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**THE CAUSAL RELATIONSHIPS MODEL FOR POTENTIAL  
SMART TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF RESTAURANT  
ENTREPRENEURS IN THAILAND TO SUPPORT CHINESE FIT  
TOURISTS**

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**Abstract:**

This study examined the consistency of structural equation modelling showing the hypothesis of the influence of service marketing mix and the application of smart tourism on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality and empirical data. The sample group consisted of 230 entrepreneurs of small food and beverage businesses in Thailand, serving Chinese FIT tourists. A questionnaire was used to collect data as well as statistical analysis, mean, standard deviation, and creating a causal relationship model of service marketing mix affecting the business performance of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand through service quality with linear structural relationships. The results revealed that the developed model was consistent with the empirical data. The service marketing mix had no direct influence on entrepreneurs' business performance, but the service marketing mix had an indirect influence on entrepreneurs' business performance through service quality with statistical significance at .01. While the application of smart tourism had direct influence and had an indirect influence on entrepreneurs' business performance through service quality with statistical significance at .01.

**Keywords:**

Smart Tourism, Service Marketing, Service Quality, Business Performance, Chinese FIT Tourists

## Introduction

Smart Tourism was applied to tourists supported by Internet of Things and Cloud Computing (Huang, Yuan & Shi, 2012). This resulted in smarter connectivity changing tourists' patterns and behaviors to fit in the era where smartphones and applications emerge. The technological advancement helps tourists to search, organize and share their experiences through social media, such as sharing sites so that others can compare, choose a service provider, book transportation, accommodation or restaurants, and use mobile apps to set a destination (Huang, Goo, Nam & Yoo, 2017). This is an important opportunity to attract foreign tourists to visit Thailand, affecting the growth of Thailand's tourism.

“Thai tourism industry” is a significant part to drive the country's economy. The Second National Tourism Development Plan prioritizes driving the economy by technology and digital system to deal with changing tourists' behaviors. The growth of Gen Y and Z tourists who travel by themselves, need convenience in transportation that comes with speed by booking in advance via applications, love to travel to explore authentic delicious food, and share restaurant's location and menu on social media (Daily News, 2017). Moreover, Wi-Fi is the most important thing during travel, and it was found that social media is an online medium that relatively affects travel (Brandbuffet, 2019).

From data in 2019, Chinese tourists mostly visited Thailand with 11.14 million people with an increase of 1.07% and expense of 530 billion baht, accounting for 27.80% of the total income from foreign tourists. When considering the ratio of overseas travel among Chinese, it only accounted for 8-9% of all population. This revealed opportunities for growth in the Chinese tourist market. Moreover, Chinese tourists' changing behavior. They used more internet. In China, social media for Chinese people include "Youku," similar to YouTube and “Baidu” is a popular search engine that Chinese people use to search for travel information. Baidu Thailand (2016) found that the most popular search terms for foodies included “Local dining options” and “What to eat in Thailand”. This information is useful to entrepreneurs to select products or services. Therefore, it is a good opportunity to focus on Chinese "FIT" tourists (Free and Independent Traveler), which is a high quality of tourists from China.

Due to the growth of tourism, the business competition has become more intense. Service business entrepreneurs should improve quality and find a target group based on the current trends. Learning Chinese social media is important to enhance the efficiency of communication channels that promote marketing to reach the target group as well as promotion in service marketing and development of travel products to meet the target customers.

The tourism sector plays a key role in supporting the expansion of the food and beverage businesses. In 2019, many cities such as Pattaya hosted the Fifth Amazing Pattaya Seafood Festival 2019 to show the potential of a world-class tourism city, ready to serve tourists with outstanding variety of seafood, service standards, hygiene, and food safety (Chonburi, 2019).

Since 2020, the impact of COVID-19 has blocked foreign tourists from traveling in Thailand. As a result, the number of Chinese tourists visiting Thailand has greatly decreased. However, Thailand is fully prepared, especially about vaccination against corona virus-19 to the population in the area. Additionally, the policy of opening the country according to the form prescribed by the Ministry of Public Health. This is an important opportunity to motivate Chinese tourists to come back and visit Thailand again.

From changing behaviors and the growth of Chinese FIT tourists along with the average spending of tourists and the competitive situation of entrepreneurs. As a result, there was a question of how entrepreneurs of small tourism businesses in food and beverage distribution businesses find an approach to improve tourism potential to achieve the business's goal, create a competitive advantage to be superior to competitors, and grow continuously. From above, the researcher is interested in studying the approach and the causal relationship model of the development of smart tourism potential of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand to accommodate Chinese FIT tourists. This study only focused on entrepreneurs of small restaurants in food and beverage businesses in Thailand that serve Chinese FIT tourists.

This study aims to study service marketing and the application of smart tourism that influence service quality, and to study service marketing, the application of smart tourism and service quality that influences on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand, and to examine the consistency of structural equation modeling showing the hypothesis of the influence of service marketing mix and the application of smart tourism on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality and empirical data.

### Literature Review

This study examined the marketing strategy based on a concept of Kotler and Armstrong (2010) about 7 elements as tools in formulating an organization's service marketing. And to study the application of Smart Tourism in the enterprise by integrating the main factors affecting behavioral intention to use based on concepts and theories to develop a unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT2) of Venkatesh, Thong & Xu (2012) in 7 areas. Which can consider factors of service quality in 5 areas based on the concept of Parasuraman, Zeithamal & Berry (1990) that modified theory was presented by Dechtongkam (2020), which explains the ability to provide quality service that meets customers' expectations to differentiate a business over competitors. This can be measured by a tool called SERVQUAL, and the business performance of entrepreneurs' small tourism businesses in Thailand can be considered from the integration of Kaplan & Norton's Balanced Scorecard (1996) that modified theory was presented by Muneekaew, Montrisuksirikul, Wattanaparb, & Itthiophakorn (2020) to measure and evaluate the results of the activities of the organization from customers' perspective. Gaining market share and having more channels to reach new Chinese tourists can create satisfaction in products and services, and Chinese tourists came back to buy products and services again with loyalty to the enterprise for the success of the organization. Literature review and related studies are below.

From related studies between service marketing mix and service quality, the research by Soonthonsmai (2020), finding that the perception of marketing mix of place and marketing promotion was mostly related to assurance. In addition, the research by Charoensup (2016) found that word of mouth in terms of persuasion affected the customer's assessment of premium restaurant service quality in Bangkok the most. These factors together could explain the customer's assessment of premium restaurant service quality in Bangkok at 54 percent. From the above reasons, the first hypothesis (H1) is that service marketing mix has a direct influence on service quality.

Although there are studies on the adoption and use of technology (UTAUT2) and the quality of service. a lot of one story However, there are few researches that study the relationship between technology acceptance and use and service quality both at home and abroad. especially in the tourism sector and the food and beverage sector. From related research studies, the

researcher found a similar study to tourism, Lee and Wu (2011), which examined the effects of technology acceptance on the quality of tourism. electronic service A case study of airline websites in Taiwan by Web Marketing found that the results of trust and perceived benefits which is a factor in the acceptance of information technology There is a positive correlation with the quality of electronic services. From the above reasons, the second hypothesis (H2) is that the application of smart tourism has a direct influence on service quality.

Conducting research related to service quality and business performance, Khan, Aabdean, Salman, Nadeem, and Rizwan (2016) found that product quality and service quality affected behavioral brand loyalty. This explained how important product quality and service quality were in the restaurant industry and fast-food restaurants. From the above reasons, the third hypothesis (H3) is that service quality has a direct influence on business performance.

Reviewing research related to service marketing mix and business performance. Apakalo (2016) found that factors of the marketing mix affected the organization's business performance. The research by Othman, Harun, Rashid, Nazeer, Kassim, and Kadhim (2019) confirmed that elements of the service marketing influenced customers' loyalty to Umrah travel agents in Malaysia. Besides, the research by Azhar, Prayogi, and Sari (2018) found that marketing mix had a significant positive impact on direct and indirect tourists' satisfaction through service quality. From the above reasons, the fourth hypothesis (H4) is that service marketing has direct influence and indirect influence on business performance through service quality.

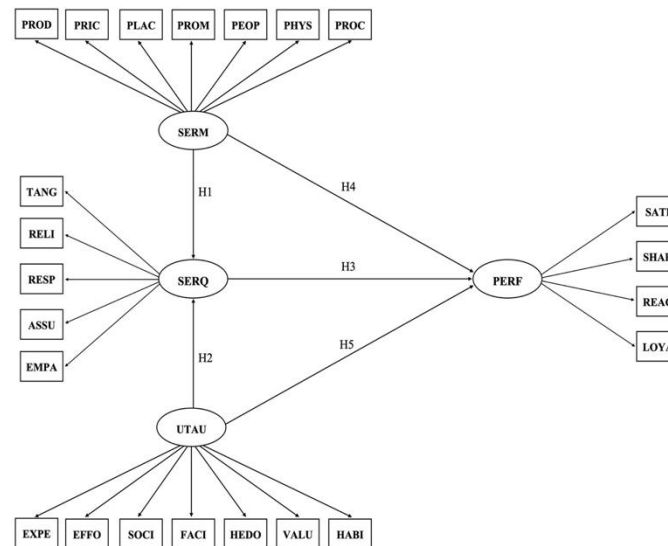
Smart tourism is gaining more and more attention. But the empirical survey of smart tourism from the perspective of enterprise application is still limited. There are many researches related to the acceptance and application of technology in tourism. But when considering in relation to business performance, it was found that Most of the research is related to the application of the booking system and the payment process using the role of technology. Balasubramanian, Balraj, Kumar, and Jaykumar (2015) surveyed the growth of customers in adopting and using smartphone apps when choosing restaurants. It found that smartphone app acceptance and customer satisfaction had a significant positive impact on customer preferences when choosing a restaurant. From the above reasons, the fifth hypothesis (H5) is that the application of smart tourism has direct influence and indirect influence on business performance through service quality.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for approaches and a causal relationship model from related research represents structural equation modelling and the influence between internal latent variables of structural equation modelling by the conceptual framework of the influence of variables of the service marketing mix (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010) and the application of Smart Tourism (Venkatesh, Thong & Xu, 2012) on business performance of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand (Kaplan & Norton, 1996), both directly and indirectly, through service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithamal & Berry, 1990) to examine theoretical models and empirical data.

Therefore, External latent variables are service marketing mix (SERM) including Product (PROD), Price (PRIC), Place (PLAC), Promotion (PROM), People (PEOP), Physical Evidence (PHYS), and Process (PROC). and the application of Smart tourism (UTAU) including Performance Expectation (EXPE), Effort Expectancy (EFFO), Social Influence (SOCI), Facilitating Condition (FACI), Hedonic Motivation (HEDO), Price Value (VALU) and Habit

(HABI). Attribute variables are service quality (SERQ) including Tangibles (TANG), Reliability (RELI), Responsiveness (RESP), Assurance (ASSU) and Empathy (EMPA). And Internal latent variables are business performance (PERF) including Chinese tourists had more satisfaction towards products and services (SATI), Your enterprise gained more market share (SHAR), Your enterprise could find more channels to reach new Chinese tourists (REAC) and Chinese tourists came back to buy products and services again and had loyalty to your products and services (LOYA). The hypothesis in this study are following by figure 1.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## Methods

This study to examine the causal model of the causal relationship of service marketing mix on business performance of restaurant entrepreneurs in Thailand through service quality and empirical data. Methods are as follows. Population is 1,337 entrepreneurs of small food and beverage businesses in Pattaya, Thailand, serving Chinese FIT tourists during January 1, 2021 to April 30, 2021. The researcher determined the sample size of 10 times the observed variable (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2010). Therefore, the sample size was 230 people, distributed according to the data source: North area, Central area and South area (Chillpainai, 2021) by Stratified Random Sampling. Details are as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Proportion Of Sample Groups.**

	North Area	Central Area	South Area	Total
<b>Population</b>	421	439	477	1,337
<b>Proportion of the population</b>	0.31	0.33	0.36	1.00
<b>Number of samples</b>	71	76	83	230

In this study, a questionnaire was used as an instrument, and related variables were developed from concepts, theories, and related research, which can be classified into 4 parts. Part 1 is a questionnaire about service marketing mix, the questions were applied from concepts and

theories of the service marketing mix (7 Ps) based on Kotler and Armstrong (2010). Part 2 is a questionnaire about the application of Smart tourism, the questions were applied from concepts and theories of modified Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) based on Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu. (2012). Part 3 is a questionnaire about service quality, applied from SERVQUAL of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1990). Part 4 is a customer perspective questionnaire, and the questions were integrated from Kaplan and Norton's Balanced Scorecard (1996). Questionnaires were tried out with 20 entrepreneurs of small food and beverage businesses, serving Chinese FIT tourists in Thailand, and content validity was tested by Item-Objective Congruence Index or IOC to check the accuracy of the measure whether it was a measure of the variable that needed to be measured by 6 experts in related fields with criteria of not less than .80 on all items for the reliability of the questionnaire whether each question was consistent or not by finding Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire ranged from 0.710 - 0.876, and the total reliability (Alpha) was .933, which had an alpha coefficient of not less than 0.70, resulting in a reliable questionnaire (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014).

There was a creation of a causal relationship model by defining structural equation modelling (SEM) with a ready-made program. Multivariate statistics were integrated by 3 analytical techniques, including confirmatory factor analysis, regression analysis, and path analysis to find the causal relationship of external and internal latent variables in structural equation modelling to identify the straightness of the pattern, magnitude, and causal influence characteristics between variables in the model as well as reducing preliminary statistical agreement. The research process was divided into 2 phases. Phase 1 includes the development of conceptual frameworks based on concepts and theories. Phase 2 includes the examination of the consistency of hypotheses and empirical data.

## Results

The results of this research met all of the above objectives as follows:

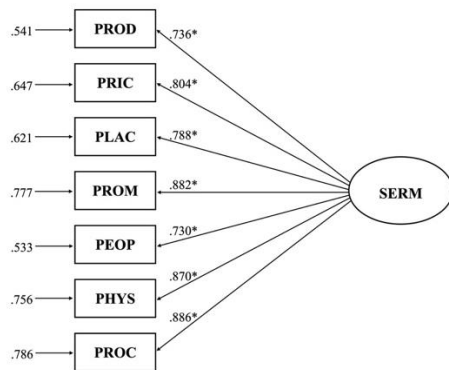
Before confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling analysis, variables' suitability was tested by the distribution of variables by analyzing skewness and kurtosis. It was found that all variables had skewness between -.693 to .838 and kurtosis between -1.255 to 1.042, meaning that all variables had a normal distribution since none of the variables had skewness greater than 3 and had kurtosis greater than 10. Then, a correlation was analyzed between constituent factors of the causal relationship. Due to correlation, all observed variables had a correlation coefficient between .312 to .884. The highest correlation coefficient was less than .90, there would not be a problem of multicollinearity. In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was used to examine KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) and found that Chi-square value was 4604.351 (df was 253 and p was less than 0.001), meaning that this correlation matrix differed statistically from the identity matrix at 0.001. This is consistent with the results of KMO, which was close to 1 (KMO= .954), meaning that variables were sufficient and correlated, and they were appropriate to examine the consistency with empirical data.

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)** was used to analyze construct validity of the service marketing, the application of smart tourism, service quality and restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in as follows:

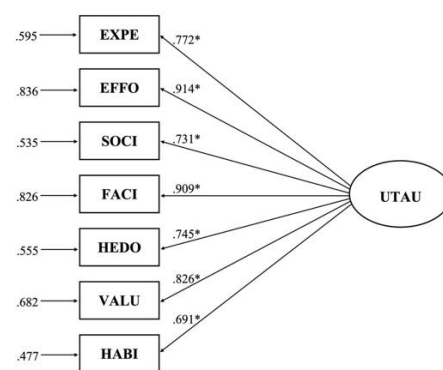
Construct validity analysis of service marketing (SERM) was found that (SERM) measurement model was consistent with empirical data based on Chi-square value of 12.349, a degree of

freedom (df) of 14, p-value of .578, goodness of fit index (GFI) of .985, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .000. When considering factor loading, it was statistically significant at .01 for all factors as shown in Figure 2.

Construct validity analysis of the application of smart tourism (UTAU) was found that (UTAU) measurement model was consistent with empirical data based on Chi-square value of 14.917, a degree of freedom (df) of 5, p-value of .182, goodness of fit index (GFI) of .982, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .039. When considering factor loading, it was statistically significant at .01 for all factors as shown in Figure 3.



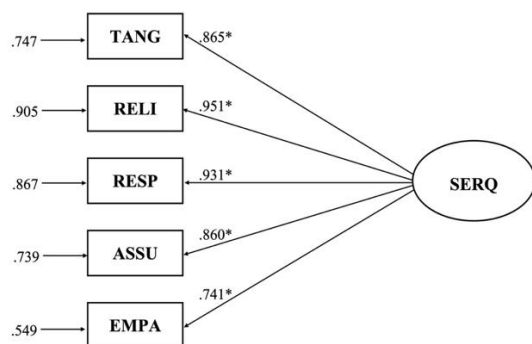
**Figure 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Variables in Service Marketing Measurement Model**



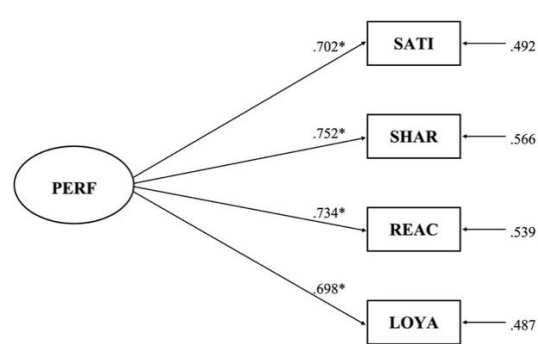
**Figure 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Variables in the application of smart tourism Measurement Model**

Construct validity analysis of service quality (SERQ) was found that (SERQ) measurement model was consistent with empirical data based on Chi-square value of 2.732, a degree of freedom (df) of 5, p-value of .741, goodness of fit index (GFI) of .995, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .000. When considering factor loading, it was statistically significant at .01 for all factors as shown in Figure 4.

Construct validity analysis of business performance (PERF) was found that (PERF) was consistent with empirical data based on Chi-square of .215, a degree of freedom (df) of 2, p-value of .898, goodness of fit index (GFI) of 1.000, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .000. When considering factor loading, it was statistically significant at .01 for all factors as shown in Figure 5.

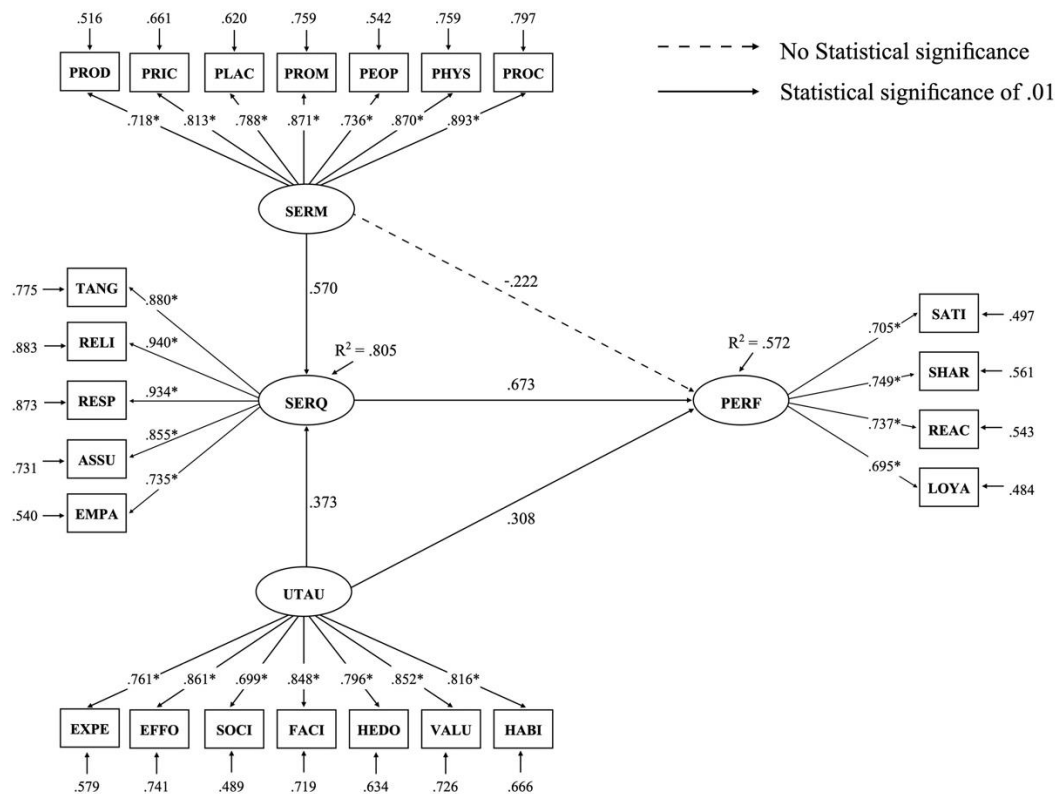


**Figure 4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Variables in Service Quality Measurement Model**



**Figure 5: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Variables in Business Performance Model**

*The Analysis of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)* was used to test the relationship of variables in the causal model to see whether they were consistent with empirical data, and the analysis results were used to explain direct and indirect influences of the service marketing mix, the application of smart tourism and service quality on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand.



Chi-square = 225.842, df = 199, p = .093, GFI = .925, RMR = .011, RMSEA = .024

**Figure 6: Structural Equation Modelling Analysis (SEM)**

The researcher adjusted structural equation modelling based on modification indices, which allowed measurement errors to be correlated. As a result, the service marketing mix's and the application of smart tourism affecting restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality to accommodate Chinese FIT tourists was consistent with empirical data based on Chi-square of 225.842, a degree of freedom (df) of 199, p-value of .093 (Bollen, 1989), goodness of fit index (GFI) of .925 (Mueller, 1996), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .024 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993), and relative chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ ) of 1.135 (Bollen, 1989), as shown in Figure 6.



**Table 2: The Analysis of Factors Directly and Indirectly Affecting Effect Variables**

Cause Variables	Effect Variables					
	SERQ			PERF		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
R <sup>2</sup>			0.805			0.572
SERM	.570**	-	.570**	-.222	.384**	.161**
UTAUT	.373**	-	.373**	.308**	.251**	.559**
SERQ	-	-	-	.673**	-	.673**

\*\* Statistical significance of .01

From Figure 6 and Table 2, service marketing had a positive direct influence on service quality with statistical significance of .01 according to H1 with an influence coefficient of .570, While the application of smart tourism had a positive direct influence on service quality with statistical significance of .01 according to H2 with an influence coefficient of .373, being able to explain the variance in service quality by 80.50%. Service quality had a direct positive influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand with statistical significance of .01 according to H3 with an influence coefficient of .673.

Service marketing had no direct influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand with statistical significance. This is not consistent with H4, but the service marketing had a positive indirect influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality with statistical significance of .01 with an influence coefficient of .384, Moreover the application of smart tourism had a positive direct influence and positive indirect on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand with statistical significance of .01 according to H5 with an influence coefficient of .308 and .251, respectively, being able to explain the variance in business performance by 57.2%.

### Conclusion and Discussion

The results can be discussed as follows:

Service marketing mix had a positive direct influence on service quality with statistical significance of .01 due to service marketing mix, namely product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and presentation, and service process. They were all key tools for businesses to formulate the service marketing mix to differentiate the business from competitors and to enhance business capacity to have service quality that meets clients' expectations. This is consistent with the study of Azhar, Prayogi, and Sari (2018). Moreover, the findings are also consistent with the study of Soonthonsmai (2020) who found that the perception of the service marketing mix including place and promotion were the most important values for service quality in terms of assurance, followed by empathy while people were a factor that Chinese tourists prioritized and directly and positively affected service quality of spa and Thai massage.

The application of Smart Tourism in the workplace has a direct positive influence on service quality. Statistically significant, at the .01 level, establishments needed to adapt to the times

and changes. by focusing on promoting the application of Smart Tourism in the workplace, namely, the expectation of efficiency, the expectation of the effort Influence from society The condition of the facilities in the system On the motivation side of liking price value and in terms of habituation In order to increase the efficiency of attracting tourists and enhancing the quality of service, the establishments have different and superior capabilities, in line with Lee and Wu (2011) who found that the results of trust and perceived benefit which is a factor in the acceptance of information technology There is a positive correlation with the quality of electronic services.

Service quality had a direct positive influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand with statistical significance of .01 due to service quality in terms of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. They were all key tools for the business to measure and evaluate the results of activities from customers' perspective. This is in line with Jeamthiranart and Donkwa (2017), who analyzed the causal factors and found that service quality had a positive direct influence on the growth of the organization, and Khan et al. (2016) found that service quality influenced behavioral brand loyalty. This explains how important service quality is in the restaurant industry and in fast-food restaurants.

Although some parts of the findings may contradict many concepts and theories that the service marketing mix had no direct influence on business performance, the researcher inferred that those theories were developed during normal conditions. Unlike this study, the study was conducted during the COVID-19 epidemic. As a result, it was found that the service marketing mix had no direct influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand. However, the study also found that the service marketing mix had a positive indirect influence on restaurant entrepreneurs' business performance in Thailand through service quality with statistical significance of .01, meaning that the enterprise of a good service marketing mix focusing on price, process. A system to support payment that is convenient, fast, and safe. Setting up a service process to deliver accurate, fast, modern. Would result in good service quality. This leads to better business performance. This is in line with Wansuk (2013) who found that the marketing mix of Spa business service was related directly and indirectly to service quality of customer's perception and satisfaction whit prompted users' intention of returning to use services and Azhar, Prayogi, and Sari (2018) who found that the marketing mix had a significant positive impact on tourists' satisfaction indirectly through service quality.

The application of Smart Tourism in the workplace has a positive direct influence and a positive indirect influence on the business performance of restaurant operators in Pattaya. statistically significant at the .01 level. Turning to target tourists in accordance with emerging trends Learn how to apply Smart Tourism in the workplace. thus increasing the efficiency in the business results of the Pattaya restaurant operators. from the customer point of view This will enable businesses to gain market share and find more channels to reach new Chinese tourists. can create satisfaction in products and services And there are Chinese tourists who come back to buy products and services again. and more loyalty to the products and services of the establishment. Consistent with Saumell, Coll, Garc and Robres (2019), The factors that influence a customer's intent to use a mobile application for restaurant search and/or reservations are ranked by impact: habituation, perceived credibility. preference motivation economical approach expectation of effort performance expectations social influence. And the condition of the system facilities was significantly. Similar to that of Balasubramanian et al. (2015). Customer satisfaction has a significant positive impact on customer preferences in restaurant choices.

Based on the study results, the policy recommendations and implementation can be summarized as follows:

1. The priority should be on enhancing service quality in terms of reliability by aiming to build a good reputation and image in the establishment to be accepted by tourists. Encourage employees to provide professional service. There is a manual or operational guidelines for all employees to work in the same direction and standard. Provide employees with knowledge and ability to provide accurate, accurate information that customers need and have good problem solving skills. This allows customers to receive fast, error-free service. If there is a problem during the service, the establishment should deal with these problems immediately, without shirking responsibility to prevent customers from feeling negative towards the establishment. It is also considered to maintain the reputation and image of the establishment.
2. The enterprise should pay attention to the application of Smart Tourism in the workplace to increase the potential of the establishment by considering the benefits and believe that the application of technology can increase efficiency work efficiency increase the quantity and quality of produce and can reduce the working time. Use a system that supports payment by credit card, online payment transfer, and payment with QR Payment instead of using cash for convenience and speed consistent with the behavior of Chinese tourists. Learn and use Chinese social media.
3. The enterprise should mainly focus on formulating the service marketing mix in terms of process, by using technology to increase efficiency in work processes. Develop and modernize the process for Chinese tourists "FIT" style to order food and reserve seats to deliver accurate and fast service. To support "FIT" tourists who are more likely to search and self booking via social media.

However, future research would be recommended to further study. As this study is a quantitative study, therefore, a qualitative study should be conducted to confirm the results of further quantitative studies. And the smart tourism potential of restaurant entrepreneurs in some particular tourism areas in the mid- and post-coronavirus situation should be investigated and compared to obtain in-depth relationships.

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