The Market Segment and Willingness to Pay for the Hotel Room During the COVID-19 Situation in Thailand

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were 1) to study the situation and identify the market segment of hotel business management during the COVID-19 situation and 2) to elicit the willingness to pay for the hotel room of the consumers during the COVID-19 situation. The study focused on the hotel management how the hotel entrepreneurs can survive and maintain their business. Overall, the business performance is decreasing more than 70%. Although, the COVID-19 situation influences the purchasing power, there is the demand for tourism and hotel from the consumers. Many hotel entrepreneurs provide the marketing promotion coporated with the government and privacy organizations to attract the local tourists to join the tourist programs. The researcher also studied the percentage of discount effecting segment of each target hotel and the consumers' willingness to pay. The data was collected by in-depth interviews from 5 experts in the hotel business and 400 questionnaires from the samples selected by an accidental sampling technique. The data was analyzed by the using a Contingent Valuation method.

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The findings revealed that apart from the cost of hotel room, the samples expressed their interests in an additional offered services from the hotel. They satisfied new experiences included the specialty room, surrounding spaces decoration, and convenient services. The safety procedures to deal with the infection of COVID-19 during the time of staying was the most factor for consideration.The samples were able and willing to pay when the hotel offered the special discount. The significant discount percentage that they were willing to pay were 35% and 45%.

Keywords: market segment, willingness to pay (WTP), hotel business, COVID-19 situation

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most activities that humans prefer to do and dedicate their lives to working hard to fulfill the need to travel anywhere both domestic and international. The tourism characteristic has been changed and adapted under the condition and lifestyle that changed rapidly (Hays et al., 2012; Manosuthi et al., 2020a; Sharma & Nayak, 2019). The changing behavior of people may be caused by the social addiction reflected through the social interest and would like to share the life experience to online channels.

In Thailand, tourism and hotel industry is one of the most important business sectors. Due to the perfect natural and man-made resources, both oversea and domestic tourists prefer to visit and spend the money in these areas and push the other related business growing together (Thongrawd et al., 2020). Before the COVID-19 situation, the hotel business tends more growth and can generate over 20% of GDP. The consumption of hotel service

has more choices because the hotel chain has developed the pattern of services to make the customers feel the most satisfaction. The expectations in the services are broader than in the past. The hotel business growth through tourism campaign and advertisement through the tour agency and online via the social media to the roadshow of a government organization (Beckers et al., 2018).

Currently, the COVID-19 situation is spreading over the world and it affects not only the tourism and hotel industry but also almost all of the other business sectors. The demand for the needed activity in daily life such as transportation, shopping, eating, and working still grows due to the necessities of life (Goetz et al., 2018). During the period of the COVID-19, it seems clear that many people stop the activity and pay only needed expense for life. They save and spare their money in case of financial emergency (So et al., 2016). Actually, in the case of the demand for the hotel, the consumers would select if the hotels provide the process of disease inspection from the government sectors (Puttachard, L.2021). This demand effects the decreasing of the tourism income during the first four months across Thailand as shown in figure 1 (Kariyapol, T., & Agarwal, R., 2020).
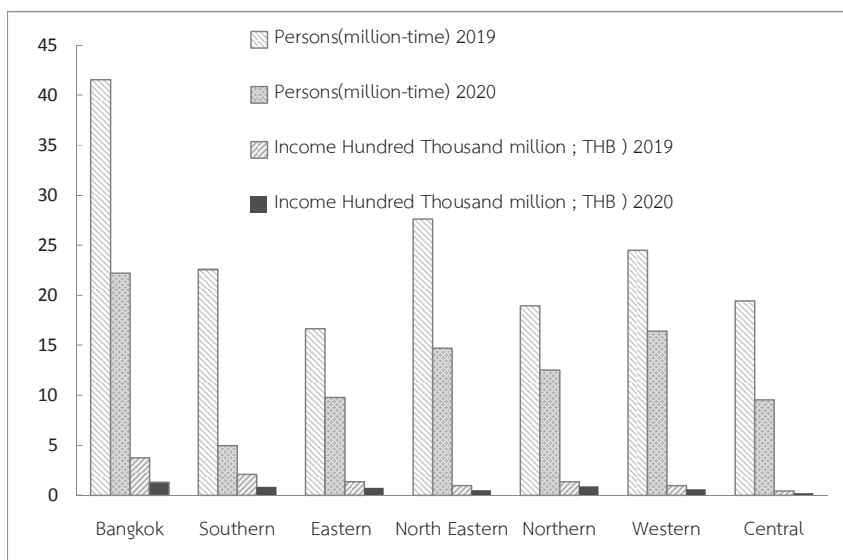
Figure 1 The comparison of tourists and revenue from tourism between 2019-2020 before and during the COVID-19 situation in different religions of Thailand

In this study, the researcher elicited the willingness to pay for different hotel segments in Thailand and assessed alternative price strategies carried out by new and additional services during the COVID-19 situation under the restricted procedure of the government control. This expectation is based on the excellent management to handle the customers regularly due to the COVID-19 situation that there are only Thai tourists whom still travelling during this period.

This is a challenge how to attract the new clients through some hotel segment had focused only on the international market when they faced with the COVID-19 the strategic management has been changed for survival by adjusting and upgrading the standard and finding out the different services

to serve the clients'need all the time and may diminish adverse environmental effects associated with any inconvenient caused (Gil, J. M., et al., 2000).

To explain a review of related literature of this study, in the first part, the researcher presented some description of the evolution of tourism and hotel business during the COVID-19 situation in Thailand. Next, market segmentations for hotel business in Thailand were defined and characterized. Finally, the willingness to pay and the Contingent Valuation method were presented.

1. Hotel business situation during the period of COVID-19

The hotel business in the first quarter of the year 2020 has strongly failed down from the contraction of world economy including the COVID-19 situation that all countries in the world have faced the lockdown procedure with controlling the spread of the disease (Poum, T. 2021). The foreign tourists were not allowed due to the announcement of MERGENCY DECREE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS on March 25, 2020 and the temporary prohibition of aircraft from flying into Thailand during 3 April 2020 - 30 September 2020 (Chula, S. 2020).

However, in October 2020, the foreign tourists have started to return as limited number in accordance with the Special Tourist Visa (STV) under the restrictions, 14-day quarantine, pre / post-trip medical examination, and life insurance. (Puttachard, L. 2021).

From this situation, it is estimated that Thailand will lose approximately 1.5 trillion baht from foreign tourists in 2020 , previously received 1.9 trillion baht in 2019 (World Bank Group, 2020). These caused the hotel entrepreneurs suddenly lose revenues and inevitably severe disruption in the overall of the business. The average occupancy rate across the country for the first 11 months was 29.3% compared to the same period last year at 69.7%, while the average hotel income per room contracted 73.6% (Puttachard, L. 2021).

Additionally, the hotel entrepreneurs faced with the sunk costs from the business operation. It is hard to burden of expenses and debts, unfortunately, they might be forced to close their business. Even though the government has drove the tourism campaign within the country by establishing a conferences but the rising demand for tourism is not enough to compensate the revenues of the hotels lost by the country's lockdown. Many relevant sectors expected the direction of the business recovering in the second half of 2020 since the COVID-19 situation will be better comply with the remedial measures to businesses sector from government that allow the hotel reopen under the disease control process (Jeff, P. 2020).

The business performance of a 4-stars hotel contracted due to COVID-19 situation, compared to 3-stars hotels and smaller resorts, the 4-star hotels had more budget and liquidity. The effect to 4-star was a new investment projects to expand the new property under hotel management, restaurants, and other new business needed to put off. On the other hand, some had an opportunity by acquiring other affected hotel businesses to negotiate as a competitive price (Tris Rating, 2021). The 4-Stars hotels have adapted and set new survival business strategies by go through customer and innovation orientation to response to the changing customer behaviors and focused on creating satisfaction that is more specialty than before (Manosuthi et al., 2021). In addition, the 3-stars and 4-stars hotel have changed themselves to serve the better of services to customer by offer the better grade of food and beverage. The 4-stars hotel guests were treated as they were staying in 5-stars hotel instead while the 3-stars hotel guests were also obtained the services for the 4-stars as well (Thawit, B., et.al, 2019).

However, the government has also released financial aids to subsidize the entrepreneurs in tourism and hotel industry including to promote a measures for raising the confidence of both Thai and foreign tourists such

as safety tourism campaign as well as Amazing Thailand Safety & Health Administration (SHA) project. By integrating health safety measures and quality service standards allowed the entrepreneurs to participate in the assessment and guaranteed a performance in SHA standards, attracting the tourists more confident in the safety of tourism products and services in Thailand (Puttachard, L.2021). Many hotels have offered service for food and beverage delivery including to Alternative State Quarantine: ASQ in Bangkok and other main nine cities around the country to accommodate foreign customers entering Thailand according to government policy (Pullawach, P. 2020).

2. Market segmentation for hotel business in Thailand

According to the growth of hotel business in Thailand before COVID-19, the first step in this study was to group the target of hotel clients clusters. Consumers were segmented according to their lifestyles that the willingness to pay for the hotel services might be influenced by individual ways of lifestyle and the need of inconvenient in traveling for each customer segmentation than by the price and location variables same as the past (Barber, N., et.al, 2012). Once the market segments were obtained, they were characterized into the socioeconomic factors and the samples attitudes towards hotel services and accommodation and the COVID-19 issue (Manosuthi et al., 2020b).

Thailand is one of the world destinations with a lot of tourist natural resources such as beaches, mountains, and cultural sites (Sharafuddin, M. Ali., 2015). According to the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC), the country's total tourism income (international and domestic) was recorded at THB 2,754 billion in 2017, continual growth of 8.5% over 2016. The tourist arrivals increased from 10.1 million in 2003 to 38.2 million in 2018 (JLL Commercial Property, 2019).

In 2020, the hotel business in Thailand became depressed conditions through 2021. The first shoots of recovery will start to break through maybe expected to the end of the COVID-19 crisis in the end of 2021, the stakeholders in this industry mentioned the hotel business will spend time at least 4 years for foreign tourist arrivals to return to pre-COVID level. Against this backdrop, the domestic tourism will recover faster partly by ongoing policy efforts from the government to stimulate demand. By the latter half of 2021, the worldwide rollout of vaccination programs will start to translate into an uptick in foreign tourist arrivals, helped by a recovering global economy and long-term growth potential in the Thai tourism industry. (Puttachard, L. 2021).

The customers in hotel every segment were divided in criteria by the type of accommodation. In this study, the researcher focused on the segment of the hotel customer by their taste, behavior, and lifestyle because now there are the specialty of hotel where trying to make a difference more than the traditional pattern. In traditionally the hotels were segmented as the star standardization with the factors involved such as the location, the readiness of facilities and the brand recognition. Nowadays the customer's behavior has been changed they won't concentrate on the traditional hotel style with a big and tall building which are the conservative room standard. The customers also seeking for the specialty and the difference of facilities and services including to the new program offering though the new change of specialty hotel also still been rated as star standardization (Neslihan, P., & Ceren, A. V., 2016). Each hotel tried to serve the different need and focus the way and positioning that they would like to let the customers were recognized.

3. Willingness to pay: the Contingent Valuation method

Contingent Valuation method is employed to assess environmental resources, goods, and services. The business organization applied the techniques to estimate use and nonuse values of environmental resources that they oversee and manage and to make decisions regarding limited resources including to measure a cost-benefit values on decision making at on projects. The methodology was use a variety of methods are used to select respondents and to develop survey questionnaires. Respondent selection is at the discretion of the survey administrator. Respondents are always individuals, and the survey samplings may range in size. In addition, respondents may be chosen randomly or selected using other approaches such as geographic specifications or database segmentation (Jones, P. C., 2018).

Consumer willingness to pay (WTP) for hotel services can be measured by using a direct valuation method: contingent valuation.

A mixed questioning procedure, normally used as closed-ended with follow-up. The samples will be asked for WTP to obtain the discount rate they would like to pay (Richard, T. 2000). The WTP is defined as the amount that must be taken away from the normal room rate and including services while keeping his utility constant:

$$V(y-WTP,p,q_1;Z)=V(y,p,q_0;Z) \qquad (1)$$

Where V denotes the indirect utility function, y is income, p is a vector of prices faced by the individual, and q_0 and q_1 are the alternative levels of the good or quality indexes (with $q_1 > q_0$, indicating that q_1 refers to improved environmental quality). Willingness to accept for a good is defined as the amount of money that must be given to an individual

experiencing deterioration in environmental quality to keep his utility constant:

$$V(y+WTA,p,q\_0;Z)=V(y,p,q\_(1\ );Z)\qquad\qquad(2)$$

In equations (1) and (2), utility is allowed to depend on a vector of individual characteristics influencing the trade-off that the individual is prepared to make between income and environmental quality. An important consequence of equations (1) and (2) is that WTP or WTA should, therefore, depend on (i) the initial and final level of the good in question (q_0 and q_1); (ii) respondent income; (iii) all prices faced by the respondent, including those of substitute goods or activities; and (iv) other respondent characteristics. Internal validity of the WTP responses can be checked by regressing WTP on variables (i)-(iv), and showing that WTP correlates in predictable ways with socio-economic variables (Jones, P. C., 2018). Survey questions are based on hypothetical scenarios. Respondents are asked to estimate what they would be willing to pay for hotel room and other services. What offering discount satisfied that respondent will take a deal of hotel room if it ensured the all requirement would be fulfilled? Survey respondents might be asked to comment on their willingness to pay if were offered discount on started at 30% and maximum at 50%.

2. Research Methodology

1. Data

In this study, the researcher collected both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through an in-depth interview from the 5 hotel experts and 400 sets of specific questionnaire conducted from

August to December 2020. Also, the secondary data was studied from the relevant research, journals, and government and private sector business reports.

2. Research Setting

The researcher selected only the hotels in Bangkok. During the period of COVID-19, Bangkok is the most potential market for tourism and hotel industry when the country has faced the lockdown policy protected from the COVID-19 situation in terms of the utilization of hotels and relevant services.

3. Population and Samples

In the first step of selecting the samples, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to 945 respondents around Bangkok without any bias. The age of respondents was between 20-60 years old. After receiving returned questionnaires, 400 samples were selected by using criteria from the answers of three following questions :

Question 1) How often did you travel per year ? If the answer was less than 6 times a year, this case of questionnaire was excluded from the data analysis .

Question 2) As referred to question number 1, during your previous travelling, did you stay at the hotel all time? If the answer was 'no' (for example, staying with friends, camping, etc.) it was excluded from the data analysis.

Question 3) As referred to question number 1 and 2, during your previous travelling, did you pay on your own expense? The answer can be both 'yes' or 'no'.

The researcher chose 400 questionnaire which answered given three questions and related to the framework of the study for further data analysis.

Additionally, the primary data did not only collect from the questionnaires but also obtained from the in-depth interview with five experts in hotel business. They shared their viewpoint about the hotel business situation in Thailand, the direction of tourism and hotel business growth, and the business strategy before the COVID-19 situation.

4. Data Analysis

In this study, the reserarcher conducted an in-depth interview from 5 hotel business experts and 400 sets of questionnaire. The gathered data was analyzed by a descriptive analysis to identify the market segments of hotel with consumer behavior criteria and using the Contingent Valuation method to analyze the willingness to pay (Kyung, H. K., et al., 2012).

The scope of the willingness to pay for the hotel covered the room rate, food, and beverage, and other needed services (Navarro, M., & Pérez-Aranda, J., 2020) that the samples were able and willing to pay during the COVID-19 and the offered discount percentage from the hotel that they can pay.

3. Research Results

Demographics Information of Samples

The samples were 184 male (46%) and 216 female (54%). The samples who had an age range from 20 to 29 were the largest group (102 or 29.75%). 71 persons (17.75%) were 40-49 years old, 72 persons (18%) were 50-59 years old, and 36 persons (9%) were over 60 years of age. Regarding the the marital status of samples, 175 persons (43.75%) were single, 201 persons (50.25%) were married, and 24 persons (6%) identified other. The highest average income of samples was between 20,000-100,000 THB up. As mentioned earlier, the data was collected between June to December 2020.

This period, Thai government has released the procedure restriction for lockdown and promoted the domestic tourism. There were some movements in the hotel booking sector.

To complete the questionnaire, the samples were asked to identify the factors that influenced them to make a decision to buy hotel services. They can choose more than one answer. The analysed results is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The factors affected the decision making to buy hotel services

Factors	Number(person)	%
Brand	198	8.52
Services and facilities	305	13.12
Price	289	12.43
Location	251	10.76
Room quality	334	14.36
Experience for staying	198	8.52
Promotion	350	15.05
Safety on assured initial check COVID-19 on arrival	400	17.20
Total	2,325	100

As demonstrated in Table 1, the majority of samples (400 persons or 17.20%) prioritized safety on assured initial check COVID-19 on arrival. It can be assumed that they concerned about the COVID-19 situation. In addition, 350 persons or 15.05 % of all samples selected promotion was one of the factor when considering to pay for hotel services.

Moreover, the samples were asked to answer about their willingness to pay in case of no discount and marketing promotion for hotel services during the COVID-19 situation. The answer is expressed in Table 2 .

Table 2 The willingness to pay in case of no discount and marketing promotion for hotel services during the COVID-19 situation

Options	Number(person)	%
Willing to pay	192	48
Willing not to pay	208	52
Total	400	100

Moreover, the samples were asked to identify their needs of additional offering services and the analysed data is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The samples' needs of additional offering services from the hotel

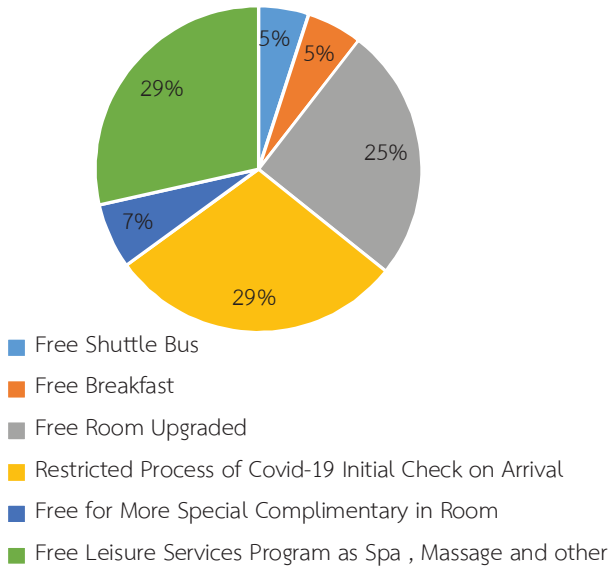| Additional offering services	Number(person)	%
Free shuttle bus	20	5.00
Free breakfast	22	5.50
Free room upgraded	101	25.25
Restricted process of the COVID-19 initial check on arrival	117	29.25
Free for more special complimentary in room	26	6.50
Free leisure services program such as spa, massage, and other	114	28.25
Total	400	100

Figure 2 The samples' needs of additional offering services from the hotel

As presented in Table 3, the majority of samples (117 persons or 29.25%) selected "restricted process of COVID-19 initial check on arrival and 114 samples (28.25%) selected "free leisure lervices program such as spa, massage, and other" for their need of additional offering services from the hotel. This can be assumed that they required and concerned about the facilities and services to make them more convenient when travelling and staying at the hotel.

Additionally, the results found the demand for hotel during the COVID-19 situation. To study the room rate and other hotel services fee during this crisis situation, it is necessary to understand the willingness to pay of the consumers related to the target and segment of the services by Contingent Valuation Method.

To elicit the viewpoints of the samples about the discount for the hotel services offering that they will take and buy, they were asked to rate their desired discount which started at "Discount 30%". The results were shown in Figure 3 below:
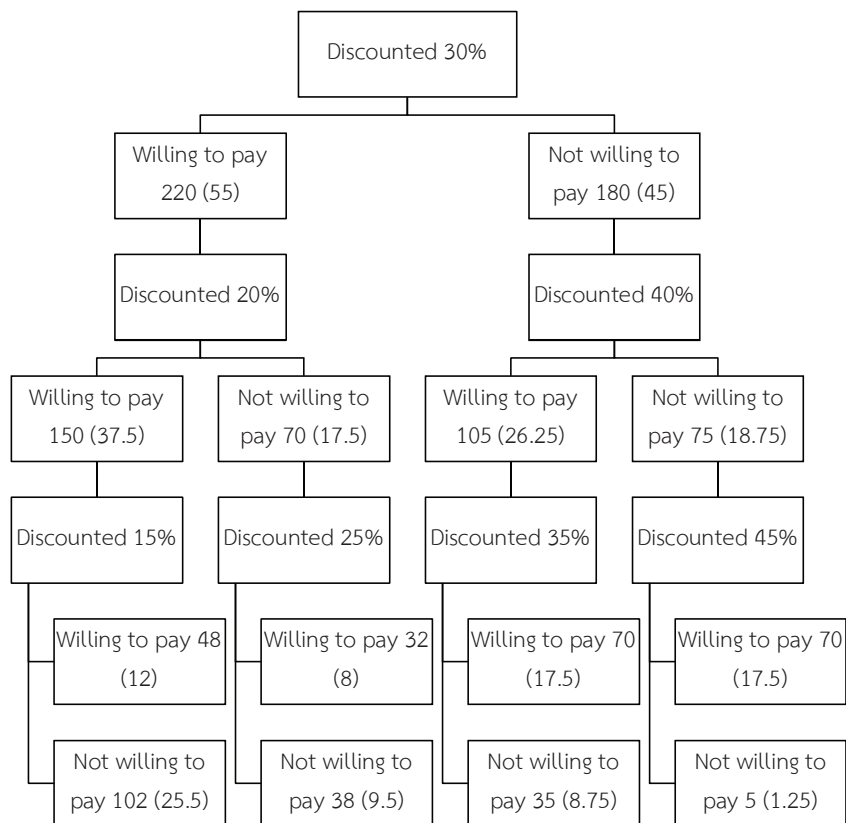

Figure 3 The process of Contingent Valuation Method to identify the willingness to pay

According to Figure 3, it shows the possibility of close end question on supposing event offering the discount % two way answered by the samples 400 people to force were selected the two choices as "Willing to pay" and "Not willing to pay". The process of asking started by offer the discount at 30% for the WTP there are the "Willing to pay" and "Not willing to pay" in this stage 220 persons (55%) and 180 persons (45%) respectively. For the first one we were decreased the offering to 20% to find out that this section stills willing to pay in the decreasing offering discounted. The second we were increased the offering to 40% to find out that if the offering rising there will be the WTP. The second stage left and right side the offering discount, were 20% and 40%, "Willing to pay" side are 150 persons (37.5%) and 105 persons (26.25%, "Not willing to pay" side are 70 persons (17.5%) and 75(18.75%) respectively. After we got the both proportion mentioned above we tried to offer the discount by asking the close-end question in case of "Willing to pay" we would offer the decreased discount and in case of "Not willing to pay" we would offer the increased discount from the chart will be 15%, 25%, 35%, and 45%. For the least offering at 15% people willing to pay as 48 persons (12%) and not willing to pay as 102 persons (25.5%). At the discount 15% the amount of "Not willing to pay" more than for two times of "Willing to pay" we can estimate that if lower down the offering than 15% the samples won't be attracted to book for a deal. For the discount at 25% we can see that the "Not willing to pay" are more than "Willing to pay" almost equal to each other but when the discount offering are increasing such as at35% up the number of "Willing to pay" will be increased as well.

Moreover, the researcher interviewed 5 hotel business experts, analysed the data, and summarized the market segment of the hotel by the consumers behavior identification. They were 4 groups of customers. All

group showed the same direction of relevant criteria. They concerned about the cleanliness, quality of service, safety, and breakfast. However, they expressed their different behaviors.

1) The first group was customers who loved travelling alone, they needed the freedom and high privacy.This group also needed a completed facility that they can access self-services without any disturbance (Johansson, M. 2017). They had stable income and strong passion in life as introvert persons.The requirement for accommodation such as specialty room and hotel surrounding decoration with a highlight to show up their lifestyle in social media platform attracting the follower to boot up the post as they own purpose.

2) The second group was couple or lover customers, this group needed privacy and romantic atmosphere with full perfect facilities and services (Fangxuan, S. Li., et.al, 2020). Some couples were in the honey moon period they also expected the perfect suitable offering facility. This segment focused and interested in the surrounding with feeling fresh from both specialty room decorations and garden.

3) The third group, the family or friends group, they came to visit around 3-4 persons per trip the characteristics of them will be travel both in family as father, mother and child that has more different detail between young and adult child. The families also needed the convenient accommodation with full services. The families with young kid also needed the special facilities that needed to inform the request in advance for young children such as baby cot, slippers kid, bathrobe kid, pool, and food and recognition program recreation space for kid with restricted security (María-Mercedes, R., & Pilar, A., 2020). The family traveling with teenagers or adult children needed the different from the young kid family they were looking for the facility fulfill both parent and children though there were concentrate the

different interesting such as the beautiful garden or pleasant living space that parent can relax during the stay in hotel, the space for teenagers to do activity like a playing sport, enjoy with friends the same age in the hotel and have happiness time together with parent as BBQ grill space at the night. In addition, this group required the same facilities with the family adult children. Normally when people traveled and stayed with friend in the hotel they also requested the good services and facilities that they can enjoy and do the activities with friends both indoor and outdoor, for example playing a sport, do the BBQ in the night, and party spend a time together.

4) For the fourth group, the business group covered both government and private sector travelling for the business purpose in term of seminar and some additional room services the customers in the segment required the convenient in full service since the shuttle bus from the airport or the pick-up point coming to the hotel they always prefer the hotel with 4-stars upper due to the reputation of their organization reflect to the image as well (Daiva, L., et.al, 2020). The customer needed the high standard of services through the food and beverage, meeting room facility, and room services in full course. This segment is a main and huge source of revenue of the hotel because the hotel can estimate the exactly income which is lot of money. The hotel will offer the best services to maximize the client's satisfaction. The hotels where most clients are a business group both government and private clients they are regarded as cooperate hotel that can be classified as a segment.

We have retrieved the segment from the study as 4 segments of hotel customers by behavior criteria that they have their own requirements in each segment as above, however the expectation and the need of each segment was under the condition that they can be afforded. Each segment had specialty interesting in hotel different segment for example, the

customer in segment 1) who travelled alone he/she may choose among 3-stars, 4 stars, 5-stars and specialty hotel as natural resort or home stay depend on the fulfillment of their need. Meanwhile, the other segments have involved in the same relationship for the hotel category with group 1) as well. The segments 3) and 4) were the group that spending more money than other they required more leisure activity which lead to consumption and spend more money different from the segment that need the privacy and won't do more activity where automatically spend less money as well.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

As presented in the graph , it can be shown that the samples were willing to pay at the each offering discount at 15%, 20%, 25%, 30%, 35%, 40%, and 45% respectively. The samples who first selected to pay at 48, 150, 32, 220, 70, 105, and 70 persons respectively.

However, the obtained information was not reliable to be used for marketing strategy. Then we need to comply as the theory of CVM model by asking along the process of model until we got the final of sample.

The relationship between the method to gain the suitable offering discount by asking the target samples who are target of business will be show in Figure 4.
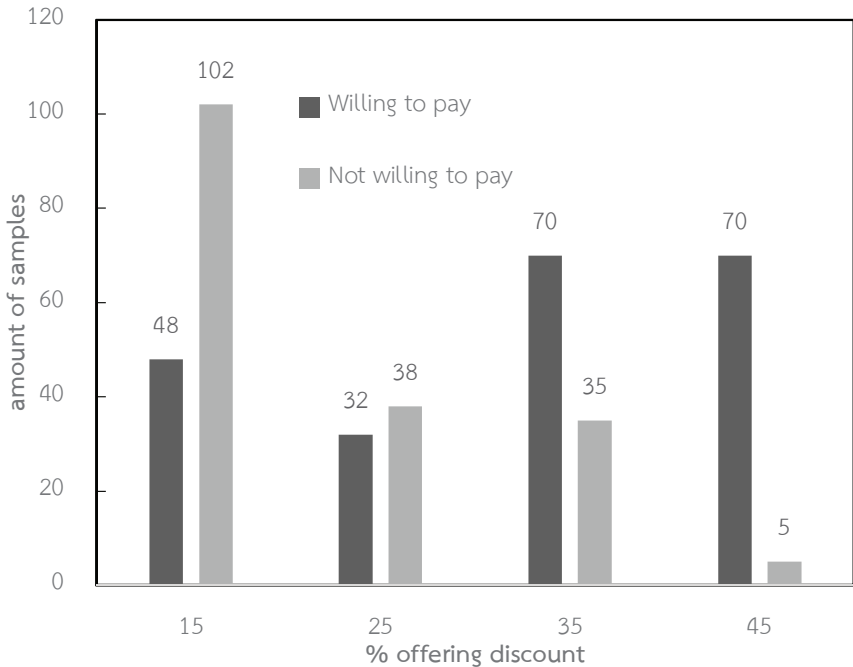
Figure 4 The amount of samples offering each discount

Although the COVID-19 pademic is spreading, there is the demand for tourism and hotel from the consumers. People still need to spend their life as normal basis before the COVID-19 situation occurs. Tourism and hotel services are becoming increasingly more serious consider before making decision to spend money for. It is summarized that in consumer side of hotel services business still has a demand but the purchasing power are decreased they will more conservative to purchase.

It is important for the business adaption as well as the ability to estimate the customer behavior and exactly need that use the appropriate method as CVM model. The hotel entrepreneurs are able to understand their target group need and expectation including to the relevant factors

effecting to the process of willingness to pay. CVM not only helps to idebtify the factors concern on how the hotel business need to collect data analysis but also cooperate the entrepreneurs to recognize the purchasing power that the customers have and intend to pay for rooms and service under the criteria. The hotel business entrepreneurs are able to plan and launce the sales and marketing plan to booth the revenue in vary timing.

The hotel business entrepreneurs need to adapt the strategy for their survival. According to the process of finding WTP using CVM model, the samples accepted and encouraged to make a deal with discount between 30-50%. Most of hotels launched their marketing promotion to attract their customers. They should give more attractive promotion and discount. At the same time, the pricing strategy is not only the best way to pull the clients but they need to use the other compliment strategy such as different and beyond services.

Many hotels provide the clients with their own operation and services for example, the seminars program included the hall, prepared lunch, two coffee breaks, stationery and other needed equipment services. Previously, the client had no choice to select any services or identify many detail. They can only choose a package that calculated the price and other expense already. After the COVID-19 situation, the hotel entrepreneurs try to present their highlights and strengths to attract new clients ,for example special food, dessert and beverage sometime this is well known compliment and attract the clients to select the full services of the hotel.

The most important factor for surviving after the COVID crisis ends and the hotel entrepreneurs should continue their business not stop to develop and understand the current trend of customer. It is necessary to study the satisfaction of the customers and provide the service to meet their needs directly as well as understanding of other hotel competitiveness.

5. Acknowledgment

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