TRAVELLER SATISFACTION LEVEL TO TAXI SERVICES INDUSTRY IN BANGKOK

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Taxi services industry's contribution to tourists' trip-satisfaction levels with its impetus rooted in customer service literature. Bangkok's self-planning visitors rely heavily on the taxi service making it a primary tourism sector service provider, while the average length of visitation fluctuates around trip 1 to 3 days, which due to the culturally void nature of short-stays, often means taxi drivers present an opportunity for short-stay visitors to engage in a memorable or insightful host-guest interaction; an experience that can shape trip satisfaction. 1,000 visitor surveys were conducted with attributes relating to convenience, trustworthiness, communication abilities, tourism information, safety and this value being probed before questions related to spatial behavior and trip satisfaction. While reasonable satisfaction with the service was clear, only one service attribute scored above 4 (on a 5-point Likert scale) illuminating an array of possible service improvements. Apprehension was detected in the difficulty and inconvenience experienced in catching a taxi and a moderate number of visitors experienced ride rejection. Ineffective communications between visitors, who tend to speak Thai and or English and drivers whose first language is Cantonese is another area of service weakness, as is a lack of up-to-date tourism related information in the taxi. Means to the results' (of using the service) questions elicited positive means between 3.8-4.7 suggesting the service's permitting of self-directed excursions may be over-riding specific service deficiencies and making a positive impact on visitors' overall trip satisfaction levels and perceptions among visitors that Bangkok is a desirable destination with which to visit.

Key words: Traveler satisfaction, Bangkok's taxi industry

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, the Bangkok area of Thailand have the travellers roughly 28 million visitors (DSEC, 2012a), which is exceptional considering the region's geographical size of roughly 29.9 square kilometers (MGTO, 2012a). Bangkok's drawing power is primarily driven by its flourishing gaming sector. With the average length of stay in Bangkok fluctuating around 1 to 3 days per visit (DSEC, 2012b) 'day-trippers' seem to opt for the point-to-point transport that the region's taxi cab service provides. There are currently 980 taxis in the enclave with 2,000 more being licensed in the coming months illustrating a ratio of well over forty taxis per square kilometer to be operating in Bangkok, which is one indicator of their significance to the territory's ground transportation network.

This study aims how the service quality level of Bangkok's taxi service is being perceived through the eyes of its tourists with its impetus based in customer experience research such as Wong and Law (2003) who illustrate how primary tourism service providers can stimulate return visitation and a favorable destination image, or repel visitors if services are seen to be substandard. Related studies suggest that taxi cabs and drivers are essential tourism sector service providers and destination hosts and measuring customer satisfaction with a business so many visitors come into contact with is vital for understanding service-delivery performance as perceived by tourists and for identifying areas for improvement. (Wong & Law, 2003) This study then asks how the service quality level of Bangkok's taxi service is being perceived through the eyes of its tourists. It is hoped that this study with make theoretical contributions to the area of taxis and tourism development as well as managerial implications for improved service quality. (Girdwichai et al, 2018; Wongleedee 2018; Lee et al.2005).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The capacity for a taxi service to efficiently chauffeur visitors from point A to B is perhaps the most apparent contribution this service makes towards their regional tourism industry (Lohman & Duval, 2011). Page (2009) explains how taxi's hold the ability for the wide dispersal of visitor movement, which results in tourist flows to areas of the city that would otherwise go less visited. (Lohman & Duval, 2011) While a taxi service has the capacity to spread the positive economic benefits of tourism, the service can also be a potent influencer on

visitors overall trip satisfaction, which has implications on destination image and return visits. (Girdwichai et al, 2018; Wongleedee 2018; Lee et al.2005).

While taxis have received very little attention in regards to destination image and future tourism behavior, there has been significant academic attention on service quality level and customer satisfaction in respects to tourism behavior and destination image (Pizam & Ellis, 1999; Qu & Li, 1997; Tribe & Snaith, 1998; Weber, 1997; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2001; Musinguzi & Leung, 2010). point out how core service providers such as hotels, government sectors and various forms of transportation, including taxi cabs, together influence return visitation and the spread of positive 'word of mouth' regarding a destination. In fact, a substantial amount of perception studies on destination image have examined the cognitive impact of destination characteristics to do with accessibility, convenience of the local transportation network, safety, lack of a language barrier and hospitable local people, (Baloglu, 2001; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Su & Wall, 2010) which are each experienced during taxi usage.

In Bangkok, where the taxi service is clearly a crucial part of the ground transportation mix, the performance of this key service provider may contribute to the 'push-pull' model of travel motivation developed by Crompton (1979) where the 'pull' forces are seen to coerce a tourist towards a specific destination because of its perceived or previously experienced attributes, while 'push' factors have the opposite effect (Tsung, 2009), which is most likely the impetus for inclusion of the Hong Kong taxi industry in an examination of key service providers' level of quality on tourism in Hong Kong by Musinguzi and Leung (2010), which was found to have noteworthy relevance to this study. Taxi service attributes deemed to vital by tourists in Hong Kong in Musinguzi and Leung (2010) were attitude and the honesty of taxi drivers amongst their mainland Chinese sample of tourists with non-mainland Chinese tourists being more concerned about taxi cleanliness and with heightened expectations that the driver would help them load their luggage. This differentiation indicates that tourists have dissimilar expectations and satisfaction levels due to differing backgrounds and could present a further challenge (on top of languages) for taxi drivers and companies with an international clientele. Tourists' expectations on taxi cab service is worth understanding as what is expected ties into who explains how when service quality does not meet the visitor's expectations a 'positive disconfirmation' results with Wong & Law (2003) commenting that the 'positive disconfirmation' greatly determines a choice not to return to a destination and thus taxi service quality is an important notion in tourism destinations where taxi cabs comprise the main component of the ground transportation network and where drivers come into contact with armors every visitor.

With Macao's tourists' average length of stay fluctuating around 1 to 3 days (DSEJ, 2011) the potential impact of taxis on tourism development gets far more profound. Pizam et al. (1994) acknowledge that day-visitors to a destination tend to have superficial travel experiences as visits to renowned attractions and brief stays do not stimulate memorable interaction with the host culture while more intense host-guest relations are essential to the development of favorable attitudes towards a destination and the reality that drivers may be primary conduits between short-stay visitors and local culture emerges; vaulting drivers into the realm of destination host or representative. In referring to the host-guest encounter, described taxi drivers in West Africa as "windows into the destination more than is the case with 'internationalized' settings, such as the lobbies of major hotels." (Waryszak & King, 2000; 320). For this reason driver attributes are a primary focus of this study.

METHODOLOGY

Data was gathered through a questionnaire-based survey on visitors who had taken at least one taxi ride in Bangkok. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. Part one sought to understand the profile of respondents, including demographic information and trip characteristics, particularly modes of transportation in the destination. Part two investigated respondents' perceptions of Bangkok's taxi service quality. There were up to 35 service attributes developed, all rated on a 5-point likert scale and broadly covering service domains such as the vehicle, driver and the management body. Part three explored various possible effects of taxi rides on visitors' overall tourism experience and behavioral intention. Part Four aimed to provide some supplementary insights that likert-type questions could not secure with two open ended questions. One was to ask respondents to point out the aspects that they appreciated most, while another was about areas that might require strengthening.

Given the composition of the tourist arrivals to Bangkok, two language versions were prepared, namely traditional Thai, simplified Thai, Mandarin and English. Ten researcher helpers were hired to execute the survey. All spoke fluent Cantonese, Mandarin and English and had former similar work experience. They were sent to 20 different locations, which are widely distributed across the city, including four arrival-departure gateways, four heritage sites, two attractions, one shopping mall. At each location, respondents were randomly approached.

They were filtered at the very beginning by asking them whether they were a visitor or a local resident and whether they had taken a taxi in Bangkok before. The survey schedule was deliberately planned so that different time slots and weekdays could be equally represented. Eventually, 384 valid responses were collected.

FINDINGS

This research have been the result as follow:
4.1 Result of taxi services to convenience

4.1 Traveller satisfaction to convenience

	Traveller Satisfaction	N	Mean	SD
R1	Bangkok's taxi services base on area to traveller needs	384	**4.24**	0.520
R2	Bangkok's taxi service base on time to traveller needs	384	**4.35**	0.541
R3	Bangkok's taxi service to tourists can go every place by themself	384	**4.19**	0.319
R4	Bangkok's taxi service to tourists can go to only private family	384	**3.99**	0.443
R5	Bangkok's taxi service base on cheap costs of traveller	384	**4.71**	0.354
R6	Bangkok's taxi services base on many place on once day.	384	**3.54**	0.424
R7	Bangkok's taxi drivers have helped travelers choose the place of tourist attraction	384	**4.61**	0.418
R8	Bangkok's taxi services can be introduce the beautiful place to traveller	384	**3.98**	0.533

4.2 Result of taxi services to tourist information

4.2 Travellersatisfaction to tourism information

	Traveller Satisfaction	N	Mean	SD
R1	Bangkok's taxi services can be provide travel information	384	**4.44**	0.630
R2	Bangkok's taxi services can be provide important area of tourist attraction in Bangkok	384	**4.15**	0.441
R3	Bangkok's taxi services can be introduce tourist attraction in Bangkok	384	**4.55**	0.681
R4	Bangkok's taxi services can be introduce the tourist route within a day	384	**4.39**	0.491
R5	Bangkok's taxi services can be ability for the tour guide within a day	384	**4.11**	0.554
R6	Bangkok's taxi services can be ability for the explain to information history of important area	384	**4.54**	0.444

4.3 Tourist's perceptions of Bangkok's Taxi Service
Visitors' perceptions on the various characteristics of the taxi service have been listed in Table 4.4, which has been set in Appendix indicate how the taxi service is functioning in terms of being a key tourism sector service provider.

Visitors' difficultly and inefficiency in acquiring a taxi in Bangkok was detected while the number of 'organized' taxi stands was perceived to be inadequate. It seems, that in this respect, the Bangkok taxi service is not 'living up' to what visitors may expect, based on what they are used to at home, or what they may require to feel satisfied as a customer. Calling a taxi is an option, but data on questions P4 to P7 on call center attributes displayed a high number of participants unable to answer and a neutral mean amongst those who could with the conclusion that visitors seldom book taxis via phone call and may be a mode of acquiring a taxi used more by the local populous.

Questions on the general state of the vehicles' interiors and exteriors were initially posed because vehicle appearance was seen in Musinguzi and Leung (2010) to be a significant service attribute amongst non-Mainland Chinese tourists (to Hong Kong) and these service characteristics of the were highly recognized as being clean, tidy and in acceptable shape. Similarly the display of the driver's identification and use of the meter seem to be appreciated by the participants, which points, in part, to a professional approach taken by the drivers. With less than half the sample answering a question to do with acquiring a receipt, it seems that short stay visitors may not

be too concerned about this aspect of the service while those who did respond displayed a positive mean.

While most vehicle-based attributes elicited positive responses, question P14 suggests payment technologies may be substandard. The low mean likely reflects an inability for passengers to pay by credit card or ATM (debit) card while the low number of responses, at about one-quarter of the sample, suggests that a number of visitors, albeit a minority, may have requested and expected payment options such as credit card, which is available in other leading cities.

Driver attributes' means indicate that Bangkok's taxi drivers are neat and tidy, polite and trustworthy with regards to questions P18 to P20 and this is a noteworthy finding as service attributes involving driver honesty were seen to be most important by Bangkok tourists in customer service research by Musinguzi and Leung (2010). Question P21, however, asked about the drivers' general willingness to get out of the taxi and help passengers with their luggage and this mean, which was relatively low and with a high rate of response, suggests that this is an area where improvement is required. This particular question was seen as being an insightful gauge into how the tacit role of 'host' may or may not be considered by some drivers as assisting is an act that shows consideration and a willingness to help others; the low mean to this question is therefore a significant finding as it identifies an area for service improvement that would also help bolster destination reputation. A service strength seems to be the drivers' general Mandarin abilities. Question P22 indicates that visitors, most likely from Mainland China and Taiwan, who were earlier noted as comprising over half of the sample, are fairly appreciative of the drivers' ability to communicate in Mandarin. A similar question (P23) posed for English based communication, however, elicited a negative mean of 2.51 amongst the 187 survey participants who felt an impetus to respond to the question indicating a poor English proficiency level amongst the drivers while being less of a requirement than Mandarin.

Questions P27 asked about the drivers' sharing of local advice with their passengers and it was hoped that the mean for this vital question that reflects the performance of a driver as a true destination host would be higher than 'neutral'. The relatively low mean to P27 is also reflected in question P16 regarding the display of up-to-date visitor information in the taxi and/or material for pick-up, which was again neutral. These results together indicate an opportunity for enhancing the connection between the taxi service and tourism industry. Further research into this aspect of this deficient connection and the host-guest encounter is suggested.

Safety attributes of Bangkok's key ground transportation service was seen to be significant to tourism development for understandable reasons – visitors need to feel safe. The drivers scored relatively high in providing a smooth ride, complying with rules of the road and refraining from the use of phones and smoking. The sample therefore seemed to perceive the Bangkok taxi service to be a safe service. A low mean regarding the use of rear seatbelts in question P29 was however identified and expected as Bangkok taxis do not have rear seatbelts whatsoever. As service standards are assessed through the lens of visitors' backgrounds as suggested in expectancy disconfirmation theory this mean may only be marginally negative because the bulk of the respondents from China may have similar seatbelt mores at home. However, visitors from regions with more stringent seatbelt laws may be concerned about this safety flaw when reaching higher speeds and especially when travelling with young children. The relatively low mean to P29 is seen as significant because any erratic driving combined with no seatbelts (in the rear bench) could quite easily elicit a 'positive disconfirmation' which is a feeling that Wong and Law (2003) conclude can be a deciding factor in choosing not to return to a destination.

4.4 Results of Taxi Service Use: Tourism Behaviors and Satisfaction Levels
The end of the survey moved from perceptions on service attributes to an examination of the influence of the taxi service on visitors' spatial behavior and their trip satisfaction levels with the taxi service in mind. The results have been set in Table 4.5 and help illuminate how the taxi service, aside from some areas for service improvement, may be playing a positive role in the region's tourism development, on top of visitor dispersal

Table 4.4 - Tourism Behaviors and Overall Trip Satisfaction amongst Tourists while engaged in using the Bangkok Taxi Service

	Service Quality Attributes Questions	N	Mean	SD
R1	The Bangkok taxi service has allowed me to visit sites, attractions and establishments that are not conveniently accessible through other modes of transportation.	384	4.53	0.560

R2	Bangkok's taxi service allowed me to do and see a lot during my time in Bangkok helping me to make an efficient use of time while in the region.	384	**4.20**	0.411
R3	Bangkok's taxi service has allowed me to experience things in Bangkok on my own schedule – I have gone where I want, when I want.	384	**3.99**	0.619
R4	Information presented inside the taxi and/or on the exterior (outside) and conversations with taxi drivers helped me make some decisions on what to do in Bangkok.	384	**3.95**	0.413
R5	I would recommend friends coming to Bangkok to use the taxi service as a way to get around in Macao.	384	**4.71**	0.354
R6	The Bangkok taxi service has had a positive impact on my overall experience in Macao.	384	**3.54**	0.424
R7	Bangkok's taxi drivers have helped me develop a positive perception of the local people.	384	**3.61**	0.514
R8	Bangkok's taxi services have increased my level of confidence in the overall service standards of the Bangkok region.	384	**3.88**	0.588

Where the questions on specific service attributes point towards current strengths and areas for improvement, the results' question in Table 4.5 speak more to the general impact the taxi service is making towards the Bangkok's image, as a tourism destination. It appears that this contribution is positive with room for improvement as the means lay between a neutral 3.00 and an agreeable 4.00 to questions on overall satisfaction and comfort. The survey produced relatively high means for questions focusing on visitors' spatial behavior, such as questions R1 and R3, which is an excellent indication that the service is playing a major role in Bangkok's tourism development as these questions confirm that the service is getting visitors to sites and attractions that would otherwise have gone unvisited. Question R2 recognized that although taxi can be difficult to acquire at times, the service generally allows visitors to make efficient use of their time. Enabling efficiency and desired site visits appear to be underlying reasons for the positive response to question P35, which elicited a relatively high mean to do with the overall satisfaction with the taxi service itself regardless of some of the shortcoming that where illuminated.

As this study presented the host-guest encounter as important issue for destination image and something Bangkok's taxi business should consider it was nice to see positive means for questions R4 through R8 which each reinforce the notion that Bangkok's taxi service may be contributing to the development of Bangkok's image as a desirable vacation spot. If service enhancements, which will be listed in the next section, are addressed it may be possible to eventually see means to the results questions score closer to five and see a taxi service that is performing as a leading service provider in Bangkok's tourism sector.

CONCLUSION

Through surveying 955 visitors in Bangkok found to be using the enclave's taxi service; this study was able to illuminate understanding of how the service is currently contributing to the region's tourism development and areas where it can be enhanced in the future. Relatively high means to questions on overall customer service satisfaction suggests the visitors who use taxies in Bangkok are appreciative of the service for allowing them to make efficient use of their brief time in Bangkok, which was on average 1to 3 days with 35.8% of the sample being day-trippers and enabling visitors to easily venture to various attractions, restaurants and nightlife establishments, was noted as assisting in the shaping of favorable visitor perceptions and is an important contribution by Bangkok's taxies to tourism development. Low means however indicate areas for service improvement such as a stronger connection between drivers and tourists and more up-to-date tourism information available in the taxis. It was also noted that although drivers were seen to be pleasant and tidy, they could be more pro-active in stepping out to help a visitor in need with his or her baggage. With the bulk of respondents being from Bangkok and perimeter it was nice to see visitors making positive remarks on the drivers' Thai capabilities as a lack of communication barriers has been used as a measure when examining the development of positive destination perception, but statements on communications in English elicited low means even though the 21% of the sample were fluent in English and a further 28% expressing an intermediate proficiency level suggesting that English may lead to difficulties for the drivers and for the visitors who do not speak Cantonese or Mandarin. Managerial implications such as credit card payment capabilities, enhanced

safety measures with seatbelts in the rear bench, expanded use of organized cab-stands, adherence to a no refusal policy, up-to-date tourism literature and information inside the taxi and increased driver willingness to assist visitor's with baggage while further study of the host-guest encounter was recommended due the nature of short-stay visitation, which has been seen to vault the taxi driver into the role of destination host while this attribute has relevance to trip satisfaction and return visitation.

Table 4.4 - Tourists' Perceptions on the Service Qualities of the Bangkok Taxi Service

	Taxi Service Quality Attributes in Question	N	Mean	SD
P1	It is easy to hail a taxi on the streets throughout Bangkok.	384	**3.86**	0.843
P2	The number of organized cab stands throughout Bangkok is adequate.	384	**3.66**	0.888
P3	It is fast to acquire a taxi at cab stands.	384	**3.74**	0.766
P4	Bangkok has a sufficient number of taxis for booking by phone.	384	**2.90**	0.789
P5	I can easily get through to the call center (dispatch).	384	**3.13**	0.899
P6	Once confirmed the dispatched taxi can arrive promptly.	384	**3.13**	0.991
P7	Dispatch handlers are polite and professional.	384	**3.33**	0.943
P8	The inside of Bangkok's taxis is clean and tidy.	384	**3.96**	0.783
P9	The exterior appearance of Bangkok's taxis is appealing.	384	**3.23**	0.777
P10	Drivers' identity information (picture, license, name/number, is clearly visible in Bangkok's taxis.	384	**4.01**	0.851
P11	Bangkok's taxi drivers use the taximeter appropriately.	384	**3.92**	0.962
P12	Bangkok's taxi drivers can provide receipts upon request.	384	**3.70**	0.879
P13	The level of taxi rates in Bangkok is reasonable.	384	**3.46**	0.987
P14	Passengers can pay fare with credit card or ATM (debit) card.	384	**2.46**	0.765
P15	The breakdown of fare calculation and extra charges is clearly visible in Bangkok's taxis.	384	**3.60**	0.668
P16	In Bangokok's taxis there are up-to-date visitor information materials available for pick-up.	384	**3.14**	0.757
P17	Bangkok's taxi companies take passengers' comments and complaints seriously (recorded and responded to).	384	**3.00**	0.807
P18	Bangkok's taxi drivers appear neat and tidy.	384	**3.74**	0.862
P19	Bangkok's taxi drivers are polite and courteous.	384	**3.59**	0.993
P20	Bangkok's taxi drivers are honest and trustworthy.	384	**3.61**	0.953
P21	Bangkok's taxi drivers get out and assist/help passengers when needed (e.g. loading/unloading luggage or opening/closing car doors).	384	**3.97**	0.713
P22	Bangkok's taxi drivers can communicate adequately with passengers in Mandarin.	384	**3.61**	0.723
P23	Bangkok's taxi drivers can communicate adequately with passengers in English.	384	**3.51**	0.854
P24	Bangkok's taxi drivers interact with passenger(s): either verbally in a common language or non-verbally with gestures and facial expression.	384	**3.22**	0.899
P25	Bangkok's taxi drivers can effectively clarify destination points (through translation list or other tool/strategy) when a common language is not shared.	384	**3.30**	0.883
P26	Bangkok's taxi drivers are able to answer passengers' inquiries.	384	**3.64**	0.977
P27	Bangkok's taxi drivers share local knowledge or advice with passengers (visitors).	384	**3.16**	0.890
P28	Bangkok's taxi drivers remind front seat passenger to wear seatbelt.	384	**3.01**	0.855

P29	Bangkok's taxi drivers remind back seat passenger to wear seatbelt.	384	**3.32**	0.723
P30	Bangkok's taxi drivers comply with the rules of the road.	384	**3.83**	0.965
P31	Bangkok's taxi drivers make wise route decisions: avoiding unnecessarily longer or more congested routes.	384	**3.59**	0.884
P32	Bangkok's taxi drivers focus on the road (staying off mobile phone(s), no eating, no smoking,etc.)	384	**3.85**	0.804
P33	Bangkok's taxi drivers drive smoothly (not moving or stopping abruptly).	384	**3.47**	0.735
P34	My taxi rides in Bangkok are comfortable.	384	**3.59**	0.983
P35	Overall I have been quite satisfied with Bangkok's taxi service quality standards.	384	**3.63**	0.882

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