A Service Redesign in Customer Experience Management for International Luxury Beach Hotel Chains in Phuket: A Fresh Perspective from COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand

Phisunt Tinakhat*, Kaedsiri Jaroenwisan**, Wongladda Weerapaiboon***

Abstract

The spread of the novel coronavirus 2019 or COVID-19 has hit the world severely. Tourism industry tremendously got an effect from this pandemic because people refrain from traveling. Hotel business is one of the most affected businesses. Redesigning service of the hotel with a proactive strategy to create a great customer experience is a challenging issue for hotel marketers to be considered. This concept paper aims 1) to present perspective of service to be redesigned in customer experience management affected by COVID-19 pandemic for international luxury beach hotel chains in Thailand, and 2) to propose future research direction on redesigning service in customer experience management affected by COVID-19 pandemic for international luxury beach hotel chains in Thailand. The author integrates a concept of service design, customer experience, and customer loyalty based on a concept of international luxury beach hotel chain and synthesizes with the effect of COVID-19 as moderating effect to service design and customer experience. The proposed perspective of service to be redesigned in creating customer experience

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* ** *** Faculty of Management Science, Silpakorn University

      No.1 Moo 3 Sam Phraya Sub-district Cha-am District Petchaburi Province 76120 THAILAND

*   Email: tinakhat_p@su.ac.th

**   Email: kaedsiri@ms.su.ac.th

***   Email: wongladda@ms.su.ac.th

The author hopes this proposition can be a service blueprint to the hotel marketers to retrieve the business from this disaster as much as possible.

Keywords: Service redesign, Customer experience management, International luxury beach hotel chain, COVID-19

การออกแบบบริการใหม่ในการจัดการประสบการณ์ลูกค้าสำหรับ โรงแรมเครือข่ายนานาชาติแบบหรูหราริมชายหาด: มุมมองใหม่จากการระบาดของ COVID-19 ในประเทศไทย

ภิสันติ์ ตินะคัต* เกิดศิริ เจริญวิศาล** วงศ์ลัดดา วีระไพบูลย์***

บทคัดย่อ

การแพร่ระบาดของโรคโคโรน่าไวรัส หรือ COVID-19 ได้ส่งผลกระทบต่อโลกอย่างรุนแรง อุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวได้รับผลกระทบอย่างมากจากการระบาดใหญ่นี้ เนื่องจากผู้คนงดการเดินทาง ธุรกิจโรงแรมเป็นหนึ่งในธุรกิจที่ได้รับผลกระทบมากที่สุด การออกแบบบริการใหม่ของโรงแรมด้วย กลยุทธ์เชิงรุกเพื่อสร้างประสบการณ์ลูกค้าถือเป็นความท้าทายสำหรับนักการตลาดโรงแรมที่จะต้องพิจารณา บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ 1) เพื่อนำเสนอมุมมองของการบริการที่จะได้รับการออกแบบใหม่ ในการจัดการประสบการณ์ลูกค้าที่ได้รับผลกระทบจากการระบาดใหญ่ของ COVID-19 สำหรับ โรงแรมเครือข่าย นานาชาติแบบหรูหราริมชายหาดในประเทศไทยและ 2) เพื่อเสนอทิศทางการวิจัย ในอนาคตเกี่ยวกับการออกแบบบริการใหม่ในการจัดการประสบการณ์ลูกค้าที่ได้รับผลกระทบจากการ ระบาดของ COVID-19 สำหรับโรงแรมเครือข่ายนานาชาติแบบหรูหราริมชายหาด ผู้เขียนรวบรวม แนวคิดของการออกแบบบริการประสบการณ์ของลูกค้า และความภักดีของลูกค้าโดยอิงจากแนวคิดของ โรงแรมเครือข่ายนานาชาติแบบหรูหราริมชายหาดและสังเคราะห์ด้วยผลกระทบของโควิด-19 ที่ส่งผล ต่อการออกแบบบริการและประสบการณ์ของลูกค้า มุมมองที่เสนอของบริการที่จะได้รับการออกแบบใหม่ ในการสร้างประสบการณ์ของลูกค้าสำหรับโรงแรมเครือข่ายนานาชาติแบบหรูหราริมชายหาดที่ได้รับ ผลกระทบจากการระบาดของ COVID-19 ได้แก่ การรับรู้ การพิจารณา การจอง การเข้าพัก

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* ** *** คณะวิทยาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร
เลขที่ 1 หมู่ 3 ตำบลสามพระยา อำเภอชะอำ จังหวัดเพชรบุรี 76120
*   อีเมล: tinakhat_p@su.ac.th
**   อีเมล: kaedsiri@ms.su.ac.th
***   อีเมล: wongladda@ms.su.ac.th

และความภักดี ผู้เขียนหวังว่าข้อเสนอนี้จะเป็นต้นแบบการบริการสำหรับนักการตลาดโรงแรม เพื่อกู้วิกฤตจากภัยพิบัติครั้งนี้ให้ได้มากที่สุด

คำสำคัญ: การออกแบบบริการใหม่ การจัดการประสบการณ์ลูกค้า โรงแรมเครือข่ายนานาชาติแบบหรูหราริมชายหาด โควิด-19

Background and Significant of the Study

Hotel business is categorized into the hospitality industry (Dogru et al., 2020). In a recent period, international luxury hotel chain (ILHC) becomes an important segment of the hotel business and is considered as one of the most popular choices among the tourists globally when they would like to travel for either leisure or business (Manthiou, 2020). One of the goals of ILHC is to offer its guests an enjoyment of comfortable products to fulfill their experience. Most of ILHC's guests feel that they have preferable affective satisfaction and greater memorable experiences staying at ILHC comparing with other types of hotel (Lee et al., 2019). Concept of ILHC is not about the physical evidence, facilities, decorations, or amenities (Lin, 2020); it also considers both emotional and experiential aspect, especially experience of luxury is all about the guests' attitude, opinions and feelings (Sudbury-Riley et al., 2020). To keep business survived, many hotels are vigorously competing with each other to create competitive advantage, product differentiation, and good relationship with their customers (Latunreng & Nasirin, 2019). At present, customers have various choices and sources of information to purchase products or services. It brings to the attentions to the hotel in managing this challenges to attract the customers to get the best products and services to be reasonable to their money (Grover et al., 2018). On top of that, retaining customers is another noteworthy mission that hotel cannot be ignored. The ability to retain customers is a crucial challenge for every type of business.One of the most powerful and competitive approach that helps business to successfully compete with each other is Customer Experience Management (CEM) (Kandampully et al., 2018). To engage between customers and services for a long-term profit, many researchers claimed that a company should integrate CEM with their existing marketing strategy (Flavián et al., 2019). Many marketing scholars concluded that CEM is considered as a key factor for a service company which is shifted from service-based economy to be experience-based economy (Fernandes & Pinto, 2019). In addition, CEM is an interaction between a company, a customer and a service which blend a physical, sensorial, rational and spiritual measurement of a customer expectation on different levels from the moment of contact (Witell et al., 2020).

Until it comes to the most notable situation of the world, when the spread of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was reported in the city of Wuhan, China since December 2019 (Qiu et al., 2020). Tourism and hospitality gradually got a huge effect from this pandemic. People all over the world stop travelling and are asked to keep social distancing with fully aware of hygiene (Gupta et al., 2020). Severely, it causes a disruption of economic globally (Hubbard & Strain, 2020). This is considered the most severe disruption in the recent history since we faced many pandemics such as SARS in 2002-2003, Swine Flu in 2009-2010, Ebola in 2014-2016, MERS in 2015-present (Chaleplioglou & Kyriaki-Manessi, 2020). Many scholars summarized impacts affected by COVID-19 on hotel business in various destinations. Focusing in Thailand as one of top ten destinations by international tourist arrivals (Chulaphan & Barahona, 2018), it is revealed that the hotel occupancy rate of the first 4 months in 2020 is decreased to be around 21% due to a measurement to control the spread of the COVID-19. This caused both Thai and foreign tourists canceled their stay and postponed their trip until further notice resulting there were no tourists visited in April, especially important tourist cities such as Bangkok, Chonburi, Chiang Mai, Phuket (Parks et al., 2020)

One of the main reasons that international tourists visit Thailand is the beauty of the beaches (Tinakhat et al., 2022). There are 2 different sides of the beach in Thailand, which are the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Coast (Kompor et al., 2018). The preferred tourist destinations in the Gulf of Thailand are Chonburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Rayong, and Surat Thani (Sucharitakul et al., 2019). Samui Island in Surat Thani is claimed as the most popular destination in the Gulf of Thailand among Thai and international tourists (Samsuvan et al., 2019); nonetheless, there are some limitations to accessing the island by transportation as there is only one full-service airline flying directly from Bangkok to Samui Island (Zheng et al., 2020), while the low-cost airlines mostly land in the Muang District of Surat Thani. Tourists need to take cruises from the mainland to the island, which makes the tourists waste their time traveling to and from the island for almost the whole day (Burbano et al., 2022). Whilst travelling to the other side of the coast of Thailand in

the Andaman Coast is easier, the tourists can reach the destination by various types of transportation according to their budget such as full-service airlines, low-cost airlines, local buses, vans, trains, and cars (Guides, 2018). According to Planet et al. (2018), Similan Islands, Phi Phi Islands, Phang-Nga Bay, Samet Island and Ang Thong Islands are the five most important islands in Thailand, while the Andaman Islands ranked the third among the top 5 highest-income islands. As a result, tourism in the Andaman Islands is well-developed and can earn income from both domestic and international tourists (Das, 2018). Furthermore, convenience transportation makes the tourists prefer visiting the Andaman Coast destinations more than the Gulf of Thailand (Suwanvijit, 2019)..

The Andaman Coast area is beautiful from the sea to the high mountains and there are various cultures and arts according to the history that have flourished in the past, which is a blend of civilization between Buddhism - Brahman - Chinese – Islam (Mahbubani & Sng, 2017). With the charm of the emerald city in the south or Andaman paradise, Phuket is the center which is like the "Pearl of Andaman" (Pathumporn et al., 2020). From a study on the loyalty of Thai and foreign tourists towards tourist attractions travel in Phuket by Mechinda et al. (2009) in studying the sample of tourists who visit a tourist attraction more than once to consider demographic characteristics psychopathic traits and tourism behavior of tourists who have loyalty to tourist attractions patterns of loyalty to tourist attractions and factors affecting the loyalty of tourist attractions including comparing the results study between Thai and foreign tourists, the results of a study in Phuket Province found that Thai tourists traveling to Phuket more than once, have low loyalty to attractions. The factors affecting loyalty include commitment to tourist attractions, a desire to bring other people to travel and want to explore tourist attractions. Foreign tourists who visit Phuket repeatedly, most of them are Europeans, males, aged 54-25years, earning from 50,000baht or more per month, have high loyalty to tourist attractions and ties to the source travel respectively.

In addition, the nature of tourism influences both tourism choices among Thai and foreigners which are the scenery and there is an incentive to travel to seek exotic.

One of the reasons making the Andaman Coast more preferred than the Gulf of Thailand is from the popularity of Phuket province, which is perceived as the second favorite destination among the tourists aside from Bangkok (Tinakhat, 2020). Moreover, a study by Akkajit et al. (2019) emphasized that the beaches in Phuket are very popular among tourists and they considered Phuket as a destination in Thailand that the tourists should not miss. This results from the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organization promoting its strategies as a world-class tourism center to increase the revenue of the province (Sinlapasate et al., 2020). Consequently, Phuket welcomed approximately 14.58 million visitors from around the world, making the income around 443,000 million Thai Baht in 2019 (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019).

As a famous holiday destination in Thailand, tourism in the Phuket has been facing huge competition in aligning the marketing strategies with the development of tourism activities for different markets (Bu-lud, 2017). Knowledge of different travel motivations has a great contribution to the hotel business in showing differences in customers' behaviors and expectations (Wu & Gao, 2019). Consolidating new innovations and technology for service creation with the target market and state-of-the-art hotel strategic management divinely enables the sales activities of the hotel in the period of modern hotel business management (Dyshkantiuk et al., 2020). Each hotel applies different strategies to attract the customers, while luxury marketing and experiential marketing are mostly used in chain hotels (Jelassi & Martínez-López, 2020). Hence, it is thus challenging for hotels to find the most efficient and effective strategy that matches market trends, segmentations, and clients' expectations and behavior (Yadegaridehkordi et al., 2021). To engage between guests and services for a long-term viability, many hospitality scholars mentioned that luxury chain hotels should integrate Customer Experience Management (CEM) with their current operation strategies (Kandampully et al., 2018). According to Lee, Zhao, et al. (2019), CEM is the ability to personalize the guests' experiences with

the reliability and competence of service performance. Measuring customer experience is delicate and complicated (Seyi-Olajide et al., 2020) because hotels need to apply a seamless experience strategy from searching, purchasing, consuming, and after-selling throughout the customer journey (Varnali, 2019).

Recent tourism and hospitality scholars about effect of COVID-19 toward hotel business mostly focus on reducing health risk (Douglas et al., 2020) whereas the government continues to launch tourism promotions and campaigns to support the business (Toubes et al., 2021). So far, there has been little discussion focusing on strategy formulation in designing a customer experience model despite the fact that it is considered as a survival strategy for a dynamic future in the hotel business (Bonfanti et al., 2021; Jiang & Wen, 2020), especially for luxury chain hotels, which are considered as one of the most preferred hotel choices among tourists (Supanun & Sornsaruht, 2019). The researcher considers that it is interesting to study how luxury chain hotels in Phuket design customer experiences that are shifted into the new normal era affected by the pandemic. This conforms to the study of Kandampully et al. (2014) that found service experience, which concerns satisfaction, service quality, and value, is the most preferred topic to comprehend hospitality service from the perspectives of customers.

Literature Review

Customer Experience Management (CEM)

Customer experience management is not a new concept. Many studies found that CEM has its root from buyer/customer behavior since 1960s aiming to understand customers' decision when consuming products or services (Ershadi et al., 2019). Then, Thomas V. Bonoma, professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School who is known for his writings on consumer behavior and industrial marketing, including managing marketing, conceptualized relationship marketing in 1976 as a concept of identifying key attitudinal drivers to broaden customer response scope considered in customer experience, and it has been explicitly used by Berry in 1983 (Payne & Frow, 2017; Van Tonder & Petzer, 2018).

In 1980s, service quality concept of Parasuraman has been widely accepted to incorporate ambience and environment linked to marketing and quality of operations (Hamari et al., 2017; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Schmitt (1999) identified experiential marketing into five senses: sensory, affective, cognitive, physical, and social-identity which caught as interest to marketers in broadening the scope of customer responses considered in the customer experience during 1990s (Le et al., 2019; Wiedmann et al., 2018). In 2000s, customer centricity has been brought up to embed customers and their data deeper into the organization which is focused on redesigning customer experience from customer perspective (Fader, 2020; Komulainen & Saraniemi, 2019). To create a long-term competitive edge for an organization, customer relationship management has been recognized as a form developing innovative capabilities and providing sustainable competitive advantage during 2011-2015 (Anshari et al., 2019; Buttle & Maklan, 2019). For the past years, CEM has set a phenomenon to marketing practice and research (Homburg et al., 2017; Kandampully et al., 2018; Keiningham et al., 2020) because it is regard to be a significant key for business success and competitive advantage (Foroudi et al., 2018; Homburg et al., 2017). The evolution of customer experience in hospitality industry is illustrated in Figure 1.
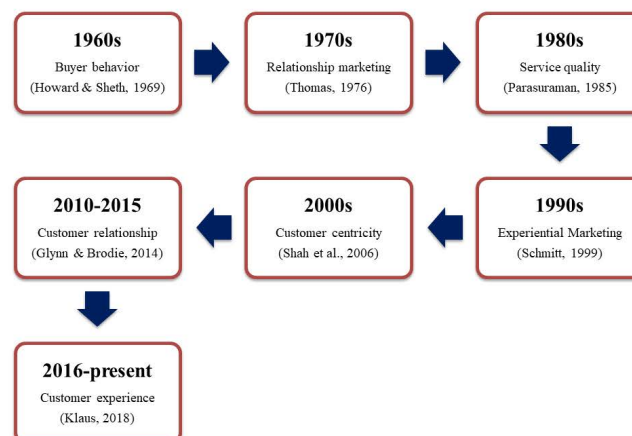

Figure 1: The evolution of customer experience in hospitality industry

Source: Author's literature review

In hospitality industry, CEM is not only concerned the business; hotel, food and beverage, entertainment, but also connected with supporting realms including esthetics, entertainment, education and escapism (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The author found some fresh perspectives of customer experience in hotel business. Bi et al. (2020) explored asymmetric effects of attribute performance on customer satisfaction in the hotel industry, and defined its meaning that it was a profoundly positive emotional state generally resulting from having one's expectations exceeded to a surprising degree. Järvi et al. (2020) studied value co-destruction in hotel services exploring the misalignment of cognitive scripts among customers and providers, and suggested that customer experience was customers' expectations and experience that provide fewer insights on supplier expectations and experiences, and on the interaction between both parties' expectations and the resulting experiences. Ko (2020) explored hotel customer service experience, and defied customer experience as an interaction that leads to positive feelings and emotions die to that customer want to repeat the experiences that not only influence satisfaction of the customer but also results into brand loyalty. From the literature review, the author can summarize the definition of customer experience as an interaction between a company, a customer and a service which blends the physical, sensorial, rational and spiritual measurement of the customer expectation on different levels from the moment of contact, it is reflected by the ability of the organization in personalizing the customers in their specific requirements from the reliability and competence of service performance.

Service Design

Every service-related business needs a good operation and well-planned service design in order to attract the customers, satisfy their needs, reach their expectations, and retain as loyalty customers (Tinakhat et al., 2015). A real need of consumers are not just "utility" or "appearance" of the product, they also demand for satisfaction from the service that must be linked to every need in their life (Liu et al., 2019). Most businesses profit nowadays is no longer the most efficient production line, yet caused by service sector that can create the most satisfaction for consumers (Meesala & Paul, 2018). This drastic change in the consumer market has forced the world of

design to re-think. Service designers should consider that a service does not just create momentary experiences, but also opportunities to help create and drive the business in the long run (Pettersson et al., 2018).Service design is not just a design for service, it includes developing, improving and creating innovative designs for products and experiences (Carlson et al., 2018). Advancements of today's internet technology enable consumer access to products and various services easily (Verhoef et al., 2017). Anyone can compare information of similar products in advance, access the same service from various channels, etc. These behaviors have significantly changed the trend of demand in the consumer market. For example, from the day when people used to be delighted with the most advanced technology, they now only need technology that can be linked with daily life "from Hi-Tech to Hi-Touch" (Park et al., 2018). Modern manufacturing methods that keep the same standard of products and services result consumers begin to look for "new value" from things that are created especially for them only "from Standardization to Customization" (Kasiri et al., 2017). The automation from the technology has started products and services become "emotionless", today's world has returned to craving for the meticulousness of the human touch again "from Automatization to Crafting"), especially in the tourism industry, education, infrastructure, health and social services (Vázquez-Ingelmo et al., 2019). Therefore, whether it is the public sector or the private sector, it is necessary to adapt to the changing trends. According to Patrício et al. (2018), service design process is not yet finalized when implementing, it's a back and forth process which must be constantly improved over and over again. It can be divided into 3 phases: 1) Exploration: In the early stages of designing a service, research and data collection must be done first. This will help identify the real needs of the customer, new market gaps or opportunities for using to design services to fulfill those needs. This phase consists of three activities: understand the challenge, gather insights, and synthesis, 2) Creation: The results from phase 1 will be used to design the service concept. All concerned stakeholders will join in the co-creation design process in order to gain concept involved in the service and to create an experience that consumers can be linked to the service at any touch point, whether before, during, or after using the service. Creating a service concept consists of 3 concepts: idea development, co-creation, conceptualization,

3) Reflection & Implementation: When getting a service concept, then test it if it can be used or not. It may be tested over and over until ideas are best suited to the objectives or problems outlined earlier. A prototype may be developed to study opportunities and possibilities, including flaws and testing the actual operation of the service system developed to give customers the most satisfaction.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is important to a growth of a business (Khan et al., 2020). It is thought to be an imperative aspect in accomplishing business goal and long-term sustainability (Moisescu, 2018). Customer loyalty helps business to maximize marketing activities, marketing communications, market opportunities and margins (Šerić et al., 2020).

Customer loyalty in hotel business is considered as an essential strategy to maintain guests to support a business in a long run (Iglesias et al., 2020). It is likely to say that hotel should position itself to be different from its competitors by designing a service to impress, attract, and retain the guests (Koo et al., 2020). According to Dick and Basu (1994), they categorized 4 types of customer which are 1) No loyalty is a situation that customers have poor attitude or have no impression with the service/product and not to consider buying it again in the future, makes customers change their mind to support the competitors, 2) Loyalty is a situation that customers have strong attitude, feel impressive, and get a good experience from company. They will; moreover, repeat a purchase and intend to continue a patronage, 3) Latent loyalty is customers who have good attitude toward service/ products, but have low repetitive behaviors, and 4) Spurious loyalty is customers who have high repetitive behaviors but low attitudinal attachment with the brand.

Customer Journey

To trade in a business, the key factor is the survey of information about the target customers from defining a customer persona to communicating to potential customers for a product or service that can solve their problems (Salminen et al., 2020).

This includes providing a good experience for customers with customer journey analysis. Customer journey will tell about the customer experience from the first awareness of the brand identity to the purchasing process, product/service trial, until long-term brand loyalty (Khan et al., 2020). It's all about the interactions and experiences that customers have with the brand. Customer journey is a powerful tool helping business understand customer context to get a clear picture of where customers know the brands, where to find the service/product, what made them decide to purchase and repurchase to reach the goal as a brand loyalty (Ballestar et al., 2018).

Many companies put great importance on customer journey and understand the consumer journey whether customer decides to buy either product or service, what behaviors and factors affect decision making, then try to find a way to get what the companies want to sell into the customer journey (George & Wakefield, 2018). When companies fully understand the behavior of customers, they will be able to define a marketing strategy to bring the message they want to convey to customers on the right platform at the right time (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2017). After reaching the target audience, companies will be able to optimize their advertising to create content and other marketing to get better results by acquiring information (Bala & Verma, 2018; Dodson, 2016). Customer journey may come from questionnaires, interviews, web search, or marketers can observe by analyzing data collected through various data analytics platforms (He et al., 2019). Quarterly (2009) proposed the consumer decision journey which helps to let the company knows what the consumer wants through which channel, creates an awesome customer experience, makes the company knows what problems to fix for customers to decide to use the services, generates more sales, and reduces marketing costs but increase efficiency. It is divided into 5 stages as showed in Figure 4.
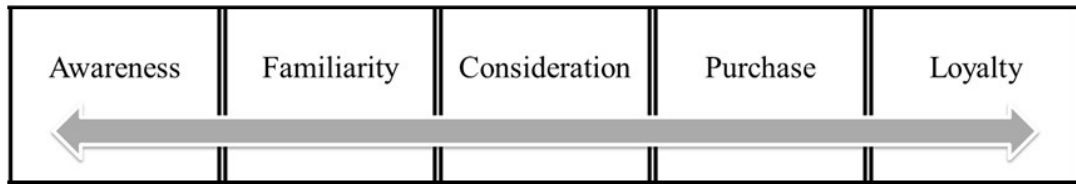
Awareness	Familiarity	Consideration	Purchase	Loyalty

Figure 4: consumer decision journey

Source: Quarterly (2009)

1) Awareness: It is the first way to get customers to know the business to build awareness through various advertising media, channels and platforms that customers currently use. Channels for customers to receive advertising from companies are available both online and offline (Wang & Zhang, 2018). The popular offline channels that can reach customers are such as television, radio, public relations through brochures, billboard, advertisement, etc. (Katz, 2019). But doing business today would not be able to ignore online channels since consumer behavior in the digital age is ranked number one on social media through various platforms (Wolff, 2017). It could be buying advertising through online channels such as Facebook Ads, IG Ads, Youtube and Ads Google etc.

2) Familiarity: Company can create familiarity through many types of activity (Ramesh et al., 2019). However, the use of sending news activities, organizing events which are associated with social responsibility is another activity that helps to build familiarity and promote attachment intertwined with the product (Reiter-Salisbury, 2018). In addition, the use of various media can be considered as making familiarity with consumers both offline and online media by using such media including necessary activities that must be consistent in the same direction because these are essential in building loyalty based on consumer engagement (Tsiotsou et al., 2016).

3) Consideration: When the customer knows the company and product, it isn't that they decided to buy the product immediately (Scholz & Duffy, 2018). They will search for product information via social media to compare the its benefits if they really want (Li et al., 2018). Most of the time, consumers will trust the information from other consumers who have already used the products, known

as a reviewer (Asioli et al., 2017). In this case, the company may be able to generate content reviews from the company by using well-known influencers that match with the products. This will help create more understanding for consumers to consider the products/services (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019).

4) Purchase: If the customers pass the searching steps for making decision and they are confident that they will buy products, they then will enter to the sales process (Jun & Park, 2016). If a company has a showroom, customers may walk in to shop and buy. For customers in the digital age, they may buy products through the website such as Shopee, Lazada or other branded platforms (Jauhari et al., 2019). Companies should set up a sales system from product selection, order confirmation, settle a payment to be convenient to consumers (Khan, 2017). This is a quick way to guide consumers to the closing stage and keep them from leaving incomplete orders.

5) Loyalty: When companies can deliver a pleasurable experience for customers, they eventually become loyal customers and will definitely keep coming back (Espinosa et al., 2018). Not only that there may have a word-of-mouth to invite others to become customers, it also allows companies to expand their customer base as well (Godey et al., 2016). At this stage, companies may be able to build a strategy to attract more loyal customers by offering promotions or special services that are only available to specific customers (Ramanathan et al., 2017). This will enable the companies to retain the same customers along with create a new customer at the same time.

Customer journey in hotel business is begun from a customer is motivated and perceived about a hotel, contacts with the hotel to make decision booking a room. This is a factor helping the hotel to better understand decision process of the customer to get a good service experience (Kim & Park, 2017). The hotel business, one of the key supply chains of the tourism industry, is one of the critical businesses affected by COVID-19 pandemic. The impact situation became even more severe when governments decided to use decisive measures in an emergency situation. Hence, service redesign that can create a good experience for guests is therefore a matter that the hotel should take into account when reopening the business. This will be discussed in the proposition

International Luxury Hotel Chain (ILHC)

Many studies have been attempting to define meaning of "luxury" in many aspects to fit with its concept and characteristic. Makkar and Yap (2018) summarized that luxury is the power to pursue someone's passion. While Singh et al. (2017) concluded that luxury is an art that brings psychological satisfaction to the user. Su and Reynolds (2019) defined luxury as a service/product provided more than the basic need. Hence, it can be said that luxury is the feeling or touch that is provided more than the expectation to fulfill someone's passion and makes one satisfied. International luxury hotel chains become an important segment in hotel business. Most of them are located in the world destination countries such as USA, UK, Canada, Hong Kong, and France (Sun et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2018). ILHC looks elegant comfortable facilities, provides high quality service, unique style, good pamper from well-trained staff with hoping the guests have a memorable experience during they stay. Preferred locations of ILHC are in city center, beach or mountain around major tourist destinations. ILHC can be divided into three segments: 1) Luxury major, for example Sofitel, Ritz Calton, JW Marriott, etc., 2) Luxury exclusive, for example Four Seasons, Kempinsku, Mandarin Oriental, etc, and 3) Upper upscale, for example Hilton, Sheraton, etc. (Dick, 2019; Tissot, 2018). The targeted market of ILHC is quite heterogeneous (Gao et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2019). Most of the guests are generation X and Y who are multi-cultural, tech savvy, and demand for personalized service from professional and well-experienced staff (Muslim et al., 2020; Oswald, 2020). Price, promotion, and place strategy are still the important factors influencing the guests to consider the booking (Cró & Martins, 2018; Jang & Moutinho, 2019).

Hotel business in Thailand during 2019 was forecasted to grow along with the tourism industry (Chaivichayachat, 2019; Palang & Tippayawong, 2019). There were more investments in hotel properties in major tourist destinations such as Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket (Horwath, 2018). Many leading international hotel chains such as Marriott, Hilton, Accor, IHG, etc. remain outstanding and produce more occupancy rate to accommodate the demands of the visitors, while Thai hotel chains are steadily sharing the markets (Rittichainuwat et al., 2020).

There are many significant factors influencing visitors to choose hotels to stay in Thailand such as location, safety, destination image, reasonable price, trust and reliability of website, and service quality (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019; Tweephoncharoen & Vongurai, 2019). These are fit with the aspects of ILHC in responding and providing a great service and experience to their guests. The COVID-19 also impacts ILHC to its revenue and cash flows due to all confirmed bookings have been cancelled because of governmental lockdown policy (Filimonau et al., 2020). Many ILHC, especially in tourism cities in Thailand need to rethink and reconsider a proactive strategy to reclaim the business effectively.

Effect of COVID-19 toward Hotel Business in Thailand

The situation of COVID-19 inevitably urged the business to adapt faster (Ross et al., 2020), especially entrepreneurs in the tourism and service sectors like "hotel business" who were severely affected when the number of guests was zero because travel was not allowed during the epidemic (Fernandes, 2020; Jiang & Wen, 2020). Overall, the hotel business for the first 4 months of 2020 continued to contract from Thailand and foreign countries' economic and trade problems (Rittichainuwat et al., 2020). Since the COVID-19 globally spreads, it results various countries start a policy to treat and stop the epidemic which heavily affected employment, income and lifestyle (Ratten, 2020).

In Thailand, there was a huge increase of new cases on March 17, 2020 (Tantrakarnapa et al., 2020). The cabinet then issued urgent measures to prevent the Covid-19 crisis and shut down all risk areas including issuing lockdown measures (Djalante et al., 2020). This caused both Thai and foreign tourists cancel their trips and hotel reservations resulting in the number of tourists in all areas disappeared. The hotel business is expected to recover gradually in the second half of the year (Bank, 2020). This is because the domestic Covid-19 epidemic situation is likely to continue to improve. As a result, the government can begin to relax preventive measures until allowing the hotel to start operating normally from mid-May (Siamhan & Trirath, 2020). If the government agrees with the opening a country for tourism or a full country open, it is expected that foreign tourists will choose Thailand as

the first destination for their trip. This is in accordance with a survey from C9 Hotelworks Market Research and Delivering Asia Communication, they surveyed Chinese tourists which ranks the first of international tourists travelling to Thailand. It is found that 71 percent from the survey still chose Thailand as their preferred destination to travel (C9 Hotelworks Market Research and Delivering Asia Communication, 2020). Thus, the third hypothesis is:

Perspective of service to be redesigned in customer experience management affected by COVID-19 pandemic for international luxury beach hotel chains in Thailand

This paper discusses a possible perspective of service to be redesigned in customer experience management on hospitality marketing and management which can be outlined into 5 stages: recognition, consideration, reservation, occupancy, and loyalty adapted from Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017) to guide future research direction in the hotel business as illustrated in Figure 6.
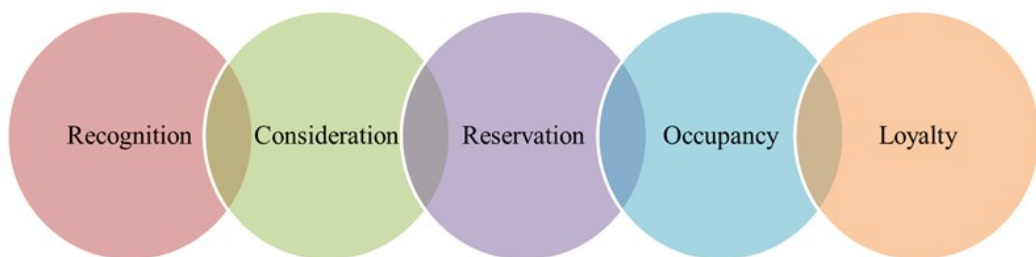

Figure 6: Proposed perspective of service to be redesigned in customer experience management
Source: Adapted from Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017)

Recognition

It is a step in building awareness among the targeted customers of hotels. Before creating recognition, hotel needs to set up Segmentation - Targeting – Positioning (STP) process in order to know the target audience that will communicate because hotel cannot take care of all customer groups (Dewanti et al., 2018). By not setting the target audience to communicate, the hotel will waste its budget because it will be a one-way communication and doesn't know who the target audience is (de Vries, 2020). When hotel doesn't know its target, communication strategies cannot be properly designed. Returning to restart the hotel, a marketer has to explore the changes of the hotel first, whether it is in the same position before the COVID-19 (Craven et al., 2020). Some hotels positioned themselves as 3-star hotels before pandemic, then transformed into a boutique hotel by adding the hotel's identity and hygiene facilities as a key factor in presenting customers. This process of generating recognition should occur after the hotel has planned according to the STP and has clearly defined the target audience. It may be a small and specific target group like fragmentation, which allows hotel to save the budget for choosing a channel to create recognition of the target audience (Nga, 2020). The tools for generating recognition for hotels may need to be categorized according to the type of customer group (Ramos et al., 2018). The main customer audiences are FIT (Free Individual Travelers), corporate groups, companies and organizations, government, and travel agencies (Leung, 2019). This does not include sub-targeting groups such as hoteliers, airline staff which each of the above groups uses a different recognition method (Ahmad & Sun, 2018; Fathy & Zidan, 2017). In addition, the content that wants to create recognition may add some details focusing on the customers to clearly see the identity of the hotel in any matter, such as a recognition to the customer to know the hotel is located in this area and let them recognize that the hotel is one of the options to consider if staying in this area (Al-Aomar & Hussain, 2018). Therefore, the main function of the hotel is to analyze each customer group and find the ways to create recognition that will best reach each group to communication in order to create recognition both online and offline.

Consideration

It is a step in getting the attention of the customers when they are aware of the recognition stage. If hotel can successfully communicate and create recognition, the customers will be interested in the product/service, so they will search for information to make decision which can occur at this stage only after the customers have created interest in a hotel (Krizanova et al., 2019). Currently, many business products and services are driven by big data (Tao et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2019). It is easy for customers to access to a wide variety of resources such as images and hotel experience from others which are needed to keep track the expected channels that customers would like to learn more about when interested in a hotel (Koc, 2020). These usually include: 1) Social Media: customers who are interested in a hotel will study information from various social media sources such as the hotel's Facebook page or the hotel's Instagram, etc. (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2018). Most of them are in the form of various reviews both positive and negative. The hotel is essential to monitor the various reviews as well as the dramas in the online world that relate to the hotel (Jimenez-Marquez et al., 2019), 2)Website: customers will learn more information of the hotel via the hotel's website (Birinci et al., 2018), which is a caution for the hotel to keep updating the information of the hotel on the website, and 3) Asking information from others: this is done by asking their friends and families who have experience in the hotel service before (Wolff et al., 2017). This may be linked to the hotel's loyalty program. If hotels have a positive feedback, customers are also likely to have positive consideration which leads to confirm a reservation (Tse & Poon, 2017).

Reservation

At this point, hotel needs to plan a distribution channel, which customers can book the rooms. Most of customers book the rooms via online travel agent (OTA), Facebook page, or line chat (Hapsari Sulistyo & Pranata, 2020). Sometimes, it's a direct booking with the hotel such as walk-in or direct-calls (Yılmaz et al., 2019). No matter what which distributions are, hotels need to adapt to customer behavior to create impression and the best customer experience because this is a critical step in the creation of the entire hotel customer journey (Buehring & O'Mahony, 2019).

The after-sales service is involved in this stage in order to make customers decide to come back and stay with the hotel again (Othman et al., 2020). In this case, customers may be asked after their stay for their satisfaction to review their experience via the hotel's social media channels in order to return to the channels of Recognition- Consideration to other customers.

Occupancy

During an in-house period, hotels need to change their existing service model to adapt to changes in the customer experience (Khan et al., 2020). For example, a hotel restaurant may start offering spoons or plates that are served privately (Larisa et al., 2020), reducing direct contact with food or with staff (Wan et al., 2020), and a design of a personal one-dish menu instead of a buffet (Bae & Chang, 2020). According to Viglia and Dolnicar (2020), Minor International increases the confidence in cleanliness, for example, a buffet breakfast will become a set menu, free room service, wash the sheets/towels every day for cleanliness. ALPICO Group provides QR Code for customers to select the menu from their mobile phone, cancels serving large dishes together, but divides into small plates for each guest instead. Dusit International lets staff help the guest do shopping for local souvenirs and can order food at any time to eat in the room. Customers will pay more attention to the safety of their food choices. They will be more convinced that the source of the ingredients is reliable. For example, improper raw food choices are the root cause of the epidemic. In response to the change in consumer thoughts, hotel must make appropriate adjustments such as return to the basics of hotel standards, adhere to Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), promote the importance of hygiene within the hotel, create a safety perception to ensure customers confidence in the service (Kuo & Hsiao, 2020). For example, Hilton International has done check-in, check-out as a digital key through customers' mobile phone in order to reducing touch (Dikken, 2020). Anantara hotels collect guest check-in information prior to arrival to reduce check-in at the lobby (Aeberhard et al., 2020). The Marriott Hotel Group is preparing to install the aerosol to help clean guest rooms and common areas, including adjusting the setting for

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Loyalty

Service loyalty is a voluntary of customer who continues to use the service from the same service provider on a regular basis (Torres et al., 2019) and decides to use the same service as the first choice although there are other channels or opportunities to choose from (Xu & Jackson, 2019). Loyalty is a result of a positive attitude and behavior towards the service provider to keep good relationship with customers not to change to other services (Suhartanto et al., 2019). Customer loyalty is a sustainable key success to the hotel business (Koo et al., 2020). Every hotel gives importance by creating challenges that doesn't just attract customers but it also means using various strategies to keep customers with them as long as possible (Aldaihani & Ali, 2018) as following dimensions: 1) Recommending to others is an impressive expression of customers after using the service leading to word-of-mouth or suggestion influencing others interested in using the service as well (Foroudi et al., 2020). This behavior is due to having positive attitude to products/services. In addition, word-of-mouth marketing which is considered as a viral marketing becomes more influential and popular (Chu & Kim, 2018). It is a powerful channel for public relations and information dissemination faster. Loyal customers will help spread the hotel information through online communication that is becoming very popular, and also a channel that is convenient to access to extensive database (Boateng et al., 2020). The final result is an increasing of new customers and profits in the long term, 2) "Purchase intention" starts with an idea of customers who decide to use products/ services through the process they perceived, but has not yet done (Prasad et al., 2019). However, this feeling shows customers' advance purchase behavior because intention to purchase is a factor to measure loyalty. This factor identifies a positive attitude of the customer to the business, and becomes the reason for the following behaviors such as word-of-mouth, recommending to other, repeat purchases, etc (Iyer & Griffin, 2020). When customers are impressed, a memorable experience will be created and become their first choice when deciding to stay in that hotel again, and 3) "Price sensitivity" means that competitor's price does not affect loyal customers, unlike low loyal customers will pay attention to the price because customers are willing to pay regardless of competitors' prices (Qiu & Rao, 2020).

At present, hotel business is highly competitive due to the expansion in the tourism and communication technology (Morozov & Morozova, 2020). Therefore, loyalty plays an important issue because it results in more sales and long-term business growth (Chaudhuri et al., 2019). Measuring customer loyalty level must be appropriate to the changing context of the hotel business which are behavior and attitude of the customer (Ngobo, 2017). The indicators that are implemented in the hotel business are behavioral intention and a positive word-of-mouth, especially an electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) (Nuseir, 2019). It can be said that a study how to measure customer loyalty is a useful point to hotel marketers as well as being able to develop to create effective marketing strategies and response to the needs of customers efficiently. The hotel business is in a stagnant situation now, a current uncertain situation should make hotel businesses around the world try to adjust their business model and adapt themselves as much as possible in order to give guests and customers confidence and come back to use the service.

Future research direction

Tourism is classified as an important industry that can generate a significant amount of income in Thailand contributing to a turnover and income distribution as well as promoting investment in various businesses that are relevant widely (Esichaikul et al., 2020). Hotel business market tends to be more competitive in order to compete for a high end market, with more emphasis on quality and service competition by making it stand out and differentiate itself from competitors to meet the needs of a more specific group of customers (Sangwichien & Jaroenwisan, 2017). Studying customer experience management for hotel business is always necessary to marketing researchers and entrepreneurs (Gilboa et al., 2019). A huge impact from COVID-19 pandemic encourages marketers to intentionally focus on implementing and designing the right way to provide a memorable experience to their guests (Bonfanti et al., 2021). Many studies are attempting to propose a marketing strategy to make hotels survive from this crisis. In relation to this, scholars are suggested to analyze loyalty behavior through customer's experience factors. It is crucial to know the customer's experience from the pre-purchase stage, which is linked to a customer

journey (Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020). Hotel business is categorized in the hospitality industry that has to adapt itself to the effects of COVID-19 (Yacoub & ElHajjar, 2021). As soon as the hotel can be fully operational, guests will likely need new services, such as keyless access to their rooms, check-in and check-out without interacting with employees, including various personal services (Mourmoura, 2020). Additionally, hotel staff will always sanitize all areas before the guest enters the hotel and goes straight to the elevator going up a room without having to touch anything or get the service as comfortable as ever (Bove & Benoit, 2020). It's time for the hotel to leverage all strategies greatly, restore the confidence of their guests, and redesign new service experiences. Designing customer experience is a vital agenda for marketing scholars and practitioners (Alcañiz et al., 2019). Guests may be surprised with the level of service unlike in the past, especially in a service of luxury hotels (Lee & Park, 2019). Shared space services such as buffet rooms and mini bars, as well as services that require intimacy such as spas, porter services, and valet service would be suspended for a while (Bhatia et al., 2018). Other forms of operation and innovation will be found from this behavior shift. For instance, Jiang and Wen (2020) presented three issues that will be influential to hotel business as affected by COVID-19: artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, hygiene and cleanliness, and health and health care. This study suggests scholars to take a serious analysis and develop the opportunities and challenges of each issue (Song et al., 2018). Even though many research antecedents, mediators, and moderators have been extensively examined through various service experiences, still there is a need to take other relevant factors into consideration, such as service journey influencing service experience (Law et al., 2018).

In conclusion, further research could firstly examine how hotel managers built customer experiences after COVID-19 has been declared over to identify possibly alternate hotel solutions and vice versa. Furthermore, given that some researchers (Liang & Wu, 2022) have proposed that customer experience has a positive impact on customer trust and retention –a customer's desire to participate in future transactions, resulting in a sense of decreased future risk (Javed & Wu, 2020) – future research could secondly look into how hotels' hygienic measures influence customer trust. Despite of COVID-19, many hotels, including upscale hotels,

services based on technology implementation to increase customer experience during COVID-19 (Pelet et al., 2021). Hence, it is recommended to study customer experience and luxury hotels under technology as it becomes a norm in a way to satisfy the key target markets and enrich guest experience in the hotel business. Third, a comparison of perceived experiences between Thai and international tourists from the service design of the hotel is interesting to study because a difference of culture could reflect needs and expectations from various demands in order to provide the right strategy to provide them a memorable and seamless experience (Buhalis & Karatay, 2022).

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