Guidelines for Developing Tourism Business Models for Foreign Elderly Tourists to Enhance Service Excellence in Thailand's Tourism Industry

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Abstract: - This research aims to 1) study the components of the guidelines for developing tourism business models for foreign elderly tourists to enhance service excellence in Thailand's tourism industry, and 2) develop a structural equation model (SEM) based on guidelines for developing tourism business models for foreign elderly tourists to enhance service excellence in Thailand's tourism industry. The research population comprised hotel operators, tour companies, restaurant businesses, and other service-related enterprises across Thailand. A sample of 500 respondents was selected using questionnaires as the primary data collection tool. The data were analyzed using multivariate statistical techniques to construct the SEM. The results revealed that the proposed model demonstrated a good fit with the empirical data, as indicated by statistical values: p-value = 0.078, CMIN/DF = 1.269, GFI = 0.980, and RMSEA = 0.023, all meeting the recommended thresholds and showing significance at the 0.001 level. Analysis of the overall model influence indicated that technology management exerted the strongest direct effect on service quality, with a standardized regression weight of 0.79. This finding provides empirical evidence that modern technology management significantly enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery for elderly tourism, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and industry recognition.

Key-Words: - Structural Equation Model, Tourism Business Model Development, Elderly Tourists, Tourism Industry.

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1 Introduction

The outlook for Thai business and industry from 2025 to 2027 reflects a global economic shift toward the service sector. Services play a crucial role in generating income and employment, enhancing the efficiency of manufacturing industries, and boosting overall economic competitiveness. Various service sectors—such as transportation, finance, and telecommunications—function as vital intermediate inputs for production. Thailand's service sector has shown a consistent upward trend, accounting for 60.2% of the national GDP and employing 53% of the total labor force. However, this remains significantly lower than in developed countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where services contribute an average of 75% to GDP and employ over 70% of the workforce. Additionally, Thailand's service sector is still largely dependent on traditional services, particularly in tourism and labor-intensive businesses such as wholesale and retail trade, hotels, and restaurants, [1]. As a result, the tourism industry in Thailand has begun adapting to emerging trends and new forms of travel. Tourism business operators are compelled to adjust and respond to the evolving demands of travelers, particularly in response to the rapidly increasing number of elderly tourists.

The United Nations categorizes aging societies into three stages. Stage 1 is the "Aging Society," in which individuals aged 60 and over make up more

than 10% of the population. Stage 2 is the "Aged Society," with individuals aged 60 and over comprising more than 20% of the population. Stage 3 is the "Super-aged Society" (or "Hyper-aged Society"), where the proportion of those aged 60 and above exceeds 28% of the population. Currently, Thailand has entered the Aging Society stage, with people aged 60 and above accounting for 17.10% of the population. The country officially became an Aged Society in 2021, and within the next 20 years, it is expected that approximately one-third of the Thai population will be elderly. This projection indicates that Thailand will become a Super-aged Society by 2035, [2].

Thailand has implemented strategic plans to address the growing elderly population across multiple sectors. One of these strategies includes the development of tourism management specifically for the elderly, to position Thailand as a hub for health and wellness tourism. This is in alignment with the Thailand Strategic Plan for Becoming an International Health Center (2016–2025), which promotes the country as a leading destination for Medical & Wellness Tourism, [3]. Medical and health tourism refers to travel by elderly individuals to visit scenic natural and cultural destinations with a conscious focus on health promotion and environmental preservation. It encompasses a comprehensive range of services, including advanced medical care and various tourism-related amenities. The scope of medical and wellness tourism is broad, ranging from inbound travel for healthcare services to participation in medical-related and alternative medicine activities. Key service-related businesses supporting this sector include accommodation, food and beverages, retail, arts, entertainment, and recreation. In 2023, the total revenue generated from this sector was estimated to be between 840 billion and 1.01 trillion baht, [4].

Considering these developments, the researcher is motivated to study the guidelines for developing tourism business models for foreign elderly tourists to enhance service excellence in Thailand's tourism industry. It aims to support tourism businesses in aligning with government policies to stimulate tourism, while preparing for the anticipated growth of elderly travelers due to demographic shifts.

1.1 Research Objectives

1) To study the components of the guidelines for developing tourism business models for foreign elderly tourists to enhance service excellence in Thailand's tourism industry.

2) To develop a structural equation model (SEM) of the guidelines for developing tourism business models for foreign elderly tourists to enhance service excellence in Thailand's tourism industry.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Concepts of Service Quality

Service refers to any activity or action performed by an individual or group that offers intangible value, without transferring ownership of any physical product. Services may or may not be tied to tangible goods. In essence, service is defined as an activity or effort undertaken to meet the needs and satisfaction of both service providers and recipients, activities that are inherently intangible. There are four key characteristics of services: Intangibility, Inseparability, Perishability, and Variability. Services depend on the recipient, cannot be separated from the recipient, and cannot be stored because it's intangible, [5]. For elderly tourism, the delivery of high-quality service is important, as elderly individuals typically do not possess the same physical resilience as younger people. Therefore, service providers must prioritize physical safety and comfort during travel. This may involve the provision of supportive equipment such as electric wheelchairs, elevators, or illuminated walking sticks to assist elderly travelers throughout their journey.

In today's competitive environment, service quality is a critical factor that every service-based business must emphasize—both at the policy and operational levels. Exceptional service that leads to word-of-mouth recommendations significantly impacts customer volume and, consequently, organizational revenue. According to [6], the key factors influencing customer perception of service quality include: 1) Reliability – the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. 2) Responsiveness – willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. 3) Competence – possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service effectively. 4) Access – ease of contact and approachability. 5) Courtesy – politeness, respect, and consideration shown by service staff. 6) Communication – ability to keep customers informed and listen to their needs. 7) Security – safety and the assurance customers feel while receiving the service.

2.2 Concepts of Health Tourism

Health tourism emphasizes the safety and well-being of elderly individuals while visiting natural

and cultural tourist destinations. The primary objectives include learning about local lifestyles and engaging in leisure activities, along with dedicating time to health promotion and therapeutic practices. These activities may include health consultations, proper physical exercise, herbal compress therapy, massage, meditation, health check-ups, and medical treatment. Health tourism is therefore seen as a form of travel that supports personal health, environmental conservation, and cultural appreciation. According to [7], health tourism management involves the strategic development of local communities into tourist destinations. This includes managing tourism resources and collaborating with local organizations and communities to identify unique tourism products and enhance their potential to attract tourists. The assessment of such potential typically focuses on three key aspects: 1) the area's capability as a tourist destination, 2) the quality and availability of health tourism services, and 3) the tourism market. Importantly, all efforts must prioritize the safety and well-being of elderly tourists.

As defined in [8], health tourism refers to travel experiences that involve visiting beautiful natural and cultural sites with the dual purpose of learning about different ways of life and rejuvenating the body and mind. During such trips, travelers engage in health-promotion activities or therapeutic rehabilitation sessions. Health tourism packages often include nature-based retreats that teach travelers how to harness the healing power of nature. These experiences aim to strengthen physical and mental health, boost energy levels, balance the mind and body, and allow travelers to apply the learned techniques in their daily lives after the trip. It is a form of systematic travel from one's home to a specific location for the purpose of maintaining or improving physical and mental health. It serves as both a health intervention and a leisure activity. Health tourism is divided into two main categories: Medical Tourism and Wellness Tourism, [9].

2.3 Concepts of Technology Management

The Resource-Based View of the Firm is a theory related to the management of organizational resources, often used to shape business policies and guide strategic decision-making. This perspective emphasizes identifying internal resources and capabilities that can provide a competitive advantage. Resources can be classified into two types: Tangible resources, which are physical assets that are visible and touchable. Intangible resources are non-physical, invisible, and difficult to evaluate or replicate. Thus, travel companies targeting elderly travelers should manage organizational resources—particularly technological tools—that help address the limitations of aging customers. Since elderly individuals tend to experience slower mobility and declining sensory functions, the integration of appropriate technology can provide significant competitive advantages for travel businesses, [10].

Effective technology management in tourism for the elderly is both vital and necessary. Travel companies aiming to deliver memorable experiences to older tourists should focus on integrating assistive technology throughout the customer journey. For instance, offering electric massage chairs, motorized wheelchairs, or other forms of mobility assistance during the trip. Pre-trip technology solutions are also important, such as implementing online booking systems, integrating reservation and payment platforms, and using chatbots to communicate interactively with elderly customers. These tools enhance convenience and create a positive and attractive image for senior-friendly tourism services. Given the decline in tourism revenue compared to past years—due to changing circumstances such as economic and the COVID-19 pandemic—tourism businesses catering to the elderly have increasingly adopted modern technologies. These include wireless internet, GPS navigation, and smart device controllers, which help to improve service quality and enhance customer satisfaction, [11].

2.4 Concepts of Communication

Communication skills involve the ability to apply knowledge of communication methods effectively to achieve specific goals. These skills are particularly important in professional interactions and include the ability to give advice, listen actively, solve problems, make decisions, and persuade others. Additionally, communication can involve more subtle techniques such as the Mind Reading Technique, which does not rely on direct verbal communication but rather on anticipating the needs and expectations of the other party. This approach is not only a general communication skill but also a strategic competency that contributes to building positive impressions during interactions. According to [12], given the importance of safety for elderly tourists, businesses in the tourism industry must ensure effective communication between tour guides and elderly travelers. Clear and mutual understanding is essential. Senior tourists must be able to comprehend rules,

regulations, and behavioral guidelines throughout the trip to ensure their physical safety.

The study, [13], emphasized that communication competence refers to understanding the rules of appropriate language use in specific situations. It includes both knowing what is appropriate to say and being able to apply that knowledge effectively. Key communication skills include advising, listening, problem-solving, decision-making, and persuasion. Moreover, advanced interpersonal skills such as the Mind Reading Technique play a role in enhancing communication outcomes. In summary, communication is important in senior tourism businesses because most elderly travelers experience some level of hearing impairment. Therefore, business operators should ensure that tour guides are well-informed about the physical limitations of senior tourists, especially regarding hearing. Tour guides must be able to adjust and coordinate their communication styles to suit the specific needs of each elderly traveler.

2.5 Research Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives and the relevant literature, the researcher formulated the following five research hypotheses in accordance with theoretical foundations:

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): The technological management component has a direct influence on the health tourism component.
- Hypothesis 2 (H2): The technological management component has a direct influence on the service quality component.
- Hypothesis 3 (H3): The technological management component has a direct influence on the communication component.
- Hypothesis 4 (H4): The service quality component has a direct influence on the health tourism component.
- Hypothesis 5 (H5): The service quality component has a direct influence on the communication component.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

From the literature review, relevant research, and the established hypotheses, the conceptual framework was developed as illustrated in Figure 1.

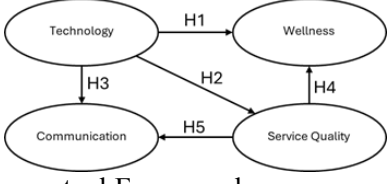

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: created by the authors

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Population and Sample

The population in this study includes hotel operators, tour businesses, restaurants, and other related service businesses in Thailand. The sample size was determined based on the standard for structural equation modeling (SEM), which suggests that a sample of 500 is considered excellent, [14]. A multi-stage sampling technique was used; the establishments are categorized into two categories, half equally based on business size: small and medium businesses (with an income of no more than 200 million baht) and large businesses (with an income exceeding 200 million baht). Consisting of probability sampling with the lottery method, this may be accomplished by identifying the sample unit and assigning it a label, and subsequently selecting the necessary quantity. This method ensures that each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, minimizing bias, [15]. After that, the researcher initiated the collection of data from the sample group.

3.2 Research Instruments

The research instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire, developed from a review of relevant literature, documents, theories, and research. The content validity of the questionnaire was assessed using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), evaluated by five experts, resulting in an average score of 0.97, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.50, [16]. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested with a pilot group of 30 individuals with similar characteristics to the target population. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.90, which is higher than the 0.80 threshold, indicating a high level of reliability and suitability for data collection, [17].

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis employed both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics using the SPSS software. For multivariate statistical analysis and to develop the structural equation model (SEM), the AMOS software was used. The model fit was evaluated using four key criteria: 1) Chi-square probability (p-value) more than 0.05. 2) Relative Chi-square (CMIN/DF) less than 2.00. 3) Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) more than 0.90 and 4) Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) less than 0.08, [18].

4 Research Results

The analysis results based on the research objectives—to examine the components of the guidelines for developing tourism business models for foreign elderly tourists to enhance service excellence in Thailand's tourism industry—identified four main components: First component: Service Quality ($\bar{x}$ = 3.94, S.D. = 0.60), second component: Health Tourism ($\bar{x}$ = 3.93, S.D. = 0.60), third component: Technology Management ($\bar{x}$ = 3.92, S.D. = 0.58), and fourth component: Communication ($\bar{x}$ = 3.97, S.D. = 0.57). These components were derived from the review of relevant literature and previous studies. From the analysis using the initial Structural Equation Model (SEM) developed by the researcher, the model did not meet the criteria for a good fit with the empirical data. The fit indices were as follows: p-value = 0.000, CMIN/DF = 2.897, GFI = 0.669, RMSEA = 0.062, Statistical significance = 0.001, which did not meet the criteria. These results indicated that the model required improvement. To enhance the model, the researcher revised it based on the Modification Indices (M.I.) of the variable pairs, following three approaches to improve data-model alignment, [19].

Those are: 1) Removing certain variables, 2) Merging related variables, and 3) Connecting variables through additional paths. After these adjustments, the model achieved an acceptable level of fit with the empirical data: p-value = 0.078, CMIN/DF = 1.269, GFI = 0.980, RMSEA = 0.023, Statistical significance = 0.001. These values meet the recommended criteria and demonstrate consistency with the reviewed literature and empirical data, as shown in Figure 2.

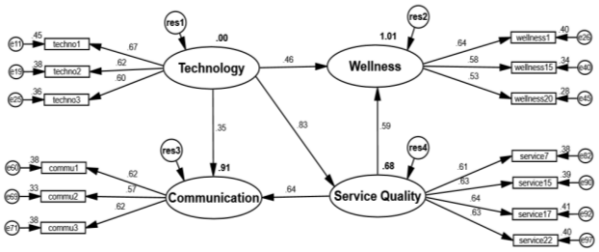

Fig. 2: Path Diagram of the Structural Equation Model

Source: created by the authors

Table 1. Observational variables

Abbreviation	Description
Service Quality	
service7	The team is experienced and knowledgeable about tourist attractions for the elderly, like being locals.
service15	Availability of medication and medical equipment for basic first aid.
service17	Tourist attractions should not require long walks or have excessively steep slopes.
service22	Clearly defined cancellation policies are provided and communicated to elderly customers.
Wellness	
wellness1	Allocate more time for elderly tourists to visit attractions compared to regular tour schedules.
wellness15	Promote heritage conservation tourism.
wellness20	Offer local cuisine as a welcoming gesture to tourists.
Technology	
techno1	Provide free Wi-Fi access during the tour at various locations.
techno2	Develop a one-stop booking system that is easily accessible for elderly users.
techno3	Create a business website tailored for senior tourists, such as using larger font sizes.
Communication	
commu1	Create chat groups on platforms such as Line for communication between tour operators and elderly customers.
commu2	Open telephone inquiry lines with multiple operators to handle travel-related questions.
commu3	Establish a unit to receive complaints and suggestions from customers.

Source: created by the authors

The hypothesis testing aimed to examine the causal influences among latent variables in the structural equation model of the development approach for tourism businesses catering to international elderly tourists to elevate service excellence in Thailand's tourism industry. A total of five hypotheses were tested with the following results:

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): The component of Technology Management has a direct influence on the component of Wellness Tourism, with statistical significance at the 0.001 level. Standardized Regression Weight = 0.44.
- Hypothesis 2 (H2): The component of Technology Management has a direct influence on the component of Service Quality, with statistical significance at the 0.001 level. Standardized Regression Weight = 0.79.

- Hypothesis 3 (H3): The component of Technology Management has a direct influence on the component of Communication, with statistical significance at the 0.001 level. Standardized Regression Weight = 0.30.
- Hypothesis 4 (H4): The component of Service Quality has a direct influence on the component of Wellness Tourism, with statistical significance at the 0.001 level. Standardized Regression Weight = 0.59.
- Hypothesis 5 (H5): The component of Service Quality has a direct influence on the component of Communication, with statistical significance at the 0.001 level. Standardized Regression Weight = 0.58.

5 Discussion

5.1 Technology Management has a Direct Influence on Wellness Tourism

Modern technology management significantly influences wellness tourism. It enhances tourists' confidence in safety during wellness-focused travel. This aligns with the findings of [20], The technological advances in the Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0 era escalated the advancement of the healthcare industry, including the health tourism phenomenon. Based on the current trend in connected health care (e.g., mobile healthcare technology; digital health, etc.), this paper aims to propose that the distance between healthcare providers around the globe and their potential patients can be vastly reduced to almost on a real-time basis. The adoption of IR 4.0 technologies is expected to make seeking treatment overseas more affordable, accessible, and health records readily available on a real-time and secure basis. However, it is worth noting that the growth of health tourism raises eyebrows of society from the security, social, and economic perspectives. Additionally, research [21], said that essential developments in health tourism indicate that technology is critical to the current health system. The digital age makes life easier by providing fast accessibility, easy usability, and integrating new technological equipment into routine life. Developments in the field of digitalization in health tourism initially focused on e-Health technologies, which use information and communication technologies to improve existing communication processes, such as electronic health records. Managers and employees need to be prepared for the profound transformation brought about by technology. Companies need to evaluate investments in technology.

5.2 Technology Management has a Direct Influence on Service Quality

The influence of technology management on service quality demonstrated the strongest direct effect. This suggests that implementing advanced technologies can enhance service efficiency and effectiveness, making services more acceptable and satisfactory to elderly international tourists. These results are consistent with [22], The significant influence of customer expectations and positive experiences in using technological hotel services on satisfaction is confirmed. The findings of the paper can contribute to the literature and hotel management decision-making in designing a modern strategy of technological business development, digitalization of services, and digital marketing relations with service users, millennials as technological leaders of change, and further hospitality organizations' survival in the tourist market. The study [23], found that to explore the impact of luxury hotel brands' technologies on guests' perceived value enhancement and its consequences, this study aims to examine how task–technology fit (TTF) and luxury–technology fit (LTF) affect luxury hotel guests' perceived value enhancement, satisfaction, and brand loyalty. The results reveal that both TTF and LTF have significant impacts on the luxury hotel's value enhancement, and the impacts of TTF and LTF on value enhancement are moderated by the guests' technology optimism. The findings of this study suggest that the luxury hotel brands must consider the fit between the image of their brand and the technology to increase guests' perceived value enhancement, satisfaction, and loyalty. Additionally, research objective [24], was to identify the effects of technological, organizational, and environmental (TOE) factors on hotel managers' intentions to adopt robotic technologies in their hotels. The results indicated that hotel managers' intention to adopt robotic technologies was positively influenced by their perceived relative advantage, competitive pressure, and top management support, and negatively influenced by their perceived complexity of the technology. The study results further demonstrated that the impacts of relative advantage, complexity, top management support, and competitive advantage on intention to adopt were moderated by innovativeness.

5.3 Technology Management has a Direct Influence on Communication

For tourism businesses targeting the elderly, incorporating modern technological tools enhances the delivery of good travel information and

facilitates communication between service providers and customers. Advanced technology contributes to more effective communication with customers. This is consistent with the research of [25]. This study aims to identify those issues involved in adopting and implementing mobile technologies by a thematic analysis of focus group interviews of luxury hotel managers and executives. The luxury hotel industry sees mobile technology's adoption as more of an opportunity than a threat, despite the managerial issues highlighted in this study. The widespread use of mobile technology practices in service firms allows the rich experience to be accumulated in organizational and economic applications. Mobile technologies enable access to resources and collaboration with other actors in the process of co-creating value in more efficient and effective ways, and with a positive impact. Furthermore, [26], found that digital marketing influences product value, presenting a variety of health supplement products, with details indicating their benefits and usage, allows customers to conveniently choose and purchase through e-commerce service channels. The use of various tools that facilitate ordering highlights the value of the products to the customers.

5.4 Service Quality has a Direct Influence on Wellness Tourism

When elderly tourists receive good service and feel well cared for, their overall satisfaction makes their well-oriented travel more enjoyable and fulfilling. This result supports the study [27]. The objective of this study is to know the factors of tourism services that affect health tourism service innovation in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand. The results of the study showed that proactive operations and cooperation with customers affect health tourism service innovation in Mae Hong Son Province. Additionally, research [28]. This research aims to study and test the influence of the management components of hotel businesses on elderly tourists in the central region of Thailand. The importance of the components, analysis of the service quality component has a direct influence on the hotel management component, revealing the highest overall level of importance, aligning with previous research findings regarding the impact of service quality on the hotel industry. It was found that improving the skills and quality of service among hotel staff significantly enhances the efficiency of hotel management.

5.5 Service Quality has a Direct Influence on Communication

A positive organizational image is important in the service industry as it builds customer trust in the quality of services reflected by the projected brand identity. No hospitality industry property will survive if they are not oriented towards its consumers, notably, to meet their needs, requirements, and expectations, so that the image of the company will be enhanced. This aligns with the findings of [29]. The findings of the study will show the influence of different service quality dimensions on satisfaction levels in hotels. This study proved that the four service quality dimensions (empathy, responsiveness, assurance, and tangible) have a positive relation with customer satisfaction, except that reliability had a negative relation with customer satisfaction. Furthermore, [30], this study aims to determine the effect of service quality, trust, and facilities on the decision to choose SP Hotel Batam. Partial research results: Service quality has a positive and significant effect on the decision to choose SP Hotel Batam.

6 Conclusion and Suggestions

The research result on the guidelines for developing tourism business models for foreign elderly tourists to enhance service excellence in Thailand’s tourism industry, which emphasizes management factors for more efficient tourism for foreign senior tourists, identifies the aspects that will enable organizations to manage their tourism business for continuous development and success in a competitive business environment. The four components for senior tourism and well-being, sorted by priority, are communication, service quality, health tourism, and technology management.

1) Based on the findings, it is recommended that tourism and hotel business operators in Thailand who aim to attract foreign elderly tourists should place a strong emphasis on the management of modern and accessible communication technologies. This is because such technologies have the highest direct influence on the service quality component, thereby enhancing service efficiency and gaining customer acceptance.

2) This study was limited to the context of tourism and hotel businesses in Thailand. To enhance the comprehensiveness of the research, future studies should consider examining similar contexts in other countries.

3) Further research may investigate the obstacles or constraints that impede the accessibility of tourism

for the elderly. This would allow both the government and private agencies to leverage the research results to enhance and improve the management of tourism for the elderly.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work the authors used LanguageTool in order to modify a few phrases in the abstract and introduction sections to enhance academic quality. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

- Prahuschai Ramart carried out the conceptualization, methodology, project administration, resources, visualization, writing, and editing.
- Rungroj Subanjui has implemented the methodology, investigation, and review.

All authors discussed the results and contributed to the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

This research has been approved by the Naresuan University Network of Research Ethics Committee, COA No. 017/2025.

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