

Service Factors from Entrepreneurs' View of Gem and Jewelry Business in Chanthaburi Province

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Abstract Service plays a critical role in the success and sustainability of businesses across diverse dimensions. Industries excelling in service provision possess the capacity to generate significant added value and ensure customer satisfaction. The gem and jewelry industry, particularly at the local level, stands out as a distinctive and intriguing business sector. This study aims to investigate service-related factors among gem and jewelry entrepreneurs in Chanthaburi province, conduct a comparative analysis of service opinions, and explore relationships and components impacting jewelry trade in the specific area. The research methodology involved in-depth interviews with 20 key informants, specifically local gem and jewelry business entrepreneurs. Participants were selected based on the precise physical locations of their businesses within the municipal area of Chanthaburi province. Findings indicate that a critical aspect of service provision lies in the service provider's role as the direct communicator with consumers. These individuals must possess favorable qualities and behaviors to effectively deliver services, meeting the needs and expectations of customers. Furthermore, these service providers are pivotal in influencing the sales volume of gem and jewelry products.

Keywords Service factors; Gem and jewelry business; Entrepreneurs; Sustainability; Customer satisfaction

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Introduction

Thailand's gem and jewelry trade, rooted in corundum deposits since the 15th century, thrives due to its strategic location between Myanmar and Cambodia. This position, coupled with domestic mines and shifting borders, has fueled its industry (Lawson & Chowdhury, 2022). By the late 1970s, miners reportedly sourced approximately 70% of the world's gem-quality ruby production from the Chanthaburi-Trat area (Pardieu, 2019, as cited in Keller, 1982). Chanthaburi, nestled on the Thai-Cambodia border, has wielded significant influence over Thailand's history and the global gem trade. Renowned for its sapphires in yellow, blue, and black star varieties (Chowdhury & Abid, 2018), it transitioned from a sapphire mining hub to a celebrated gem trading center. Its mines produce exceptional black star sapphires and rich yellow "Mekong whiskey" stones (Vertriest et al., 2019). Chanthaburi's gem legacy began with the Gula people discovering yellow - green "Buddnamtaeng" sapphires in the Khao Ploi Waen and Khao Wua hills. During King Rama V's reign, they established a trading settlement and trained locals in gem polishing, solidifying Chanthaburi's role in the gem industry (GIT Information Center, 2022). The bustling marketplace known as the Talad Ploy Gem Market is situated on Si Chan Road, at the core of Chanthaburi City in Thailand (Bhattacharya et al., 2017).

Located in eastern Thailand, Chanthaburi has played a substantial role in the economic prosperity of the country. Despite its relatively modest size as a small city on the left bank of the Chanthaburi River with a population of 12,450 people (National Statistical Office, 2024), its influence and contributions surpass its scale. Notably, Chanthaburi is home to Thailand's largest gem trading market and serves as a central hub for the gem processing industry. A significant portion of Thailand's gemstones undergo cutting and polishing processes within Chanthaburi (Medium, 2021).

The Chanthaburi Province Development Plan (B.E. 2566-2570) is paramount as a pivotal mechanism driving operational initiatives in Chanthaburi Province through government policies, organizational functions, and regional-level activities. This plan, serving as a crucial instrument, aligns the province's endeavors with the government's agenda, the functions of governmental departments, and initiatives at the local level. Its overarching objective is to achieve the development goals outlined as "Chanthaburi, an economically vibrant city, promoting agriculture, gem-related activities, cross-border trade, and high-value tourism, while remaining environmentally friendly, fostering creativity, and contributing to a prosperous society." Chanthaburi Province (2022) envisions this plan as an ideal and enduring manifestation of its aspirations in the economic, agricultural, and gem-related sectors, as well as in cross-border trade and high-value tourism, all characterized by environmental friendliness, creative thinking, and the promotion of a thriving society. According to the Factsheet of Chanthaburi Province in October 2023 claimed that the number one product in terms of uniqueness is Gems (Top Identify Goods) (Trade Policy and Strategy Office, 2023). This can be seen from the data on the gem and jewelry trade value in Chanthaburi, as shown in Figure 1.

In pursuit of its goal to become a global hub for gems and jewelry trading, Thailand has undertaken significant governmental measures. Specifically, the Ministry of Commerce, acting through the Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP), has introduced new legislation. This strategic initiative aligns with the National Industrial Development Master Plan 2012-2031, reflecting Thailand's commitment to achieving global prominence in the gems and jewelry industry (Karnchanawong et al., 2019). Gems and jewelry are among Thailand's highest-valued export products from 2018 to 2023, as shown in Table 1.

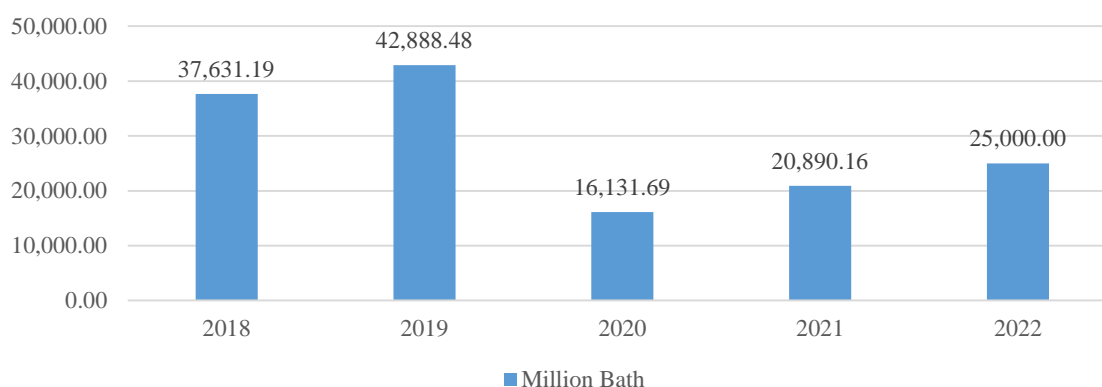


Figure 1 Value of gem and jewelry trade in Chanthaburi from 2018-2022

Source: Chanthaburi Provincial Office (2024)

Table 1 Top 10 highest-valued export products of Thailand from 2018 to 2023

Product	Export product values from 2018 to 2024 (million baht)					
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1. Motor cars, parts and accessories	927,501.26	846,435.16	659,509.97	919,153.18	990,658.45	1,069,596.00
2. Automatic data processing machines and parts	633,150.25	564,626.60	579,000.20	694,943.36	716,958.08	615,014.91
3. Precious stones and jewelry	383,976.66	486,216.02	567,046.03	317,888.61	517,812.38	509,830.76
4. Rubber products	353,442.86	347,649.54	375,387.89	454,219.94	480,270.65	456,492.21
5. Refine fuels	298,921.30	226,962.64	165,145.07	280,355.69	350,336.05	353,010.52
6. Electronic integrated circuits	267,100.98	234,892.15	222,053.38	268,519.79	323,350.87	333,664.41
7. Polymers of ethylene, propylene, etc. in primary	330,156.09	284,263.00	247,316.19	354,731.17	368,743.10	305,840.30
8. Machinery and parts thereof	262,831.45	227,071.40	203,123.38	257,174.19	303,425.98	302,901.18
9. Chemical products	294,215.38	235,246.69	208,675.83	311,876.02	331,449.80	277,589.82
10. Iron and steel and their products	201,010.88	172,229.05	150,333.05	217,649.62	242,298.15	240,097.24

Source: Trade Report (2024)

In the gem and jewelry industry of Thailand, the predominant business model is represented by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (InfoQuest News Agency, 2023). Upon further study, it becomes evident that the gems and jewelry sector plays a crucial role in the grassroots economy of the country. The business sizes range from micro, small, and medium enterprises, collectively contributing significantly, up to 90 percent, to the entirety of the industry (The Nation, 2022). Within Chanthaburi Province, the gem and jewelry industry constitutes a thriving sector renowned for its exceptional craftsmanship and cultural significance. This unique business environment poses intricacies that entrepreneurs must navigate, where the provision of services emerges as a pivotal aspect influencing customer satisfaction, business success, and the industry's overall sustainability.

Recognized as a hub for gemstone trading and jewelry craftsmanship, Chanthaburi offers a distinctive backdrop for comprehending service dynamics.

In the contemporary business landscape, the provision of services holds paramount significance across all industries, including those traditionally associated with luxury, such as the gem and jewelry sector. The increasing importance of services within the economy and household consumption, alongside heightened competition in the market, necessitates the scrutiny of service enterprises. This examination is essential to foster a positive customer experience (Dąbrowska & Janoś-Kresło, 2019). The conceptualization of service constitutes one of the initial and foundational definitions, delineating service as an activity or a sequence of activities characterized by a predominantly intangible nature. These activities typically involve, though not invariably, interactions between clients and service company personnel aimed at resolving consumer issues (Álvarez-García et al., 2019).

Customer service and retention encompass the business's proficiency in sustaining its current customer base. This metric encapsulates customer loyalty and the business's adeptness in ensuring customer satisfaction through high-quality service and product offerings. Customer service entails a spectrum of activities designed to enhance a customer's ability to realize the full potential value of products or services, both pre- and post-sale. Consequently, a superior level of service contributes to customer satisfaction, fostering repeat purchases. It is noteworthy that maintaining existing customers proves to be a more cost-effective strategy than acquiring new ones (Aummontha & Smutkupt, 2017). Typically, businesses exhibit a clear division of roles and responsibilities in their organizational structure. However, in the small-scale gem and jewelry businesses located in Chanthaburi province, services are predominantly overseen by the business owners themselves (Phuengsamran et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurs in this province assume a crucial role as service providers, engaging directly with clients and shaping the customer experience. To comprehend the nuanced dimensions of service factors specific to the gem and jewelry trade in this locale, exploring the insights and perceptions of these entrepreneurs is fundamental. Such an investigation is essential for unraveling the intricacies of service provision within the context of the Chanthaburi gem and jewelry industry, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of this unique business landscape.

Suppose the gem and jewelry industry in Chanthaburi Province undergoes development and elevates its service standards to an excellent or international level. In that case, it could potentially propel Thailand into a global gems and jewelry trade center, aligning with government policies. Additionally, achieving a reputation for excellence can attract interest from customers both domestically and internationally, promoting tourism. Travelers interested in gems and jewelry are likely to visit and make purchases in Thailand, bringing back souvenirs and sharing their shopping experiences with others. Furthermore, international trade can be fostered through Thailand's provision of outstanding services, enabling businesses to compete effectively in the global market and contributing to sustainable long-term revenue generation. This, in turn, results in economic expansion at both the local and national levels simultaneously. The study examines the factors related to service among gem and jewelry entrepreneurs in Chanthaburi Province. It will conduct a comparative analysis of service opinions and explore the relationships and components affecting the jewelry trade in this province.

Literature review

The Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) represents the amalgamation of transformative conceptual shifts into a theoretical framework centered on service for value co-creation. This framework redefines service as a dynamic process of leveraging resources to benefit others, moving beyond the traditional view of service as a mere outcome, such as an intangible product (Ng & Vargo, 2018, as cited in Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016). The SDL concept not only enhances our comprehension of the growing significance of services across diverse business sectors but also signifies a shift from a conventional

manufacturing-centric economy to one centered around services (Ambarwati et al., 2023, as cited in Lai et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2021).

The Services Marketing Mix (7Ps) and SDL convergence reflect a shared objective in emphasizing the unique nature of services and their collaborative creation with customers. The 7Ps seamlessly support this alignment by accentuating the co-creation of value, underscoring the significance of customer involvement, and recognizing the distinctive attributes of services. The 7Ps—product, price, place, promotion, people, processes, and physical evidence—comprise a unified framework that plays a pivotal role in achieving customer satisfaction, as a barometer for meeting customers' needs and expectations. The Services Marketing Mix holds undeniable significance, crafting a perceptual image for intangible products and encapsulating services (Alnaser et al., 2017, as cited in Oflaç & Yumurtacı, 2014). This integration positions the 7Ps as a pragmatic framework, facilitating the application of SDL principles in service marketing and management.

The Four characteristics of Services present a conceptual framework that assists service businesses in comprehending the distinctive features and challenges inherent in services. By addressing and leveraging these characteristics, businesses can formulate strategies to enhance customer experiences, manage service quality effectively, and establish sustainable competitive advantages in the service industry. In exploring services marketing, Martin (2023, as cited in Ellis, 2000) highlights the compilation of eight factors: intangibility, inseparability, inconsistency, immediacy, intimacy, intermediaries, innovation, and inventory. These elements collectively define and shape the services landscape, providing a comprehensive understanding of their unique characteristics and challenges within the marketing realm. Furthermore, service marketing introduces a diverse perspective. Pakurár et al., (2019) elaborate on service quality as a multidimensional construct of five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. These dimensions are applied within the context of the service quality gap, indicating a disparity between customer expectations and the perception of services.

Moreover, in response to the challenges posed by the commoditization of goods and services, companies are increasingly turning to Customer Experience Management (CEM) as a pivotal driver of competitive advantage (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). CEM emerges as a strategic response when competitors provide increasingly similar offerings to price-sensitive customers with low switching costs response (Witell et al., 2020, as cited in Rangan & Bowman, 1992). In such circumstances, the traditional influences of product leadership and operational excellence diminish in significance, giving way to the critical role of intimacy in ensuring customer satisfaction and gaining a competitive edge (Witell et al., 2020, as cited in Reimann et al., 2010). To effectively address customers' specific needs, companies must proactively engage in the deliberate design of memorable customer experiences (Witell et al., 2020, as cited in Harby, 2018; Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

Research methodology

This research seeks to explore the determinants influencing service provision within the gem and jewelry industry in Chanthaburi Province, focusing specifically on entrepreneurs. The study employs a dual-method research approach: 1. Documentary Study: Conducted by examining foundational principles and theories related to service provision, this phase draws insights from textbooks, literature, and academic publications from various sources. 2. Qualitative Study: This method, encompassing in-depth interviews with key informants, aims to gather rich and contextual data from entrepreneurs actively involved in the gem and jewelry business in the municipal area of Chanthaburi Province.

Key informants selected for this research are entrepreneurs in the gem and jewelry trade, operating medium and small-sized businesses (SMEs) within Chanthaburi. The criteria for inclusion in this group involve entrepreneurs who are at least 30 years old, reflecting a deliberate focus on

individuals with a certain level of maturity and experience in their businesses. Researchers set this age criterion based on the belief that entrepreneurs aged 30 and above can provide valuable insights aligned with the research objectives. The key informant group comprises 20 entrepreneurs, and the businesses may or may not be involved in online commerce. Clear and distinct physical locations characterize these businesses. The selection criteria prioritize individuals willing to share information, ensuring a cooperative and informative engagement for the study.

The study employs an interview-based approach, utilizing informal techniques with the researcher serving as the interviewer to elicit detailed and directly relevant information aligned with the predefined research objectives. The study incorporates personalized in-depth interviews with key informants, utilizing semi-structured interview guides created by the researcher to provide a framework for the interview process. Researchers employ electronic recording equipment exclusively for audio documentation and use writing tools for text transcription during interviews. This method aims to streamline the acquisition of comprehensive information. It is important to note that using video recording equipment is precluded due to ethical considerations in research, as it may compromise the confidentiality of research participants and lead to potential refusal to participate in the project. Following the data collection from key informants, the researcher proceeds with a descriptive analysis, employing analytical induction and content analysis to systematically analyze and organize the gathered data, derive patterns, and interpret the content obtained from the interviews.

In human research, ethical principles are indispensable, guiding researcher interactions with participants and emphasizing safeguarding their rights, including dignity and privacy. Adhering to these standards reinforces research validity and upholds academic integrity, fostering trust within the academic community and society. The research protocol for this study, approved by the Human Research Ethics Review Board, Part 2 (Humanities and Social Sciences Group), under Project Code HU 006/2566, ensures adherence to established standards, as outlined in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The certificate number IRB2-019/2566, issued by the Research and Innovation Administration Division of Burapha University, underscores the commitment to ethical conduct. These measures, including providing comprehensive participant information, obtaining informed consent, employing suitable data collection methods, and disclosing conflicts of interest, ensure participants' confidence in their safety and well-being throughout the research process, mitigating any potential physical or psychological harm.

Research findings and discussion

the researcher has collected data by transcribing audio recordings, resulting in the organization of information related to the services provided by entrepreneurs in the gem and jewelry industry in Chanthaburi Province. This process enables the differentiation and categorization of data into 10 key issues, listed in the following order.

Section 1: Information of key informants

The identities of key informants will remain confidential throughout the research project. The committee may approve the study for exemption from the meeting's resolution (Exemption Determination) in adherence to research ethics criteria. The research information, gathered through surveys, interviews, or observations of broad public behavior, aligns with criterion 5. It cannot be linked to specific individuals and does not pose risks to society's perception of certain groups lifestyle, employment, welfare, or economy. To safeguard participant identities, the researcher has assigned false names. The qualifications of key informants have been defined according to the stipulations of the research methodology, and the participant information document explicitly outlines a policy prohibiting identity disclosure. As a result, hypothetical pseudonyms have been employed to maintain control and confidentiality by established project policies, and the results from gathering personal data from these key informants are detailed below.

Table 2 Information about key informants

Name	Sex	Age (Years)	Educational Level (Degree)	Work Experience in Gem and Jewelry Business (Years)	Expertise in the Field of Gem and Jewelry Business	
					Gems	Jewelry
Chan01	Female	39	Bachelor	19	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan02	Female	40	Bachelor	10	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan03	Female	36	Bachelor	10	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan04	Female	30	Bachelor	20	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan05	Male	48	Diploma	13	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan06	Female	30	Senior High School	3	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan07	Female	56	Master	38	Diamond & Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan08	Male	45	Bachelor	20	Gems	Gold
Chan09	Female	55	Junior High School	30	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan10	Female	49	Bachelor	20	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan11	Female	40	Bachelor	10	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan12	Female	40	Master	25	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan13	Female	49	Bachelor	25	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan14	Female	45	Bachelor	10	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan15	Female	36	Bachelor	10	Diamond & Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan16	Female	30	Bachelor	6	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan17	Female	32	Bachelor	10	Gems	Silver & Gold
Chan18	Female	33	Senior High School	5	Gems	Gold
Chan19	Female	39	Bachelor	18	Diamond	Silver & Gold
Chan20	Male	43	Junior High School	6	Gems	Silver & Gold

The study incorporates data gathered from 20 business owners, predominantly operating as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), many of whom follow a family business model. Key insights from Table 2 highlight that the interviewed business owners are aged 30 and above, predominantly engaged in medium-sized and small-sized enterprises, with a notable prevalence of family involvement in the gem and jewelry business operations. The data further categorizes the respondents, revealing 17 females and 3 males aged 30 to 55 years. Educational levels span from junior high school to master's degree, and those providing crucial information boast an average of 15 years of experience in the gem and jewelry industry. Specializations cover various areas, with a preference for diamonds and gems, while 18 individuals specialize in gold and silver jewelry, showcasing expertise in both materials. Additionally, two individuals specialize exclusively in gold jewelry.

Section 2: The characteristics of the gem and jewelry business

The researcher collected data on the characteristics of the gem and jewelry business to understand whether there are similarities or differences in business operations. This includes the duration of business operations, which directly impacts the market and target audience (customers). We also examined the types of products sold, service characteristics, and the duration of business operations. This information illustrates how key informants conduct their business operations, staying conscious of the characteristics and customer needs through service provision and product transactions throughout the business operation period. This encompasses adapting business strategies to survive

and grow in the highly competitive gem and jewelry products market. The current market competition is intense, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3 Presenting the characteristics of the gem and jewelry business

Name	*Types of business	**Types of products sold	***Nature of service	Duration of Business Operations (Years)
Chan01	R / W	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	30
Chan02	R	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	7
Chan03	R / W	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	12
Chan04	R	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	10
Chan05	R / W	G / FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	12
Chan06	R	FP	CAS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	15
Chan07	R / W	G / FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	21
Chan08	R	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	13
Chan09	R / W	G / FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	30
Chan10	R / W	G / FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	20
Chan11	R	G / FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	10
Chan12	R	G / FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	5
Chan13	R	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	25
Chan14	R / W	G / FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	10
Chan15	R / W	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	15
Chan16	R	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	2
Chan17	R / W	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	12
Chan18	R	FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	10
Chan19	R / W	G / FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	5
Chan20	R / W	G / FP / MO	CAS / JDS / PWS / SICGA / ASS	15

Remark: 1. *Types of business: Retail (R) and Wholesale (W)
2. ** Types of products sold: Gems (G), Finished Products (FP), and Made to Order (MO)
3. * Nature of service:** Consultation and Advisory Services (CAS), Jewelry Design Services (JDS), Product Warranty Services (PWS), Services for Issuing Certificates of Gemstone Analysis (SICGA), After-Sales Services (ASS)

Section 2 reveals that all businesses fall within the retail trade category, and 11 out of the 20 stores engage in both retail and wholesale operations. The product offerings are diverse, encompassing uncut and cut gemstones, finished products (ready-made jewelry), and custom-made products (made to order). Of all the stores, 9 sell products from all three categories, 10 offer finished products and custom manufacturing services, while 1 store exclusively sells finished products. Regarding services, nearly every store provides similar offerings, such as consultation and advisory services, jewelry design, product warranty, gemstone analysis certification services, and after-sales support. Only one store does not offer design services. The operational duration of the gem and jewelry businesses varies from 2 to 30 years among all 20 stores, with an average duration of 14 years.

Examining Table 4, it becomes evident that every store actively participates in online trading channels, employing the Line application as a multifaceted tool for customer communication, public relations, information dissemination, and product details explanation, primarily emphasizing product sales. The distribution across various platforms includes 18 stores on Facebook, 14 on Instagram, and 7 on TikTok. In comparison, only 2 stores maintain their websites. Additionally, 4 stores leverage E-Marketplaces (Lazada, Shopee, and eBay) for product distribution. Notably, only 2 stores exclusively utilize the Line application without incorporating other apps. Regarding personnel responsible for service-related tasks, most stores have a single person overseeing such responsibilities, accounting for

10 stores. Subsequently, 9 stores have two individuals in charge, while only 1 store has five individuals responsible for service-related tasks.

Table 4 The online trading channels information from key informants

Name	Online trading channels	Number of personnel responsible for service-related tasks (Number of People)
Chan01	Facebook / Instagram / TikTok / Line	1
Chan02	Facebook / Instagram / Line	1
Chan03	Facebook / Instagram / TikTok / Line	1
Chan04	Facebook / Instagram / TikTok / Line	1
Chan05	Website / Facebook / Instagram / Line	2
Chan06	Facebook / Line	1
Chan07	Facebook / Line	2
Chan08	Facebook / Instagram / Line	2
Chan09	Line	2
Chan10	Line	2
Chan11	Facebook / Line	2
Chan12	Facebook / Instagram / TikTok / Line	1
Chan13	Facebook / Instagram / Line	2
Chan14	Facebook / Instagram / Line	1
Chan15	Facebook / Instagram / Line / Shopee	2
Chan16	Facebook / Instagram / TikTok / Line	1
Chan17	Facebook / Instagram / TikTok / Line	2
Chan18	Facebook / Instagram / Line / Lazada / Shopee / eBay	5
Chan19	Facebook / Line / Shopee	1
Chan20	Website / Facebook / Instagram / TikTok / Line / Lazada / Shopee	1

Section 3: The characteristics of the gem and jewelry business

This section divides the data collection into three parts:

1. Service patterns or types provided to customers or consumers by the business

Discussing various service patterns highlights common features, such as providing product information, consultations, jewelry design, warranties, certificates, after-sales services, repairs, and delivery. These services are all part of a “One Stop Service” model, aiming to meet customers’ comprehensive needs within a single store. Additionally, stores offer extra services like procuring gemstone materials, custom gem cutting, special shapes, preferred colors, and mailing ring size measurements for those unsure of their size. This integrated service model aligns with Pardalis et al. (2019), who found that a one-stop-shop approach can positively impact the market, attracting individuals and companies to explore opportunities in this business sector.

2. Service costs

The inspection and assessment process stores use before initiating repairs involves evaluating the damage and informing customers of the repair costs beforehand. Costs depend on the extent of repairs needed, such as replacing lost gemstones or fixing broken ones, which incur expenses, while minor repairs like cleaning or soldering usually do not. According to Wirtz & Zeithaml (2018), service

firms must manage offering options, flexibility, and customization costs. Thus, it's essential to balance customer expectations with operational efficiency.

3. Relevance of service provision to the current business

Sixteen key informants are confident in their service adequacy, citing positive customer feedback and satisfaction evaluations, with no awareness of complaints. Conversely, four informants believe their services are inadequate, based on broader assessments beyond customer commendations. Their concerns include difficulties in reaching the target audience online, financial constraints limiting service development, and the need for better information provision and customer query responses. They also feel their basic services are comparable to general jewelry stores, preventing service expansion, such as offering lifetime free repair warranties. Ingaldi (2021) highlights the importance of a well-designed service process for customer satisfaction and quality. Thus, it is essential to precisely define and evaluate each stage of service delivery.

"...There is a one-stop service provided, with customization for customers. If a customer brings gemstones, we can work with them. If a customer brings a ring and wants to change the jewelry style, we can accommodate that too. We issue certificates, accordingly, depending on the size of the gemstone. Our store's criteria are that if the gemstone is priced at 50,000 baht or more, we will issue a gemstone certificate" (Chan01, Female, 39, Mueang Chanthaburi, October 4th, 2023, 10:21 AM)

Section 4: The person responsible for service-related tasks

We divide the data collection into two parts:

1. The method or steps in selecting the person responsible for service-related tasks

Key informants prioritize honesty, resilience, strong interpersonal skills, reliability, a humble attitude for service-related roles, a positive service mindset, effective communication, and customer engagement abilities. Although physical appearance does not determine everything, we recommend a well-groomed look. Fundamental knowledge of gems and jewelry, social media marketing, and proficiency in English and other languages like Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian are beneficial. The ability to learn, adapt, and communicate effectively is key. Building trust with customers fosters brand loyalty and good business relationships, enhancing efficiency, flexibility, and cost-effectiveness, promoting sustainable value for customers and suppliers (Buchaiphum & Sivabrovnvatana, 2017). Additionally, identifying key service attributes through online reviews helps avoid wasting resources on less important aspects (Zhang & Xu, 2024).

2. Assigning tasks and responsibilities to the person in charge of service-related tasks (both in-store and/or online)

Key informants have designated duties for the physical store, encompassing sales and transaction finalization, maintaining the store's cleanliness and product orderliness, greeting customers, preparing refreshments, recommending and presenting products, compiling catalogs, checking inventory, arranging product displays, managing artisan tasks, and selecting gemstones. These responsibilities underscore their role in managing and servicing the gem and jewelry retail environment. Online, key informants engage in customer conversations, advertising, and promoting products through posting images, creating content, and conducting live sales. Recruiting sales personnel requires candidates to be patient, hardworking, ambitious, and possess good interpersonal skills (Laksitamas et al., 2019, as cited in Agnihotri et al., 2017). Selecting experienced salespeople with a positive attitude towards the organization and the products offered (Laksitamas et al., 2019, as cited in Hildesheim, 2011), aligning with Laksitamas et al. (2019, as cited in Inamizu et al., 2017; Rentz et al., 2002) necessitates a systematic sales process, including (1) preparing for customer meetings, (2) analyzing and approaching customers, (3) interviewing, (4) product demonstrations, and (5) closing sales.

“... Actually, one must truly consider credibility because trust is essential. Additionally, the personal image in communicating with customers must be good. It’s not necessary to be beautiful or handsome, but when communicating with customers, one must be composed, gentle, and respectful, and listen to customers’ problems. Having some experience and basic knowledge in gemstones and jewelry is good, but we can teach that. However, the fundamental aspect that should be present is honesty. They call it being friendly, having a service-oriented mindset, and being amicable” (Chan12, Female, 40, Mueang Chanthaburi, September 11th, 2023, 13:21 PM)

Section 5: The service provided by jewelry and accessory businesses that align well and are sufficient for the needs of customers or consumers.

This section discusses opinions about the alignment and adequacy of the business’s services with customer or consumer needs. Sixteen key informants unanimously agree that the services provided by the business sufficiently meet the needs of customers or consumers, citing positive experiences such as compliments, repeat purchases, word-of-mouth recommendations, and customer loyalty. Understanding customers involves analyzing their needs from their perspective, regularly surveying changing demands to develop responsive products, promoting sales to offer customer benefits, and providing close post-sales service to maintain long-term relationships (Chongkolphuet, 2020). Notably, negative feedback is absent from customers. However, four key informants have expressed concerns about the service’s inability to cater to specific customer needs, outdated product styles, unclear product information, inappropriate product displays, and ineffective management of online customer interactions, including misdirected online communication. These issues highlight the significant influence of negative reviews and managerial responses on potential customers’ attitudes and purchasing intentions. Managerial responses not only directly impact these attitudes but also moderate the effects of negative reviews (Le & Ha, 2021).

“... There are hundreds of gold shops in Chanthaburi, all dealing in jewelry sales, so there is competition. Each shop has its own knowledge and strengths, but we also have our unique strengths in providing full customer service and taking care of the jewelry we sell throughout its lifespan. Every shop has its own strategies. We operate based on the knowledge we have. Our customers praise us, make repeat purchases, and recommend us to others. Hearing this makes us happy. Customers say they must buy from our shop and advise against buying from other shops, saying other places are not okay and not good. Here, they say, is guaranteed; if the gemstones are good, they say they are good, and they sell beautiful items. Hearing this from customers reassures us” (Chan07, Female, 56, Mueang Chanthaburi, September 26th, 2023, 13:35 PM)

Section 6: The similarities or differences in the services provided by gem and jewelry stores and other accessories in the municipal area of Chanthaburi Province

Key informants unanimously agree that their services resemble those in the gem and jewelry sector within Chanthaburi Province, sharing attributes like product information, after-sales support, repair services, warranty issuance, and certificate provision. However, they emphasize unique aspects such as product presentation, communication strategies, explanations of product origins, pricing discounts, and efficient repair services by skilled technicians. This aligns with Srihadi & Setiawan’s (2015) findings that consumers value confidence and social benefits in high-contact situations, expecting tailored communication and efficient service delivery. Additionally, each business adopts distinct customer engagement approaches focusing on competitive pricing, attributed to vertically integrated operations and raw material access, aligning with Nortong’s (2020) Competitive Advantage Strategy of low-cost pricing and building close customer relationships.

“... I think customer service is similar across the board, such as taking care of and receiving customers, which I believe is quite alike. However, regarding pricing, I’m not sure; each shop might

differ. Post-sales service also seems similar. As for online, I think it's the same, but the difference might be in response times to customer chats. Since we don't have an admin, we might respond slower than shops with full-time employees acting as admins, who can respond to customers at all times" (Chan11, Female, 40, Mueang Chanthaburi, September 6th, 2023, 11:32 AM)

Section 7: The factors that are important for providing services in the gem and jewelry business

The analysis results of the factors crucial for providing services in the gem and jewelry business are detailed as follows.

1. Tangible

All key informants concur that visual elements, particularly the storefront presentation, are paramount. They highlight various factors, including aesthetic appeal, product arrangement, showcase displays, lighting, signage, and certifications from various organizations as critical components. The rationale behind this emphasis lies in the belief that the storefront serves as a tangible representation for customers, capable of shaping positive experiences, leaving lasting impressions, attracting customer interest, and greatly contributing to sales promotion endeavors. If the tangible aspects are properly presented, customers will be able to recognize the true value of a service. Tangibility can be easily incorporated or adapted into the service design process through the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials (Panda & Das, 2014).

"...I think it's important because it attracts customers. It's the face of the business and indicates what our shop sells and what we want to present" (Chan04, Female, 30, Mueang Chanthaburi, October 2nd, 2023, 12.37 PM)

2. Reliability

The viewpoints of eighteen key informants converge on the critical importance of trustworthiness factors, particularly highlighting the significance of service providers, their communication and negotiation skills, and credibility established through warranty cards, trading history, and association memberships. Sharing knowledge about gems and jewelry, responding to inquiries, and related actions are also essential. However, two key informants present a contrasting opinions, emphasizing conversational skills and communication techniques to build customer trust. Furthermore, they assert that the store's location in the Chanthaburi province area contributes to trustworthiness in jewelry and accessory products, despite reliability being the primary factor impacting customer satisfaction, albeit with the lowest significance value among variables (Setiono & Hidayat, 2022).

"... It is important. Our shop is in Chanthaburi province and is certified by the province. We have a certificate from the Chanthaburi Chamber of Commerce, certification from the Gem and Jewelry Institute of Thailand (Public Organization): GIT, a commercial registration certificate, and certifications from other agencies. These all contribute to demonstrating our credibility to a significant extent" (Chan06, Female, 30, Mueang Chanthaburi, September 6th, 2023, 11:02 AM)

3. Responsiveness

All key informants emphasize the critical importance of responsiveness in service provision, particularly in promptly addressing customer inquiries, especially those from online platforms. This reflects modern online customers' expectations for clear, accurate, and timely responses. Customers generally perceive quick and accurate service implementation, with providers consistently ready to respond to requests (Setiono & Hidayat, 2022).

"...It is important because sometimes customers ask a question and expect an immediate answer. We need to have the knowledge to respond to every issue and try to answer as best as we can. For online customer inquiries, it usually takes about 10 minutes to respond. We have people helping

to monitor the page, as the shop has an admin for communicating with customers” (Chan02, Female, 40, Mueang Chanthaburi, October 4th, 2023, 11:12 AM)

4. Assurance

Each key informant collectively underscores the significance of confidence as a pivotal factor, which intersects with various other considerations, such as participation in product competitions at diverse events, securing trade registrations and certifications from the Ministry of Commerce, the strategic location of the store in the esteemed gem and jewelry hub of Chanthaburi Province, issuing product guarantee certificates to customers, and providing reliable product information to instill confidence among customers. Delivering exceptional customer service that surpasses expectations, including reliability, assurance, and tangible cues, closely ties to customer satisfaction. Trust, when not directly linked to customer service, may be viewed as a long-term outcome of reliability, assurance, and tangible clues provided through customer service efforts (Aruho & Kansime, 2021).

“...It is important because this affects the shop’s credibility. If we sell fake items to customers and they find out later, it would be very damaging for us. Therefore, if customers are concerned about the authenticity of the items, we allow them to send the items to any certification service. However, we also provide a certificate with the product beforehand” (Chan18, Female, 33, Mueang Chanthaburi, September 25th, 2023, 10:45 AM)

5. Empathy

In agreement, all key informants stress the vital role of customer attention in service operations within the gem and jewelry industry, serving as a guiding principle for businesses in this sector. Their perspective is substantiated by shared experiences, revealing that many customers need more knowledge about gems and jewelry upon entering stores, including details about product types, styles, prices, and available services. Consequently, service providers must offer thorough explanations and relevant information to ensure customers are well-informed. Additionally, they underscore the importance of presenting products that meet customers’ expectations and financial constraints. Other actions demonstrating attentiveness include resolving customer issues, providing guidance on jewelry care and maintenance, and suggesting accessories that match customers’ preferences. Meaningful empathetic interactions significantly improve the skills of salespeople and their customer-centric behaviors, resulting in increased satisfaction levels (Supramaniam et al., 2024).

“...It is important. For instance, sometimes customers come with a budget to buy from our shop, but the item they want is over their budget. In such cases, we suggest alternative items that are similar, propose reducing the size, avoiding large carats, or switching to a different design. From past experience, some customers are okay with this, while others are not” (Chan14, Female, 45, Mueang Chanthaburi, September 26th, 2023, 14:10 PM)

6. The other crucial factors

The insights from the 16 key informants highlight several critical factors for enhancing delivery across various dimensions, emphasizing the importance of clear communication about products, lasting impressions, and strong customer relationships. Essential traits include honesty, resilience, passion in service, and flexibility for service delivery timelines. Providing additional services, such as product delivery and showing empathy through gestures like gifts, significantly boosts customer satisfaction. Enthusiasm in service delivery and considering the experience of service providers are also crucial. These elements align with the SERVQUAL framework: Tangibles (clear information, additional services), Reliability (honesty, resilience), Responsiveness (flexibility, empathy), Assurance (passion, enthusiasm), and Empathy (good relationships, personalized gestures). Key informants advocate using these SERVQUAL elements in both offline and online contexts. However, studies suggest that SERVQUAL dimensions may need to address e-service quality fully (Salome et al., 2022), as e-commerce requires timely product delivery and fulfillment of promises. Customer promptness in ordering, issue resolution, and a robust distribution network, are vital for high customer

satisfaction (Çelik, 2021). Notably, four key informants did not comment on the importance of these service factors.

“... It’s about creating a good impression and maintaining relationships with customers. If a customer returns for a repeat purchase and we remember them and mention that we recognize them, it creates a positive impression. The customer will think, ‘They remember me, they have my information, they know what I bought before,’ which enhances the response and loyalty of repeat customers. It makes communication easier” (Chan16, Female, 30, Mueang Chanthaburi, September 18th, 2023, 11:30 AM)

Section 8: The impact of providing services on the sales volume of gem and jewelry products

All key informants agree that service quality significantly influences gem and jewelry sales, with poor service reducing the likelihood of purchases and excellent service enhancing it. Superior service increases the chances of initial sales and fosters repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth, and customer recommendations, thereby boosting overall sales and customer loyalty. Consequently, service providers must prioritize building consumer confidence to positively impact loyalty, word-of-mouth, and satisfaction. Offering exceptional services to consumers is not an effective marketing strategy for enhancing these aspects (Srihadi & Setiawan, 2015). Al-Khatiri et al. (2023) also underscore the importance of service quality, highlighting its significant impact on customer satisfaction, purchasing decisions, and sales volume. Data analysis reveals a positive relationship between service quality and sales, with key factors including service speed, responsiveness, employee friendliness, accurate information, and customer trust. High-quality service fosters positive experiences, trust, loyalty, and recommendations, leading to higher sales volumes. Additionally, combining effective marketing strategies with excellent service quality further boosts sales.

“... Yes, it’s there. If we don’t speak well, customers may not be satisfied, or if we don’t provide the information they need, trust may decrease, leading customers to not buy from our shop, affecting sales” (Chan15, Female, 36, Mueang Chanthaburi, September 18th, 2023, 13:30 PM)

Section 9: The need for development and improvement in the current service provision to enhance its quality

All key informants reflect a desire for improvement and enhancement of the existing services to make them better. This can be categorized into in-store and online (as shown in Table 5).

From Table 5, In-store improvements encompass a range of strategies, including enhancing product variety and quantity, updating display formats, improving staff communication skills, and expanding team size, alongside continuous training to maintain gem and jewelry knowledge, enhance storefront design, and create customizable ready-made jewelry settings. These enhancements cater to the preferences of hedonic consumers seeking enjoyable shopping experiences and aiming for satisfaction with their purchases, ultimately influencing their decision to repurchase from the same store (Munaro et al., 2019). Meanwhile, online enhancements focus on staff training in online sales techniques such as video editing, product promotion, and effective presentation skills while also prioritizing customer service improvement and building a robust online presence through various channels. Goutham et al. (2023) underline the importance of jewelry store management systems in augmenting efficiency, customer satisfaction, and revenue, particularly with advancements in AI, machine learning, and e-commerce integration. However, ensuring ongoing success necessitates meticulous system selection, comprehensive staff training, and consistent performance monitoring.

“... If it’s about the storefront, I’d like to improve it. Make it beautiful with plenty of products for customers to choose from. Offer a wide variety of options because the current storefront is not enough. I’d like to increase the number of service staff as well. For online, I’d like to create good content,

informative content to attract customers because currently, the content is solely about selling products. It should include informative content about gemstones and jewelry” (Chan03, Female, 36, Mueang Chanthaburi, October 2nd, 2023, 13:05 PM)

Table 5 The need for development and improvement of existing services to enhance both the in-store and online aspects of the gem and jewelry business in Chanthaburi Province

Store	Online
1. Increasing the production quantity and variety to provide customers with more choices	1. Training on online product sales, such as video editing, product promotion, photography, image editing, and other related techniques
2. Changing the display format of products in showcases according to various festivals, such as Chinese New Year	2. Accessing the target audience in the online world
3. Developing the ability to communicate in multiple languages, especially English and Chinese	3. Public relations activities, such as creating content that provides knowledge and information about gem and jewelry
4. Increasing the number of service staff	4. Expanding additional online distribution channels to broaden the customer base
5. Providing additional training to keep knowledge about gem and jewelry up to date	5. Creating an online customer community
6. Enhancing the design and decoration of the storefront for aesthetic appeal	6. Developing a personal online store website
7. Manufacturing ready-made jewelry settings that can be customized to customers' preferences and available for immediate sale	7. Conducting live streaming for product sales
8. Developing the customer service and communication skills of online store staff	8. Enhancing skills in online advertising through various channels
9. Training on online product sales, including video editing, product promotion, photography, and styling techniques for effective product presentation	9. Improving the use of online product sales platforms
10. Engaging with the target audience in the online world	
11. Public relations activities, such as creating informative content about gem and jewelry	

Section 10: Expectations for increased product sales after implementing the desired developments and improvements in service provision

The discussion among key informants revolves around the potential impact of service development and improvement on product sales. Seven informants suggest a potential 20% increase in sales through this avenue, attributing it to the belief that offering exceptional service in various languages could attract new customers, particularly those from foreign backgrounds interested in gems and jewelry. We see this approach as a long-term strategy for business promotion, with continuous service enhancement being crucial for fostering customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In contrast, four primary informants anticipate a more significant 30% increase in sales post-service development, emphasizing strategies such as expanding the customer base and leveraging online platforms for enhanced visibility. However, another group of four informants presents a more cautious view, foreseeing only a modest 10% increase in sales due to economic constraints. Despite recognizing the importance of good service in building customer confidence, they acknowledge the

challenges of competing with more prominent brands, particularly in the online market, where substantial investment in branding is necessary for significant sales growth. Amidst these varying perspectives, one informant stands firm on the potential for a substantial 50% increase in sales, supported by firsthand experience. In contrast, others remain skeptical about the predictability of the overall sales impact following service enhancement.

Investing in service quality and customer value builds strong customer relationships, ultimately boosting profits and enhancing the brand's long-term value (Diktaş & Tekin, 2019), but also contributes to implementing a multichannel strategy in jewelry retail. Retailers broaden their reach through diverse touchpoints such as physical stores, websites, mobile apps, and social media, catering to varied customer preferences and capturing a wider audience. This expanded accessibility drives increased sales and revenue growth and fosters personalized interactions, targeted marketing, and seamless experiences, leading to higher customer loyalty and engagement (Abirami et al., 2023).

“... Got it. I'd say it's over 30%, which I think, compared to other shops, the service opportunities are 50:50. But if I improve my service, my chances would be 80%. If other shops don't improve, they remain at 50%. This is an opportunity to sell. Currently, with online opportunities, we might not need to advertise ourselves. Sometimes, if customers like us, they will share and repost continuously” (Chan20, Male, 43, Mueang Chanthaburi, October 2nd, 2023, 13:45 PM)

Section 11: Other suggestions

Sixteen insightful voices from Chanthaburi province provide valuable recommendations aimed at enhancing gem and jewelry store services, urging government agencies to act. Their suggestions span a wide range, from online sales training and public relations initiatives to local trade promotion efforts. They advocate for comprehensive training programs covering service, sales, and communication skills; tailored for physical and online platforms. Moreover, they emphasize the importance of supporting booth setups, offering language training, establishing provincial service standards, and fostering skill development in gemstone polishing.

In addition to these collective recommendations, two informants spotlight the need for individual store improvements. They stress the importance of creating better access channels to reach target customers and call for advancements in transportation services. However, it is noteworthy that two informants did not provide additional suggestions.

In the sphere of state policy, the Thai government has recognized the pivotal role played by the gem and jewelry industry and has consistently worked towards its development. Despite various measures implemented by different state agencies, there remains a lack of coordination in policy formulation. This results in unclear government support, a lack of continuity, and insufficient widespread implementation (Techavorabot et al., 2022).

“... I would like government agencies to help promote Chanthaburi's gemstones, focusing on knowledge about gemstones. I want the government to stimulate interest in Chanthaburi's mineral resources, highlighting important gemstones that would attract both Thai and international customers to visit mines. Topics could include mining techniques, gemstone cuts, the beauty of gemstones, and the future value of gemstones because they will become scarce in the future. Training in language, sales techniques, to align with creating a standard in service and sales of gemstone products” (Chan09, Female, 55, Mueang Chanthaburi, September 11th, 2023, 11:58 AM).

Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper has thoroughly examined the perspectives held by entrepreneurs in the gem and jewelry business in Chanthaburi province, with a specific focus on key service factors. The analysis has concentrated on the dimensions of Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy, elucidating their collective impact on shaping entrepreneurs' perceptions of

service quality within the industry. The findings underscore the importance of tangible elements, service reliability, responsiveness to customer needs, assurance of quality, and empathetic connections with clients. Recognizing and addressing these factors are essential in enhancing the overall service experience and fostering sustainable growth within the gem and jewelry business in Chanthaburi province.

Moreover, in Chanthaburi province, providers of gem and jewelry services comprehend the paramount significance of specific service elements, acknowledging that achieving a harmonious blend of Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy is crucial for maintaining customer satisfaction and ensuring enduring success in this intricate business landscape. The prosperity of service provision in the gem and jewelry sector heavily relies on key service providers' diverse qualities, characteristics, skills, and abilities, many of whom are entrepreneurs in Chanthaburi province. Even when entrusting service responsibilities to employees, business owners maintain vigilant oversight, recognizing the direct impact of customer service on product sales. Further research and implementing strategic measures aligned with these factors are imperative to guarantee sustained success and competitiveness in this constantly evolving market.

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