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The 7<sup>th</sup> STOU National Research Conference**Customers' Expectations of Service Quality:  
A Case of Fitness Centers in Ayutthaya, Thailand**Sorapol Khattiyasuwan<sup>1</sup>Kawinpob Saiphet<sup>2</sup>**Abstract**

The purposes of this study were to explore customers' expectations of service quality in local and hotel fitness clubs, located in Ayutthaya center, and to identify if their expectations differ regarding to gender and ages. The research data was obtained from questionnaires based on the SQAS instrument by Lam (2005), 170 customers who hold the membership of fitness clubs in Ayutthaya center were accidentally selected as the study samples. Descriptive statistics, t-test and One-Way ANOVA tests were carried out for data analyses. The results of the study are as follows. Participants presented the average rating of "very important" for fitness service quality expectations, ranging from 3.58 for program service quality to 4.27 for "fitness service" of "overall changing room including lockers and showers" as extremely important level. It was also found that the fitness services, significantly needed, could be changing rooms including lockers and showers ( $\bar{X} = 4.27$ ), while, other fitness service staff such as, help, courtesy and communication skill ( $\bar{X} = 4.19$ ) were also expected respectively. Moreover, there was significant difference of expectations among genders and ages. Female 's expectation level was higher than male's, regarding to program quality and workout facilities service. Furthermore, customers' expectations, aged less than 29, were higher than the customers, aged under 30, according to fitness program, workout facilities and staff services. It is also suggested that clubs should emphasize on changing room facilities like lockers and showers. Moreover, this study can serve and benefit to the Health & fitness management clubs in Ayutthaya, to find out their customers' desires, identify the service quality standards, modernize firm regulations as well as enhance service quality.

**Keywords:** Fitness centers, Service quality, Expectations<sup>1</sup>อาจารย์ประจำคณะวิทยาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏพระนครศรีอยุธยา sorapol.r@hotmail.com<sup>2</sup>อาจารย์ประจำคณะวิทยาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏพระนครศรีอยุธยา k.saiphet@gmail.com



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#### Introduction

Since the world nowadays has been changing very fast, it becomes more complex and very highly competitive. That makes people more stressful. Obviously, they are trying to find out activities to minimize stress. Therefore, workout activities have become popular. This can allow fitness industry become one of rapid growing worldwide business, especially international area (IHRSA, 2006 and 2007). In Thailand, the fitness club market in 2015 was generated 9,000million bath, 10% growth rate. So, this business can reflect a fast growing industry in Thailand (Tawase and Keogh, 1998). An increasing number of fitness centers has been located in Bangkok about 30% and expanded to other provinces especially tourist destination areas; Pattaya, Phuket Chaingmai and Ayutthaya (Pengpol 2006).

Clearly, Tourism areas these days are focusing services such as workout programs; healthy menus, fitness clubs and clinical treatments (Chen et al. 2008). Indeed, most of hotels located in Ayutthaya such as Sala Ayuthaya, Kantary hotel and Classic Kameo Hotel would be forced to provide well-being services especially swimming pool and fitness clubs for tourists (Tripadvisor 2017). However, hospitality research represented approximately 64% of Hotel Fitness clubs have been disappointing due to quality issues of inconsistent exercise rooms, negatively affecting hotels (Sheehan 2005).

Similarly, fitness centers in Thailand have been increasing in volume especially in tourism destination like Bangkok, Pattaya, ChaingMai and Ayuthaya. Moreover, the new services have been becoming more popular for tourists and local customers. However, there have been no researches done before on customers' expectation of fitness service quality in these Auythaya local fitness centers including hotels. Consequently, the current researches focused on customers' expectation of fitness service quality in local and hotel fitness clubs located in Ayuthaya metropolitan. Apparently, the trend of this Thai health consciousness can mean more opportunities to fitness clubs to maximize their market values (Boom FitnessCenterMarket 2016). Although, Tawse&Keogh (1998) and Racquet&SportsClubAssociaton (2015) demonstrated that Thai fitness clubs have been increasing continuously, There was only 0.6 % of fitness club membership, meaning low rate, compared to others like Signapore and Australia (Mark 2006). Indeed, many fitness members seek to receive the quality of services from clubs (Pei Chih Wei, 2010). In addition, it was found that the increasing number of fitness customer s' complaints in Thailand, approximately 0.55 %, refers to the low standard of fitness quality service. Because of this, many fitness centers more emphasis to the quality service and efficient operation to minimize customer's complains and maintain profitable (Papadimitriou&Karteroliotis, 2000). Also, the increase of consumer power in this industry has motivated providers to highlight on customer service to meet or exceed their customer s' expectations (Robinson 2006).

Obviously, an increase in health-consciousness concerns and the popularity of fitness services



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directly influence the growing number of health and fitness clubs in local hotels, apartments and department stores to satisfy the wants of those people who expect to be able to exercise while on holiday, travelling and local life (Senakham 2008). Due to high competition in hospitality business, this could drive a number of hospitality industries to improve the variety and quality of services to satisfy their customers' desires, as well as their expectations (Aslan and Kocak 2011). Consequently, to investigate ways of offering a high degree of service quality, not only in terms of products but also in terms of service. Furthermore, the determination of factors influencing and improving service quality is considered the key weapon leading to long-term revenue, purchase intention, product reduction and customer satisfaction. Indeed, Hospitality organizations, especially fitness club, have been to highlighting customers' wants and expectations to be satisfied. Thus, service quality can influence top management to indicate strengths and improvement of service areas as competitive advantage. Clearly, an expectation of service quality is required, especially in hospitality area like fitness clubs (Rahman 2012).

#### Objective Statement

The aim of this research is to explore customers' expectations on fitness service quality of fitness clubs located in the centre of Ayutthaya province, Thailand. The Objectives are:

- To study characteristics of respondents participating in fitness clubs in Ayutthaya.
- To study the levels of customers' expectations on fitness service quality in Ayutthaya
- To study statistically significant differences in customers' expectations of service quality between the genders
- To study statistically significant differences in customers' expectation of service quality among age groups.

#### Research methodology:

The population in this research was defined as customers participating in 6 fitness clubs (4 local and 2 hotel fitness clubs), located in Ayutthaya centre, Thailand for a week during August 2017. The 6 fitness clubs are Mindset, Fit now, Ayutthaya gym, Gorilla, Classic Kameo, and Kantary Hotel Fitness. The size of the population in the research was approximately 350 people or 30-50 participants daily in each fitness club. According to the Yamane formula, the sample size needed for the research would be 170 people, (Yamane 1973). Thus, the research data has to be collected at least 170 people participating in local and hotel fitness clubs, referring to effective questionnaires. Also, accidental sampling technique was used to select the study samples. In this research, the questionnaire consisted of three parts, which are (1) personal details, (2) expectations towards fitness services and (3) recommendations to the clubs.



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The first section aims to collect personal information about fitness members including genders, age groups, occupations, education, time, frequency, purpose, country of residence and media. Secondly, this section contained statements of respondents' perceptions regarding fitness service quality, applied SQAS by (Lam et al., 2005) and for measuring the expectations towards fitness services, 6 dimensions, as well as fitness service staff, fitness service activities, fitness service changing room including lockers and showers, workout facility, physical facility, spa, swimming pool and sauna. The last section is for open-ended more information about expectations and recommendations to the fitness service (local & hotel clubs). According to this research objectives, the data analyses were separated into 4 sections; descriptive statistics were applied for sections 1, 2 and 3 of the questionnaire. Independent sample t-test and One-Way ANOVA were used to find the differences in expectations towards hotel service quality when segmented by genders and age groups.

## Results

### 1. Respondents' Characteristics

The attributes of demographic characteristics of the respondents representing the target group consist of descriptive analysis of personal information on gender, age, occupation, education, time, frequency and purpose. The researcher applied frequency and percentage to summarize the personal information collected from 170 respondents. The results are shown in Tables 1 to 6.

Table 1 Respondents' Variables

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	97	57.1
Female	73	42.9
Total	170	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
below 29 years	85	52.5
30 - 39 years	57	35.2
40 - 49 years	20	12.3
Total	162	100.0
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	13	7.6
Government officer	9	5.3



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Business owner	36	21.2
Officer	87	51.2
Others	25	14.7
Total	170	100.0
<b>Education</b>		
Under Bachelor Degree	25	14.7
Bachelor Degree	108	63.5
Master Degree	20	11.8
Doctoral Degree	9	5.3
Others	8	4.7
Total	170	100.0

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistical data for different demographic variables. It shows that the majority (57.1 %) of the respondents were males. Most of them (50.0%) were below 29 years. Regarding occupations, most of them (51.2%) were officers. Their educational levels were mostly (63.5 %) Bachelor Degree.

Table 2 Time Spent at Fitness Centers

Time Spent	Frequency	Percentage
Less than an hour	16	9.4
An hour	20	11.8
1 - 2 hours	84	49.4
Others	50	29.4
Total	170	100.0

Table 2 shows that most (49.4 %) of the respondents spent 1-2 hours at the fitness centers.

Table 3 Participation in the Fitness Center Service

Frequency of Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Less than once a week	12	7.1
Once a week	16	9.4
2 times a week	36	21.2
3 times a week	56	32.9
Others	50	29.4
Total	170	100.0



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Table 3 shows that the biggest group (32.9 %) of the respondents participated in the fitness center service three times a week.

Table 4 Membership of the Fitness Centers

Time of Membership	Frequency	Percentage
Less than a month	28	16.5
1 - 2 months	61	35.9
3 - 4 months	16	9.4
5 - 6 months	9	5.3
1 year	36	21.2
Others	20	11.8
Total	170	100.0

Table 4 shows that the biggest group (36.9 %) have been members of the fitness centers for 1-2 months.

Table 5 Respondents' Purpose of Using the Fitness Centers

Purpose of Using the Fitness Centers	Frequency	Percentage
Health	40	23.5
Fitness	22	12.9
Health and fitness	63	37.1
Weight control	37	21.8
Socialization	4	2.4
Others	4	2.4
Total	170	100.0

Table 5 shows that the biggest group (37.1 %) of the respondents used the fitness center service for health and fitness.

## 2. Overall Expectations of the Quality of Fitness Center Services

Means and standard deviations are used to describe respondents' expectations of service quality of the fitness centers which include fitness service staff, fitness service activities, changing rooms lockers showers, workout facilities and physical facilities. The results are in tables 6-12.



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Table 6 Means and Standard Deviations of Fitness Service Staff

Fitness Service Staff	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level of Expectation
1 Possession of required knowledge/skills	3.89	0.88	Very important
2 Neatness and dress	3.96	0.87	Very important
3 Willingness to help	4.30*	0.76	Extremely important
4 Patience	4.21*	0.73	Extremely important
5 Communication with members	4.32*	0.83	Extremely important
6 Responsiveness to complaints	4.18	0.72	Very important
7 Courtesy	4.37*	0.78	Extremely important
8 Provision of individualized attention by instructors	4.14	0.96	Very important
9 Provision of consistency of service	4.30*	0.74	Extremely important
Overall fitness service staff	4.19	0.67	Very important

n= 170 \*extremely important

In terms of fitness staff, it shows that the level of expectation on overall fitness service staff is very important. The very important elements are possession of required knowledge skill, neatness and dress, responsiveness to complaints and provision of individualized attention by instructors. The extremely important elements are willingness to help, patience, communication with members, courtesy and provision of consistency of service.

Table 7 Means and Standard Deviations of Program Service Quality

Program Service Quality	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level of Expectation
1 Variety of programs	3.52	0.88	Very important
2 Availability of programs at appropriate level	3.55	0.88	Very important
3 Convenience of programs time/schedule	3.58	0.85	Very important
4 Quality/content of programs	3.69	0.86	Very important
5 Appropriateness of class size	3.54	0.84	Very important
6 Background music	3.49	0.84	Very important
7 Adequacy of space	3.65	0.98	Very important
Overall program service quality	3.58	0.73	Very important

n= 170 \*extremely important

In terms of program service quality, it shows that overall program service quality is at the level of very important. Moreover, all seven elements are also at the level of very important also.





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Table 8 Means and Standard Deviations of Changing room lockers and showers

Changing room locker and shower service quality		$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level of Expectation
1	Availability of lockers	3.86	0.92	Very important
2	Overall maintenance	4.01	0.93	Very important
3	Shower cleanliness	4.08	0.94	Very important
4	Accessibility	4.22*	0.83	Extremely important
5	Safety	4.22*	0.74	Extremely important
Overall changing room service quality		4.27*	1.36	Extremely important

n= 170 \*extremely important

In terms of changing room lockers and showers in accordance with table 8, the overall changing room service quality is at the level of extremely important. Accessibility and safety are also extremely important. The rest, availability of locks overall maintenance and shower cleanliness are at extremely important.

Table 9 Means and Standard Deviations of Physical Facility Quality

Physical Facility Quality		$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level of Expectation
1	Convenience of location	4.10	0.91	Very important
2	Hours of operation	4.05	0.76	Very important
3	Availability of parking	4.06	1.00	Very important
4	Accessibility to building	4.01	0.85	Very important
5	Parking lot safety	4.14	0.88	Very important
6	Temperature control	4.11	0.79	Very important
7	Lighting control	4.02	0.81	Very important
Overall Physical Facility Quality		4.07	0.66	Very important

n= 170 \*extremely important

In terms of physical facility quality in accordance with table 9, the overall physical facility quality is at the level of very important. Moreover, all seven elements are also at the level of very important also.





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Table 10 Means and Standard Deviations of Workout Facility Service Quality

Workout Facility Service Quality		$\bar{x}$	S.D	Level of Expectation
1	Pleasantness of environment	4.11	0.79	Very important
2	Modern-looking equipment	4.01	0.75	Very important
3	Adequacy of signs and directions	3.92	0.77	Very important
4	Variety of equipment	3.85	0.86	Very important
5	Availability of workout facility equipment	3.74	0.72	Very important
6	Overall maintenance	4.04	0.74	Very important
Overall Workout Facility Service Quality		3.96	0.61	Very important

n= 170 \*extremely important

In terms of **workout facility service quality** in accordance with table 10, the overall workout facility service quality is at the level of very important. Moreover, all six of its elements are also at the level of very important also.

### 3. Inferential Analysis: The Study of Difference in Customers' Expectation of Service Quality among Genders and Age Groups

#### 3.1 Difference in Customers' Expectation of Service Quality between Genders

Table 11 The Analysis of Expectation of Service Quality Determined by Different Genders

Service Quality	Male		Female		t	p-value
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	$\bar{x}$	S.D		
Overall Staff Service Quality	4.11	0.66	4.28	0.66	-1.639	.103
Overall Program Service Quality	3.48	0.68	3.70	0.78	-1.991*	.048
Locker Room Service Quality	4.00	0.77	4.19	0.69	-1.739	.084
Physical Facility Quality	4.12	0.68	4.01	0.63	1.033	.303
Workout Facility Service Quality	3.86	0.62	4.05	0.57	-2.062*	.041

\* It is significantly different at .05 level

According to table 11, it reveals that there are significant differences at .05 of expectation on Overall Program Service Quality and Workout Facility Service Quality. However, the rest are not significantly different.



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#### 3.2 Difference in Customers' Expectation of Service Quality among Age Groups

Table 12 The Analysis of Expectation of Service Quality Determined by Different Age Groups

Service Quality	20 - 29 years	30 - 39 years	40 - 49 years	F	p-value			
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	$\bar{x}$	S.D	$\bar{x}$	S.D		
Overall Staff Service	4.25	0.62	4.28	0.61	3.82	0.72	4.391*	.014
Program Service	3.79	0.76	3.40	0.57	3.37	0.72	6.712*	.002
Locker Room Service	4.17	0.77	4.09	0.55	3.76	1.04	2.452	.089
Physical Facility	4.09	0.66	4.11	0.66	3.91	0.77	0.636	.530
Workout Facility Service	4.10	0.47	3.80	0.58	3.83	1.00	4.742*	.010

\* It is significantly different at .05 level

According to table 12, it reveals that there are significant differences at .05 of expectation on Overall Staff Service, Program Service and Workout Facility Service. However, the rest are not significantly different.

#### Discussion

1. Research question one: what are characteristics of respondents participating in fitness clubs in Ayutthaya.

The majority of the respondents for this study (57.1%) were male and the rest (42.9%) were female. The results were closely similar to Senakham (2008) whose findings revealed the customers participating in fitness Thai university centres were predominantly male (51.50%), compared with female (48.5 %). In terms of age groups, most of respondents in this study were under 29 years old (50%), more than 30 -39 years old (33.3%), and more than 40 years old (11.8%) respectively. This indicated that most respondents in fitness services were people aged under 29 years old. These data also supported by study of Senakham (2008) whose findings revealed the people participating in fitness centres were mostly aged 20-29 years old. Regarding to occupations, it indicated that the largest group of participants in hotel fitness services were officers (51.2%), the second one was business owner (31.2%) and the third one was others (14.7%). Only 9 % of respondents were Government officers. Among the customers of fitness clubs, the largest group graduated with a Bachelor's Degree (63.5%), followed by those graduating with a Master's Degree and Doctoral Degree (17.1%) and under Bachelor Degree (14.7%).

2. Research question two: what are the levels of customers' expectations on fitness service quality in Ayutthaya



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To measure customers' service quality expectations of fitness services, mean scores were used to describe customers' expectations towards the service quality of fitness clubs, including fitness service staff, program service quality, fitness service changing room, (including lockers and showers), physical facility, workout facility service quality. Considerably, the dimensions, expected, were ranked from "very important" (3.58) for program service quality, to "extremely important" (4.27) for overall changing rooms. Similarly, Chelladurai et al. (1987) found that a primary facilities goods was the most significant fitness service dimension. Thus, it is strongly suggested to be more concerned with improving the services quality of changing rooms, especially available facilities of changing room like lockers and showers to exceed overall fitness customers' expectations.

#### **3. Research Question Three: were there statistically significant differences in Customers' Expectations of Service Quality between Genders?**

The findings showed that females had higher service quality expectations in overall Program Service Quality and Workout Facility Service Quality, than males had. This means females might request more available program of service quality such as various, appropriate, content programs, and workout facility quality respectively, whereas, males might have lower standards of those aspects, especially a variety of program provision.

#### **4. Research Question four: were there statistically significant differences in customers' expectations of service quality among age groups?**

One-way ANOVA was used to test the differences in service quality expectation among age groups. It revealed that there was a significant differences at 0.5 among age groups. It was also found that respondents aged under 29 year old have the highest expectations towards overall fitness service program, workout facilities and staff service, followed by those among 30-39 years. This finding was supported by the research results explored by Szumilewicz et al. (2011). It was found that different ages could affect to different preferences for type of sport program as well as facilities. Their study demonstrated aged around 25 – 54 years old, was clearly interested in programs, events and activities provided by fitness staffs. Moreover, the finding revealed age differences could be connected to different levels of service quality satisfaction, Rueanfthanakite's (2008).

#### **Recommendations**

The health-conscious concerns can lead to the increasing number of fitness clubs in hotels and local to meet the desires of those people who keep exercise during daily life, holidays, and travelling. Furthermore, knowing customers' expectations and demographic differences, based on, service quality can benefit the fitness companies in many ways, especially customers' satisfaction and loyalty (Phiri



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and Mcwabe 2013). So, to have more competitive advantage over others, fitness clubs must offer customers with quality services to satisfy their expectations. Indeed, enough changing rooms (lockers and showers), accessibility, safety attributes, along with cleanliness and tidiness are considered as one of the most concerned factors in fitness services in which resulting to fitness improvements. Also, providing fitness quality services of staffs; help, communication with member, courtesy and patience are also required. Thus, fitness club managers should implement the information for hotel service improvements. Moreover, this study can imply the level of respondents' attitudes, based on fitness service quality, bring about to critical points of practical operations of service quality. More importantly, fitness clubs and hotels in the Ayutthaya can use and apply this research findings to improve the services quality of their health and fitness clubs. They should keep in mind that the more customers' satisfaction of service quality, the more customer they will be able to attract.

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