ratio (CR.), and the Square Multiple Correlation obtained from the analysis to prepare the structural equation of the research model. Finally, present the statistics show the influence between variables.

After that, the researchers verified the results, and the conbrach alpa of 0.940 was examined, and the assistant researchers asked the staff working in three Chiang Mai hotels which are 4-star hotels (in the reference of the Thai Hotels Association), and the data was revised to be adjusted to the content. When the questionnaire was improved, it was actually used to collect data and ask for cooperation from the Thai hotels association where local authorities provided assistance. The hotels allowed the research assistants to distribute the questionnaire to the hotel staff who voluntarily answer. During the time of data collection in Chiang Mai, there was an outbreak of Covid-19 alpha and delta. The hotels and staff are concerned about the outbreak that tourists could be infected as they came to hotels. It was fortunate that the staff at the hotels had time to answer the questionnaire.

Research methodology
Data Analysis

Number of 170 questionnaires were sent, 138 respondents replied, and 32 respondents did not cooperate in filling in the information. Data analysis of this study was done by examining personal data, the importance of training, educating, and/or improving the quality of service of employees by descriptive statistics which is the mean and standard deviation. Upon obtaining the data, it was saved in the SPSS software. Also, the construct variables will be used in the SEM testing. Once the construct variables have been completed, they were transferred to STATA version 15.1.

In the beginning, a reflective model was considered in the form of a first-order confirmatory analysis by considering which each latent would be in each group. After that,

it was combined into SEM that we believed that the antecedent factors of hygiene training had an effect on service quality marketing as a mediator. After receiving the full model, the results of the research were as follows.

Results

The result should be completely conformed to the research objectives and research hypotheses, the statistical significance level was set at 95 percent confidence, which means that the level of statistical significance is 0.05. Therefore, in this analysis, the goal was to examine the quality of service of hotel staff during Covid-19. The pandemic is now perceived as a reflection of the importance of marketing strategies and the need for rigorous training in this regard. Hygiene principles are established by the government, therefore they become a priority on management principles. The structural equations are used to test the hypotheses as shown in Figure 1. While details of the variables, their meanings, and their distribution characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Definition of variables and descriptive statistics

| Variable	Definition	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
q1	Costs, expenditures, and service standards have been reduced.	3.768	0.653	1	5
q2	Staff responses and solves problem quickly in order to deliver service to travelers.	3.934	0.616	1	5
q3	Current competition concerns mostly on offering the lowest price for travelers.	3.992	0.609	2	5
q4	Temporary partnerships are created with other businesses to generate some revenue.	3.920	0.621	1	5
q5	Local markets are focused for now.	3.876	0.640	2	5
q6	New market channels are being explored.	4.014	0.584	2	5
q7	Hygiene surveillance is implemented to ensure safety and health of travelers for risk of virus contamination reduction.	4.159	0.560	2	5
q8	Travelers and staff can access to receive quality medical care and services.	4.137	0.571	2	5
q9	Innovative in providing customer services is continual to keep travelers and staff from risk.	4.043	0.579	2	5
q10	Staff is always relearning to look for better serving methods of travelers and to perform stable confidence.	4.086	0.576	2	5
q11	Supporting other business networks of suppliers help meet their aims.	3.949	0.622	2	5
q12	Education and training are promoted to take the right approach in added value services.	4.072	0.581	2	5

SD = standard deviation
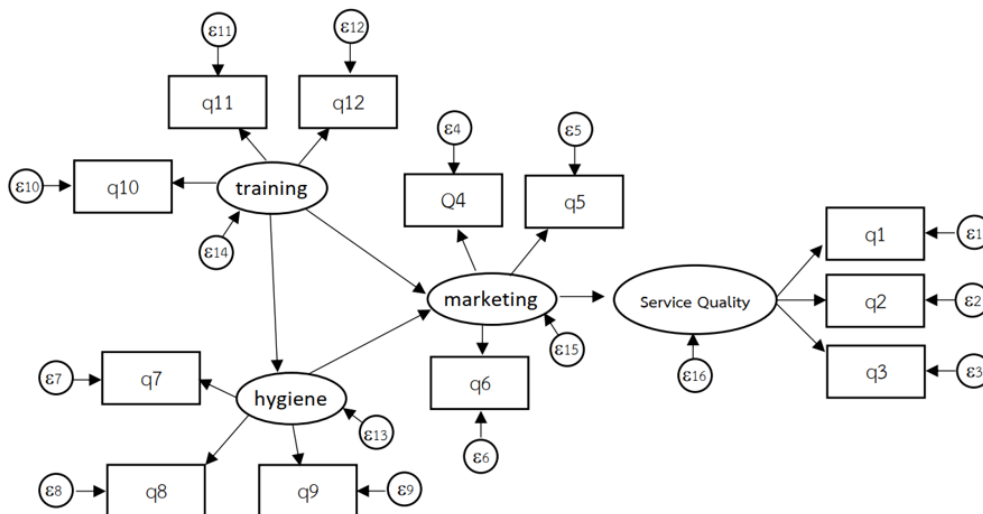
Figure 1 The structural equation conceptual framework to prove the statistical hypothesis

The following details describe the distribution characteristics of the observed variables. First, all scores were based on a five-point scale with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Most of the distribution characteristics of the observed variables focus on measuring service quality (Table 1). The mean and standard deviation patterns indicate a relatively high level of quality and performance of employees. However, the results are not statistically significant as there is a standard deviation of more than 0.50. Questions 3 and 4 reflect the issues about measuring the quality of work that most employees brought up. For example, more than half of respondents indicated that their services were only of average quality (q3), whereas another proportion responded that their services were of high quality (q4). Notably, only a small percentage of respondents said that their service provided a very high quality (q5). Employees could not provide a satisfactory level of service, as shown in Table 1.

Similarly, regarding the marketing variables, (q4–q6) suggested that the opportunity of the hotel market was still good despite the instability, showing a standard deviation above 0.5. New markets were being explored, and new sales channels were being considered for the situation. This suggests that the affiliated organization should adapt to the area and encourage employees to willingly cooperate (Table 1).

Concerning the training variables, the distribution pattern did not differ from q1–q6. The mean of the scores was approximately 4, most of which had a standard deviation of 3 or moderately by 3 or modest respondents. Similarly, concerning the distribution of the hygiene variables (q7–q9), the pattern was not significantly different from the other variables. The responses were also well distributed, with high averages and standard deviations. This suggests that the majority of employees care about the provision of services and consider it is a priority according to the governmental policy about the Covid-19 prevention program, even if the average score is less than 5 at the highest level. In the measurement of training, hygiene, and service quality variables, the questions in

the questionnaire are developed in relation to Likert scale 1-5. Questions 1-6 measure training variables, questions 7-9 measure hygiene, and questions 10-12 measure service quality.

Analysis of Collinearity and Multi-collinearity

Because the scale of measurement level of observed variables used in this study (Figure 1) are interval scale. They preliminarily accord with the use of structural equation models. All variables in the equation must be independent of each other; there must be no collinearity or multicollinearity. The Pearson moment product correlation (r) was tested with a cut-point value of 0.650 (Gujarati and Porter, 2015, p. 320). Information in Table 2 presents the Correlation Matrix when considering the correlation between the observed variables.

Table 2 The Correlation Matrix of observed variables

Variable	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12
Q1	1											
Q2	0.497	1										
Q3	0.332	0.376	1									
Q4	0.272	0.283	0.358	1								
Q5	0.293	0.207	0.242	0.421	1							
Q6	0.137	0.199	0.232	0.392	0.513	1						
Q7	0.148	0.196	0.386	0.315	0.205	0.148	1					
Q8	0.234	0.210	0.257	0.301	0.168	0.199	0.650	1				
Q9	0.258	0.293	0.256	0.277	0.143	0.213	0.571	0.621	1			
Q10	0.242	0.155	0.151	0.255	0.146	0.293	0.410	0.462	0.520	1		
Q11	0.337	0.334	0.178	0.444	0.348	0.410	0.220	0.284	0.355	0.443	1	
Q12	0.158	0.158	0.181	0.314	0.353	0.390	0.361	0.381	0.375	0.474	0.520	1

Analysis of First Order Confirmative Factor Analysis

The first step in creating structural equations to test empirical data is to demonstrate that the latent variables in the measurement model can be measured using observation variables. Analysis was performed on the following models: service quality (Model A), hygiene (Model B), marketing (Model C), and training (Model D), as shown in Figure 2. The first-order confirmatory factor analysis shows that all observed variables pass the goodness of fit test (Table 3-4).

Table 3 Factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) of the measurement model

Variables	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Service Quality		**0.603**	**0.819**
Q1	.796		
Q2	.820		
Q3	.708		
Marketing		**0.629**	**0.835**
Q4	.747		
Q5	.823		
Q6	.807		
Hygiene		**0.747**	**0.898**
Q7	0.864		
Q8	0.886		
Q9	0.842		
Training		**0.653**	**0.850**
Q10	0.784		
Q11	0.812		
Q12	0.828		

Table 4 Model Goodness of Fit of First Order Confirmative Factor Analysis

Model Goodness of Fit Indicator	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D	Criteria Index	Model Evaluation
Chi-square Model	64.843	158.377	76.303	88.406		
D.F.	60	80	54	61		
Chi-square/D.F.	1.086	1.990	1.415	1.456		
RMSEA	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	<0.05	Good
CFI	0.725	0.955	0.946	0.952	≥0.90	Good
SRMR	0.023	0.026	0.030	0.025	≤0.08	Good
GFI	0.937	0.937	0.928	0.923	≥0.90	Good
AGFI	0899	0.898	0.884	0.875	≥0.90	Good
NFI	0.948	0.943	0.935	0.942	≥0.90	Good
TLI	0.947	0.940	0.929	0.937	≤0.95	Good
AVE	0.597	0.580	0.581	0.680	≥0.50	Good
CR	0.882	0.876	0.884	0.876	≥0.60	Good

DF = degrees of freedom, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, AIC = Akaike's information criterion, BIC = Bayesian information criterion, CFI = comparative fit index, SRMR = standardized root mean square residual GFI =, Goodness of Fit Index, AGFI = Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index, NFI = Norm Fit Index, TLI = Tucker – Lewis Index The criteria of the Goodness of Fit index are referred by Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2011)
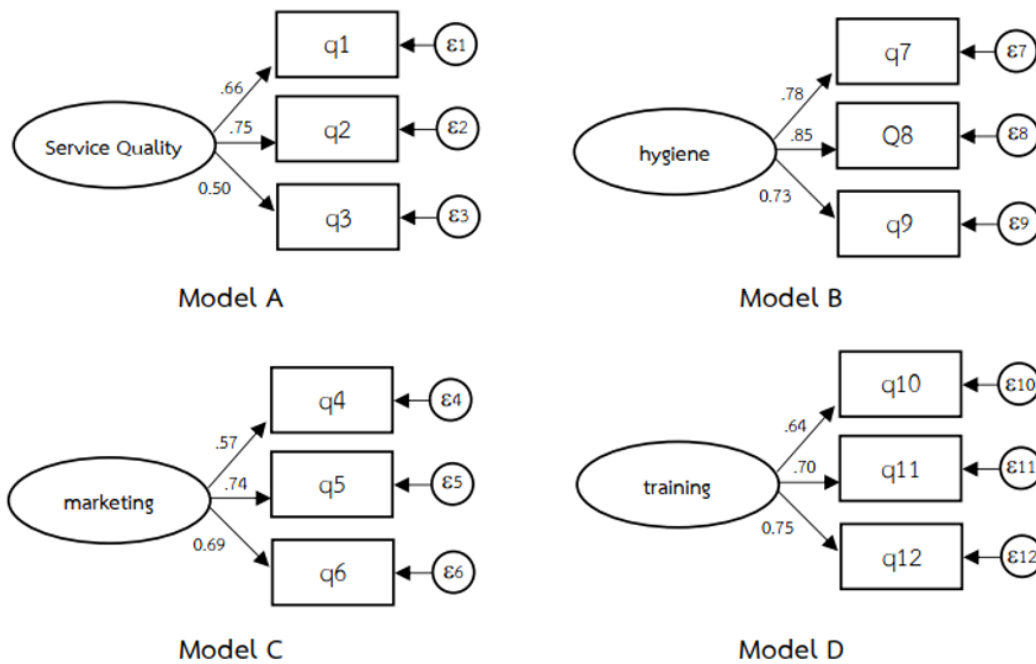
Figure 2 First Order Confirmative Factor Analysis

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Coef	Z-test	Results
H1: Training has a statistically significant effect on marketing strategies.	0.71	3.83***	supported
H2: Training has a statistically significant effect on employee hygiene practices.	-0.04	5.11***	supported
H3: Hygiene has a statistically significant effect on marketing.	-0.04	-0.30	Not supported
H4: Marketing strategies has statistically significant changes in employee performance.	0.73	3.98***	supported

Z-stat ≥ 1.96 indicating that the hypothesis is statistically significant at the level 0.05**

Z-stat ≥ 2.59 indicating that the hypothesis is statistically significant at the level 0.10***

Hypothesis 1 (H1) is in line with Hosseini, Zainal and Sumarjan (2015, p. 159), the staff in charge of providing quality services, an important that requires to have frequent attention to details of guests' behavior and attitudes in real-time. They must also analyze feedback for the purpose of developing their service quality. Therefore, they can recognize the causes of the problems and solve them immediately. Staff needs to adjust or change to ensure that guests have a positive experience.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) conforms with Shin and Kang (2020, p. 3) claimed that one way to enhance safety via hygienic practices and to reduce customers' anxiety is for hotels to integrate. As hotel guests can select to use a hotel's dining services, then those responsible for preparing the food must take disciplinary measures to prevent any type of outbreak from occurring.

Hypothesis 3 (H3), Yu, Seo and Hyun (2021, p. 2) indicated that 'customers empha-

sized not only the hygiene of the spaces they used but also the hygiene of hotel staff and the spaces designated for staff'. They recommended that hotel managers should come up with different strategies to raise awareness and trust that hygiene is being administrated effectively and efficiently.

Hypothesis 4 (H4) is in line with Anwar and Shukur (2015, p. 65) indicated that the training is part of the process of delivering total satisfaction to the targeted group. No matter whether it is the working model or standards that guide the nature of the work, the methods applied must always be re-evaluated by human resource management. This must be done to design a proper training program to ensure that employees are confident about what they are doing. Marketing strategies oriented towards specifications concerning the satisfaction of the guests (by using the facilities for personal or business functions.)

Analysis of Structural Equation Model

After the collinearity and multicollinearity check (Table 2) and confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation analysis was performed. The following sequences are based on structural equation models of the conceptual framework, which are used to indicate that the hypotheses are correct, and particularly that the quality of employee services reflects the mediating variable, marketing strategy. First, an understanding of the current market situation (i.e. the Covid-19 pandemic) comes from training and focuses on another factor (see Figure 2). The results clearly proved that training, education, and focusing on hygiene principles had a statistically significant impact on marketing and the quality of employee services at all 0.05 levels. All variables and the goodness of fit model of this equation are described in Table 6; Table 7 indicates the level of the group's influence on the other groups.
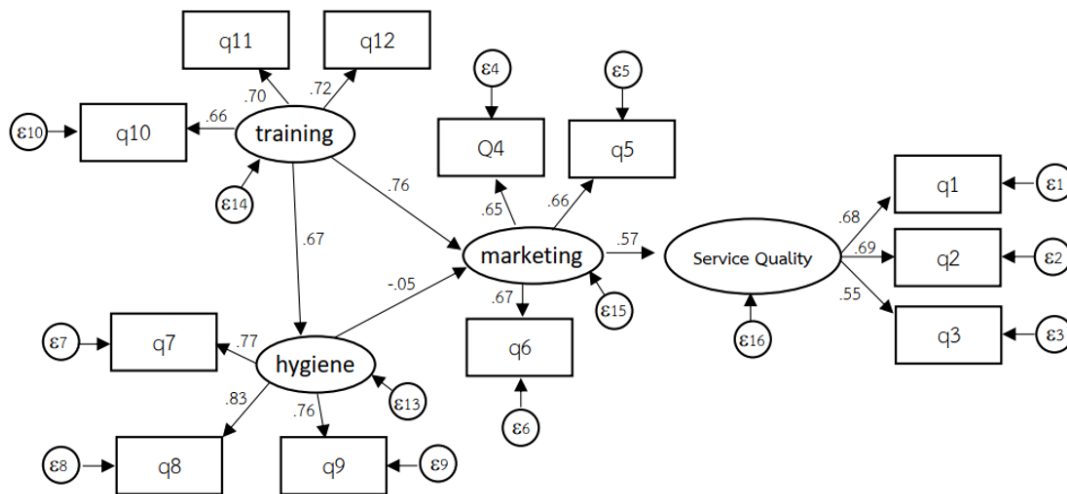

Figure 3 The final structural Equation model

Table 6 Model Goodness of Fit the structural equation

Chi-square Model	Degree of Freedom	Chi-square/D.F.	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
86.678	50	1.734	0.073	0.929	0.074

DF = degrees of freedom, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation,

CFI = comparative fit index, SRMR = standardized root mean square residual

Table 7 The total effect, direct effect, and indirect effect from the structural equation

	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect
Training-> Marketing	0.657	0.687	-0.030
Marketing-> Service quality	0.460	0.460	0.000
Training->Hygiene	0.682	0.682	0.000
Hygiene -->Marketing	-0.044	-0.044	0.000
Hygiene->Training	0.682	0.682	0.000
Training-> Service quality	0.302	0.000	0.302
Hygiene-> Service quality	-0.020	0.000	-0.020

Discussion and conclusion

Marketing acts as a mediator to quality of service, therefore, the hotels must emphasize on marketing strategies, followed by hygiene and staff training. Toh-it, et al. (2022, p. 53) service quality affecting the satisfaction of hotel users who have received tourist hygiene safety standards, it is stated that service quality affects the satisfaction of tourists who use the service, with reviews about the service quality of hotels receiving tourist hygiene safety standards being the factor with the highest level of opinion among respondents. Quality service in a hotel can be an assessment of the hotel's strategy and system, as well as shows how efficient and effective services are delivered to meet guests' expectations and needs (Padlee, Thaw and Zulkiffli, 2019, p. 2).

The outstanding finding of this research is that employees require intensive training, especially in hygiene because it is a major cause of Covid-19 spread (Department of Health, Ministry of Public Health, 2021, p. 9). When hotel staff realize the importance of hygiene, it induces a better quality of service, resulting in customers' confidence. However, the observed variables in this research do not take the demographic characteristics into account in the structural equation model. The researchers believe that age and gender reflect the personality of hotel staff where they are always ready to get training. In addition, training on hygiene and service quality should be given to all the staff members during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The findings are focused on four hypotheses with an antecedent factor in management focusing on employees. The results of this study were in accordance with hypothesis 1 (H1), 2 (H2), and 4 (H4), except hypothesis 3 (H3) claiming that 'hygiene did not affect marketing'. However, they are all connected

in a way that influences the structure that led to the quality of service. Even though hygiene did not have a statistically significant effect to marketing, hotel staff and eligible workplaces are required to complete training on hygiene provided by the health authority to receive the Thailand Safety and Health Administration (SHA) Certificate. The SHA-certified hotels illustrated the performance of the hotels that they strictly follow the Covid-19 control guidelines and ensure safety and health standards. In the meantime, tourists have confidence in the Thai tourism industry's standards and have new tourism experiences regarding "the new normal" during the Covid-19 pandemic (Janthadech, 2021, p. 5).

The findings indicate that training issues and enhancing employees' understanding of hygiene have a significant impact on employee performance. In particular, (the employees' knowledge of the government's guidelines for hotels and accommodations, known as the Safety Health Administration), has had a statistically significant impact on marketing strategies and directly affected the service quality of employees' actions and expressions, which can be considered forces from endogenous factors. Training had a strong impact on understanding marketing, which enables organizations to continue to operate and survive, as well as positively affects their performance. This characteristic of the relationship indicates that communication within an organization should emphasize the quality of the service.

The hygiene and cleanliness of an environment strongly affect employee confidence in relation to and in making direct contact with customers. More importantly, when considering the indirect effects of, for example, hygiene training and marketing on the positive quality of the service, it is worth noting that the process of creating good service with the service will have to be integrated into all three parts. Especially during the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to provide the necessary assistance for front desk employees who must always have duty contact with guests.

This research is also in line with Yeh (2021, p. 2) which states that managing people in hotels has different ways of working during the covid-19 pandemic. People's behavior has forced organizations to change their work patterns in accordance with the dynamic changing context. This belief is consistent with the study done by Pornleartkochakorn, et al., (2022, p. 46) stated "Hotels should strive to retain high-performing employees and use this period in training employees to be able to multitask at once for flexibility in their work and optimize human resource allocation. Hotel staff should be strict with hygiene measures to maintain the client's accommodation environment, such as disinfection, food hygiene control, mask distribution, or providing medical consultations to reassure residents' health and safety.

In summary, the importance of the current challenges in the wake of the emerging Covid-19 pandemic has forced hotel businesses to adapt to the potential pandemic crisis at any time. Based on the objective results of this study, respondents inform about training employees. They are ready to reassure customers

about hygiene. Training creates a positive market that gives customers confidence. Also, it's part of a competitive advantage by building the skills and quality of service in the most challenging way. Last but not least, the hospitality industry may consider using the research results for developing the marketing strategies while preparing for any other pandemic that may occur in the future. This study confirms that staff training on sanitation is absolutely related to the marketing strategies where hotels can influence the consumer's perception with regards to the brand or product that is relative to the competitors. Moreover, the idea is to establish the image of a brand so that consumers perceive quality of service in a certain way. For instance, the five-star hotel in Chiang Mai uses the 'Cleaning Technology' to ensure the best-possible levels of cleanliness, sanitization and disinfection throughout the public areas such as the UV sterilization, UV light disinfection, and HVAC Hepa air conditioning technologies. Every room contains a personal hygiene kit with a mask and hand sanitizer for each guest. The hotel also provides food service for external customers who can drop in buying and taking home. It is believed that the publication of this paper will contribute to both academic and practical knowledge to the stakeholders.

Practical implications

Nevertheless, this crisis from the outbreak of Covid-19 has made an impact on various businesses. One of those is the hotel business which is forced to reduce the number of employees to maintain its financial balance for survival. At the same, some hotels cannot maintain their financial balance and shut their operation down. Either reducing the number of employees or closing the business will inevitably impact employees. They are subjected to hardship conditions, particularly their salary and welfare benefits are reduced. Employees who do not agree to the conditions will be asked to resign. Meanwhile, persistent employees must take on a wider range of duties that they are responsible for. This is why it is important for business executives to think about what to do to retain loyal employees in the organization and encourage them to work to their full potential. In addition, this is about management's consideration of development with situational training for the purpose of creating a competitive advantage. This important issue is not only a solution to the Covid-19 crisis, but also proactive planning for a crisis that emerges in the future.

This research showed that even though the hotel staff service person is aware of the quality of service for hotel guests, they should continually receive training regarding hygiene to prevent the spread of Covid-19. This creates great confidence among service users and tourists to use the hotel's services. During the airborne pandemic of coronavirus, disease control scholars should educate all the tourism industries, hotels, restaurants, spas, etc. regarding hygiene and training to enhance customers' confidence and proof of service quality. It is worth noting that hotel owners, managers, authorized decision makers, or stakeholders should always concentrate on provide training about hygiene and marketing. In addition, they should place importance on the quality of ser-

vice. This study illustrated that all factors have a structural relationship, where we cannot ignore any variables.

Limitations and future research

Due to the data collection of this research conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the hotels were unsure about the safety and some of the staff worked overlap. This obstructed the appropriate data and small sample, compared to the normal situation. The hotels in Chiang Mai have rescheduled by limiting the working days and the number of employees daily as a prevention for the spread of coronavirus.

This research focused on the development of personnel quality in 4-star hotels located in the Muang district of Chiang Mai. Future research should include studies in other tourist cities with similar business growth to Chiang Mai, which will be more specifically based on the contextual conditions of each hotel area. Future research may be on developing service quality indicators that can measure service quality more effectively and developing new service quality indicators to better suit the hotel business.

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