

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BANGKOK SUBWAY'S EXPECTED AND PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Bangkok's first subway system (MRT) opened to the public in July 2004. This study is the first comprehensive investigation into the perceived and expected service quality level of both Thai and non-Thai users of the subway. Based on the results of this study, several recommendations for improving service and for marketing the subway system are presented.

Built by Siemens, the Bangkok subway is a world class mass transit system. Covering about 22 kilometers and containing three interchanges with the existing elevated train system (called Bangkok Transit System or BTS), the subway system enables rapid transport around many parts of metro Bangkok. Unfortunately, ridership has been below expectations. One reason for this appears to be the relatively high cost of riding the subway as compared with using alternatives such as buses. Another reason appears to be disappointment in the perceived level of service quality.

For a mass rapid transit system still in its infancy, service quality is a very important component to gaining customer satisfaction. To be successful with the already planned expansion of the subway, Bangkok's subway operator must understand their customers and how they rate the service quality.

The purpose of this study was to measure the service quality of Bangkok Subway from the perspective of Thai and non-Thai customers to see whether there is a difference in expectation and perception. The SERVQUAL instrument was used to measure service quality for 396 respondents using the subway train service. The data was collected in

March and April of 2005 using a closed-ended questionnaire which consisted of demographic characteristics and 22 statements to measure service quality expectation and perception. The results showed that expectation exceeded perception for both groups on several dimensions of service quality.

The smallest SERVQUAL score gap between non-Thai and Thai customers of Bangkok Subway is in the service quality dimension of reliability, followed by responsiveness, empathy, and assurance. The largest gap is in the dimension called tangibles.

The study found a significant difference between service quality expectation and perception for non-Thai as well as Thai customers of Bangkok Subway.

However, the analysis of the service quality for each service quality dimension showed that only the dimension tangibles indicated a significant difference between non-Thai and Thai customers of Bangkok Subway.

From the research outcome it becomes clear that: 1) Bangkok Subway needs a strategy to first improve its service quality and, 2) to find ways to attract more customers as the subway system is not fully utilized. It is proposed that the Bangkok subway system needs to implement an effective public relations campaign to increase subway usage by all groups. Additional research is needed to determine the most effective strategy for improving perceived service on the Bangkok MRT System.