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*Deity Symbols of City Pillar Shrines in Northeastern Thailand:
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Prasirt Runra

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Territories in Burma/Myanmar*

Yaw Htung

*Community Engagement in the Indigenous Education Discourse:
Unravelling Policy Lessons from Lumad's Alternative School in
Mindanao, Philippines*

Jae Mari D. Magdadaro
and Noe John Joseph E. Sacramento

*A Thematic Analysis of the Journey of Online Learners in
the Time of Covid-19*

Merites M. Buot
and Krista Marie L. Fama

*A Framework for Designing Customer Experience of Luxury
Chain Beach Hotels in Andaman Coast of Thailand:
Repercussions of the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Phisunt Tinakhat,
Kaedsiri Jaroenwisan
and Wongladda Weerapalboon

*Enhancing the Customer Journey during COVID-19 through Service Design:
A Case Study of Pawnshops in Bangkok*

Kom Campranon

*Dance Exchange as a Vehicle of Cultural Diplomacy:
A Case Study of Ramayana Joint Performance of Thailand's Khon
and Indonesia's Sendratari*

Anak Agung Lindawati Kencana

Control Tobacco Planting Area in Thailand Using Remote Sensing Technology

Ramiha Pacharavanich

*Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT):
4Ps in The Lens Of of Philippine Decentralization*

Ana Leah Cuizon
and Cyril Bryan Cuizon

*The Role of Thai Prosecutor in Child Protection:
A Case Study of Child Prostitution Victims*

Anyapilak Rakkhittham

Vol. 25 No. 1 (2022): January-June



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Deity Symbols of City Pillar Shrines in Northeastern Thailand: A Multiple Identity Presentation and Negotiation Between Central and Local Cultures

Prasirt Runra

1-30



The Kachin Ethno-Nationalism over Their Historical Sovereign Land Territories in Burma/Myanmar

Yaw Htung

31-56



Community Engagement in the Indigenous Education Discourse: Unravelling Policy Lessons from Lumad's Alternative School in Mindanao, Philippines

Jae Mari D. Magdadaro, Noe John Joseph E. Sacramento

57-81



A Thematic Analysis of the Journey of Online Learners in the Time of Covid-19

Merites M. Buot, Krista Marie L. Fama

82-94



A Framework for Designing Customer Experience of Luxury Chain Beach Hotels in Andaman Coast of Thailand: Repercussions of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Phisunt Tinakhat, Kaedsiri Jaroenwisana, Wongladda Weerapaiboon

95-123



Enhancing the Customer Journey during COVID-19 through Service Design: A Case Study of Pawnshops in Bangkok

Kom Campiranon

124-144



Dance Exchange as a Vehicle of Cultural Diplomacy: A Case Study of Ramayana Joint Performances of Thailand's Khon and Indonesia's Sendratari

Anak Agung Lindawati Kencana
145-177



[Open Journal Systems](#)

Information

[For Readers](#)

[For Authors](#)

[For Librarians](#)

Home Thaijo

THAIJO

Manual

[For Author](#)

[For Reviewer](#)

Journal Information



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Indexed in TCI



Indexed In



ASEAN
CITATION
INDEX



A Framework for Designing Customer Experience of Luxury Chain Beach Hotels in Andaman Coast of Thailand: Repercussions of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially altered the tourism and hospitality industry. The lodging business is among those most affected by the pandemic, especially luxury chain hotels, seen as one of the fastest growing type of hotels and until recently, popular among global tourists. To revive businesses, services should be designed to produce memorable customer experiences. This represents a strategic challenge for hotel marketers working on luxury chain beach hotels. This paper proposes a conceptual framework for designing customer experience in luxury chain beach hotels affected by COVID-19 on Thailand's Andaman coast. The researchers unified Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory and attributes of luxury chain hotels through a systematic literature review. Five antecedents are identified: service design, customer trust, customer experience, customer delight, and perceived hygiene attributes of COVID-19. The theoretical contribution of this paper could assist academics with effective acceptance model, while the managerial contribution could help hotel marketers to recuperate business when the effects of the pandemic lessen. Suggestions are also provided for future research.

Keywords

Service design, Customer experience, Luxury chain beach hotels, Andaman coast of Thailand, COVID-19

Introduction

Thailand is perceived as one of the world's most favorite tourist destinations after its tourism industry has grown quickly since the Vietnam War in 1967 as one of the preferred leisure destination for the American soldiers (Jaisuekun & Sunanta, 2021). Tourists can enjoy many interesting activities in Thailand such as traditions, festivals, culture, natural resources, historical sites, beautiful beaches, and delicious Thai food (Tinakhat, 2021). One of the main reasons that international tourists visit Thailand is the beautiful beaches. According to Nilrat and Bunsit (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 third among the top 5 highest-income islands. As a result, the Andaman Islands tourism industry is well-developed and draws income from domestic and international tourists. As a famous holiday destination in Thailand, tourism in the Andaman Coast has been facing a huge competition in aligning its 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 about customers' behaviors and expectations (Belarmino & Koh, 2018; Wu & Gao, 2019). Each hotel applies different strategies to attract customers, such as digital marketing (Parvez et al., 2018), sustainable marketing (Migale, Stimie, & Brent, 2019), innovative marketing (Krizanova et al., 2019) and relationship marketing (Boateng, 2019), while luxury marketing and experiential marketing are mostly used in chain hotels (Jelassi & Martínez-López, 2020). Hence, it is challenging for the hotels to find the most efficient and effective strategy that matches market trends, segmentations, and clients' expectation/behavior.

Many economists claim that COVID-19 has caused the most severe economic disaster in the last hundred years such as SARS in 2002, Swine Flu in 2009, Ebola in 2014, and MERS in 2015 (Chaleplioglou & Kyriaki-Manessi, 2020; Rajakaruna, Liu, Ding, & Cao, 2017; Reperant & Osterhaus, 2017). Hotel businesses have been adversely affected by COVID-19 because people have refrained from travelling. When people resume to travel, there is new behavior called "new normal". People have adapted their behaviors and interests when travelling even though the pandemic is not yet over. In terms of the hotel industry, a new normal strategy has been introduced to reduce the interaction between staff and guests (Chen, Chen, Liu, & Sharma, 2020; Jain, 2020; Shin & Kang, 2020). Some leading hotels have designed new patterns of service by implementing technology to respond to guests' concerns (Shin & Kang, 2020; Wang, Ng, & Brook, 2020). The Marriott, Hilton, and Hyatt have initiated mobile check-in, robot cleaners, and chatbots (Bonarini, 2020; Damnjanović, Lončarić, & Dlačić, 2020; Polemis & Stengos, 2020; Xu, Zhang, Zhang, & Wang, 2020). From the effect of COVID-19, hotel businesses need to adapt their strategies due to changing tourists' needs related to security, safety, and hygiene. To engage between

guests and services for long-term viability, many hospitality scholars have mentioned that luxury chain hotels should integrate customer experience management (CEM) with their current operation strategies (Kandampully, Zhang, & Jaakkola, 2018). The hotel managers need to consider implementing an experience design through a customer journey starting from pre-purchase, purchasing, to the post-purchase stage in order to increase a service value and loyalty for the business that affected from COVID-19. This is especially true for luxury chain hotels that focus on a competitive advantage and need to offer a great experience to the customers to maintain their patronage (Kandampully et al., 2018). Therefore, luxury chain hotels should rethink their strategy to keep their business revived. Besides, a service design through customer journey to enhance the guests' experiences is an effective strategy for the hotels when they would like to adapt themselves to survive from the crisis (Kabadayi, Ali, Choi, Joosten, & Lu, 2019; Merli, Preziosi, Acampora, & Ali, 2019; Mody, Suess, & Lehto, 2019).

Recent tourism and hospitality scholarship about the effect of COVID-19 on hotel businesses has mostly focused on reducing health risks (Douglas, Katikireddi, Taulbut, McKee, & McCartney, 2020; Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, Lemke, & Hsieh, 2020). The Thai government has also launched many tourism promotions and campaigns to support these businesses. However, there has been little discussion focusing on strategy formulation in designing a customer experience model even though it is considered as a survival strategy for hotel businesses (Bonfanti, Vigolo, & Yfantidou, 2021; Jiang & Wen, 2020; Richard, 2017). This is especially true for chain hotels, which are often considered the most preferred hotel choices among tourists (Soonsan & Somkai, 2018; Supanun & Sornsarut, 2019), and have become increasingly common in tourist destinations (Bailey and Ball, 2006; Cai and Hobson, 2004; Lomanno, 2010) due to their competitive advantages (Camison et al., 2020). From an economic perspective, chain hotels have competitive cost advantages over individual hotels, together with the size, economies of scale which can afford the chains greater bargaining power in their negotiations with customers and suppliers as well as higher efficiency and optimization of resources (Such-Devesa and MendietaPeñalver, 2013). These benefits help chain hotels during both economic expansion and crisis (O'Neill and Carlbäck, 2011). The researchers consider that it is interesting and challenging to study how luxury chain hotels in leading Andaman Coast provinces in Thailand like Phuket, Phang-Nga, and Krabi can design a customer experience which is shifted into the new normal era affected by the pandemic.

Thus, this research studied from two sides of perspective 1) demand side (hotel guests), and 2) supply side (hotel management) to fully understand the service experience phenomena. More specifically, the aims of the study were to (1) analyze the uniqueness of luxury chain beach hotels on the Andaman Coast of Thailand in order to formulate a service

design strategy to create new customer experiences, (2) categorize the new normal service design currently undertaken by luxury chain hotels on the Andaman Coast of Thailand to create new customer experiences, (3) determine which of the luxury chain hotel attributes will affect customer experience after having a service design, (4) examine relationships of service design affecting customer experience, customer delight, and customer trust at luxury chain hotels on the Andaman Coast of Thailand, (5) investigate the moderating effect of perceived hygiene attributes of COVID-19 on the relationship between service design and customer experience, and (6) formulate the new normal service design strategy to enhance customer experience for luxury chain beach hotels on the Andaman Coast of Thailand. The researchers hope that this study will be beneficial to the hotel owners and marketers to design the appropriate services that create a memorable experience effectively and maintain customers sustainably during and after COVID-19 pandemic or any crisis may happen in the future.

Literature Review

Chain Hotels

According to Karhunen and Ledyeva (2021), hotel chain management is an investment of a hotel either newly built or independent hotel with a hotel chain having their own manager. The head quarter will be a consultant helping in marketing, public relations, and reservations in the same pattern (Ribaudo et al, 2020). According to Wood (2017), there are two main groups of hotel chain management: 1) local chains are found and developed along with the tremendous growth of the tourism business in many regions around the world, and 2) international chain located around the world (especially in tourism destinations). The hotel management team needs to consider the most effective strategy and operational tactics to operate the business (Köseoglu, Chan, Okumus, & Altin, 2019). Many hotel guests are both local and international who are always attentive to a unique and memorable experience reflecting the cultural and foreign context (Richard, 2017). Chain hotels provide services in accordance with the standards or policies of their headquarters. The service level is classified into different categories in order to have clarity on the management and practice of providing good service to the guests (Geetha, Singha, & Sinha, 2017) because what guests remember and appreciate is intangible services. These services are not objects, but actions like how the hotel staff treats the guests. Smith Travel Research (STR) is recognized as a leading data collection for the hotel business (Sepula, 2019). STR categorizes a chain scale which breaks down the hotels into six different tiers based on their Average Daily Rate (ADR), which is an average rate paid for the rooms sold measure calculated by dividing room revenue by rooms sold, establishment types, architectural point of view, and services offered (Hua, DeFranco, & Abbott, 2020). Chain scale helps hotels to use the right strategies to their target clients (Li, Cui, & Peng, 2017); on the other hand, it helps the customers to achieve their expectation

about the services and facilities from the hotels that they would like to stay (Ivanova & Ivanov, 2015). According to Lai and Hitchcock (2017), the eight attributes of luxury chain hotels that are measured to analyze customer satisfaction are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, core benefit, technology, and entertainment. The authors, hence, apply these measures in this study.

Kim, Han, and Ariza-Montes (2021) studied how tangible and intangible hotel attributes improved individuals' well-being perceptions before and during COVID-19, as well as how these perceptions in turn influenced a design to create cognitive attitudes, affective attitudes, and brand loyalty during these periods. This is related to Chan, Gao, and McGinley (2021) who investigated hotels' service standard changes, processes of management decisions and preparations for the future. Kim, Han, and Ariza-Montes (2021) found that the common practices of precautionary measures include body temperature checks for all persons entering the hotel premises, a requirement to wear surgical masks, filling in a health declaration form during check-in, indicating travel history in the past 14 days and reporting any symptoms of respiratory illness. The international chain hotels are more apt to follow their asset class' standards, whereas local chain hotels are more flexible in the operations' execution. Hence, the hypothesis is as follows: -

Hypothesis 1: Attributes of luxury chain hotels positively influence service design

Service Design

Service design is a way of thinking and practice to help develop a service or product model that is most useful, usable, convenient and impresses the most users (Oertzen, Odekerken-Schröder, & Mager, 2020; Torres & Miranda, 2020). It is also an important strategy to increase service value (Kozak & Gürel, 2015). The goal of service design is to provide a tangible and intangible profit return to the business. Service design is a human-centered process to create value and a competitive advantage for service providers. It developed from various fields of science to be a tool for designing various services with efficiency and effectiveness along with the process of creating strategies for customers or service users to have a good experience with organizations. Service design also adds value to products and organizations. In addition to being a process that can meet the needs of service users, it also includes building understanding of service providers in various fields such as needs, lifestyles, etc. It also creates a good image for the organization as well. The result obtained from the service design is the service standard that the company will use as a standard for the staff to follow in delivering services to customers in the future.

In terms of the hotel business, service design is considered as a process to help developing a service model to serve the customers in an effective way (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018). More importantly, it can generate returns to a hotel in a

holistic way and help the hotel staff understand the needs of their clients (Lei, Wang, & Law, 2019). This allows the hotel staff to offer superb service in the way of the hotel because the service design will not neglect the people involved in that service. Because of COVID-19, hotels have needed to adapt themselves to design their services to new normal customers' behavior as categorized by Del Chiappa et al. (2021) as PPE and sanitization, physical distancing in restaurant service, room service and reception automation, and social and environmental engagement.

Zomerdijk and Voss (2010) studied service design for experience-centric services and found that the designing of customer journeys and touchpoints for sensory design, the engagement of employees, the management of fellow customers, and the close coupling of backstage employees and front stage activities represent promising new frontiers in experience design. In a similar study, Johnston and Kong (2011) investigated how organizations actually go about designing and improving their customer experiences, and they found that customer, staff and cost are used to assess the benefits of improving the customer experience. Cook et al. (2002) found that service encounters can be designed to enhance the customer's experience during the process and their recollection of the process after it is completed, and they summarized that when attempting to understand human issues in service design we must consider the range of customer emotions, in particular delight and outrage. This is in line with Barnes et al. (2020) who evaluated the extent to which need fulfillment is the root of customer well-being and that meet well-being needs ultimately promotes delight. They found that context affecting the customer–employee interface may occur at individual, group and/or societal levels. Service providers must be equipped to pivot their service processes to address each customer's salient needs. Insights from transformative service research and the social needs literature also provide a useful lens through which to study the drivers of customer delight across contexts. Ling-Yee Li et al. (2017) studied the multiple roles of customer trust on customer participation behavior in high-versus low-contact services, and they found that trust is formed on the basis of competence and performance, and it can be sustained as long as the service firm is able to maintain a high level of performance. Since trust can facilitate value co-creation behavior that leads to greater value of the service outcome and customer loyalty, increasing customer trust is warranted, and retail firms should work hard to perform better. Hence, the hypothesis is as follows: -

Hypothesis 2: Service design positively influences customer experience.

Hypothesis 3: Service design positively influences customer delight.

Hypothesis 4: Service design positively influences customer trust.

Customer Experience

Pine and Gilmore (1998) conceptualized consumer experience that it is an activity to create an impression to the customers from the services or products of the organization; moreover consumer experience refers to the experienced utility theory in behavioral economics of Kahneman and Thaler (1991). Utility is the benefits that consumers receive from their experience, and it is a result of commercial offering that contributes to a creation of many memorable experiences for consumers. Experience creation is also important to ensure customer satisfaction that can lead to a purchase intention (Tran, 2020). A study of Pine and Gilmore has also been applied in the hotel business such as mobile check-in, robot cleaner, as well as chatbot in Marriott, Hilton, and Hyatt (Bonarini, 2020; Damjanović et al., 2020; Polemis & Stengos, 2020; Xu et al., 2020). In addition, Pine and Gilmore (1998) define the word "experience" as an event in which a person feels personally. It is determined from a business perspective on the basis of consumer experience of enjoyment, participation, and the memory of events that have been touched and perceived which can be shown into four different dimensions or 4D experiences as follows:

1) Entertainment experience is a model of experience that has been continuously developed in the tourism business. It can happen commonly when tourists get to experience activities at tourist attractions (Paulauskaite, Powell, Coca-Stefaniak, & Morrison, 2017) such as on amusement park rides, watching a show, listening to music, and reading. The activities that provide entertainment experiences must therefore have a style that captures the attention of tourists.

2) Educational experience reinforces that the tourists are interested in the activities that are like the education of the tourists. Thus, there is an expression of participation with the attractions both physically and mentally. In general, the tourists will gain knowledge and skills after gaining a learning experience through visiting tourist attractions (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). For example, visiting an arts and crafts festival allows tourists to learn about the historical background of the arts and crafts.

3) Esthetic experience reflects the concept of escapism or a service marketing atmosphere (Holmqvist, Ruiz, & Peñaloza, 2020; Prentice, Wang, & Loureiro, 2019). This demonstrates that the physical environment of a business and/or service has an important impact on the service level for tourists. It can be said that esthetic experience is a key factor used by tourists to assess attractions and tourism experiences.

4) Escapism experience requires a deeper level of immersion and engagement rather than entertainment and learning. Tourists who look for an escapism experience do not want to only to travel to specific attractions, but also to participate in the activities of the attractions (Junaid, Hou, Hussain, & Kirmani, 2019; Thanh & Kirova, 2018).

When combining the unique four experience dimensions, it can result in a more complete experience from the attractions (Tussyadiah, Wang, & Jia, 2017). The 4 experience dimensions can create the best travel experience for the tourists by showing a combination of the four experiences into a horizontal axis that represents the participation of tourists, and the vertical axis that represents absorption-Immersion in the travel experience.

Lee and Park (2019) found that affective experience has a significant impact on delight whereas cognitive experience has a positive influence on equity. Social and behavioral experiences were more related to equity than delight. Delight was a more powerful influence on loyalty than equity. Customer equity has a positive influence on loyalty and partly mediates the relationship between delight and loyalty. This study provides the opportunity for hotel managers to categorize different experiences that drive customers to their delight or equity in upscale hotels. This is in line with Ball and Barnes (2017), who combined the evolving fields of customer delight and positive psychology to investigate a broader conceptualization of customer delight and investigated antecedent variables that impact this broader conceptualization. They found that aside from joy and surprise, gratitude also has a positive impact on customer delight. Furthermore, the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) and transcendent customer experiences (TCE) were shown to positively impact the proximal antecedents of customer delight. Havíř (2017) summed up research on customer experience and compared dimensions clarifying customer experience in seven conceptual models with findings from 17 research projects on customer experience conducted after 2010. He reveals that experience management improves trust, customer satisfaction, loyalty, financial performance, and influences customers' behavior across the range of contexts, quality, and duration of the relationship between brand and customer. Nobar and Rostamzadeh (2018) explored effect of customer satisfaction, experience, and loyalty on brand power in the hotel industry and found that the positive experience of hotel services, hotel customers have improved customer satisfaction, and since the customer's trust in hotel services is more likely to lead to increased customer loyalty and improve brand strength. Hence, the hypothesis is as follows: -

Hypothesis 5: Customer experience positively influences customer delight.

Hypothesis 6: Customer experience positively influences customer trust.

Customer Trust

Trust has gained significant attention within the literature since competition in businesses all over the world has become fierce (Porter & Kramer, 2019). Trust is like a non-existent asset that can gain a competitive advantage in business (Kršlak & Ljevo, 2021). Competitive advantage is a result of the trust in the organization that is reflected in its reputation. An organization that is trusted by its customers will help the organization to be

famous (Brennan, Canning, & McDowell, 2020). On the other hand, well-known organizations can also increase the trust of customers. The reputation of the organization is positively correlated with the company's financial performance (Ginesti, Caldarelli, & Zampella, 2018).

Trust also helps the company keep the sales volume from the loyal customers who have confidence in buying the products and services whether the company is offering any product or service (Paparoidamis, Katsikeas, & Chumpitaz, 2019). Hence, it is undeniable that trust is important for business operations, and it is worth studying to be able to recognize the factors creating trust, especially the trust in the customer towards the organization.

McAllister (1995) conceptualized trust into 2 aspects: 1) Cognitive trust is a recognition that a person chooses to trust for what is respectable under a given situation and choose what is considered a good reason. Cognitive trust is a customers' willingness and confidence relied in a competence of a service provider. Customer trust arises from the accumulated knowledge that allows individuals to predict with a level of confidence (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). 2) Affective trust is an emotional connection of the individual that will show genuine care and believe in good or glorious qualities and believe that these feelings will be rewarded. Affective trust is characterized by feelings of security and perceived strength of the relationship (Chiang & Wang, 2012). From our literature review about customer trust, we can conclude that customer trust is a result from the service provider building credibility, integrity, caring for customers, and fast/accurate service to make the customers feel confidence that they will receive their products and service as expected. However, this paper implements the customer trust concept from McAllister (1995) which consists of cognitive trust and affective trust.

Customer Delight

Customer delight is the key performance indicator which measures the extent to which customer expectations are compared to their perceptions. One of the key elements that help in customer delight, especially in the hospitality industry is the interaction between customers and frontline staff. The frontline staff can develop a relationship between customers and brands. Frontline staff can surprise the customers by showing their sincere personal interest in them and come up with a specific solution to a specific need. Satisfaction aims to exceed expectations, whereas delight depends on the positive unexpected events (Dixon, Victorino, Kwortnik, & Verma, 2017; Torres & Ronzoni, 2018). While satisfaction arises when customer's expectations are exceeded, delight arises when perceived actual service performance exceeds consumer expectations. Interaction is the best source of delight as it can be tailored to the specific needs of the customer (Christ-Brendemühl & Schaarschmidt, 2020; Guidice, Barnes, & Kinard, 2020). Finn (2012) examined customer satisfaction and customer delight by analyzing the linearity of their satisfaction impacting

behavior while controlling the result of delight was a different variable. In addition, to understand conceptual scope of a customer delight, it is important to realize how the structure has been performed in existing research. A key finding of Finn's research refines how it measures customer delight. However, Finn suggests that the three emotions loaded with the happiness factor are separate from those associated with surprising consumption, positive effects, and arousal. Barnes, Ponder, and Hopkins (2015) take Finn's three scales and ask employees to acknowledge how much their customers are delighted.

In conclusion, customer delight is the key performance indicator which measures the extent to which customer expectations are compared to their perceptions. One of the key elements that help in customer delight, especially in the hospitality industry is the interaction between customers and frontline staff. Frontline staff can develop the relationship between customers and brands. Satisfaction aims to exceed expectations, whereas delight depends on the positive unexpected events (Dixon et al., 2017; Torres & Ronzoni, 2018). Interaction is the best source of delight as it can be tailored to the specific needs of the customer (Christ-Brendemühl & Schaarschmidt, 2020; Guidice et al., 2020).

Perceived Hotel Hygiene Attributes of COVID-19

COVID-19 caused a difficult and crucial time in the hotel business around the world. As the behavior of the people has shifted due to the pandemic, many hotels started using hygiene management to ensure the guests' trust and maintain hotels' credibility. Even though the hotel occupancy rate is still low, the hotel business still expects that the domestic market will be able to recover quickly after the pandemic resolves, and foreign customers are expected to gradually return to the next phase (González-Torres, Rodríguez-Sánchez, & Pelechano-Barahona, 2021). In the meantime, it was found that many hotels were trying to improve their hygiene and cleanliness systems to assure customers using their services were satisfied (Awan, Shamim, & Ahn, 2020). Hygiene is considered as a crucial aspect among the various methods to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (Kwok et al., 2020; Moore, Robbins, Quinn, & Arbogast, 2021). It is the necessary conditions and measures to live a safe life from disease (Finlay et al., 2021; Prüss-Ustün et al., 2019). Many studies show that a personal hygiene such as wearing disposable/surgical masks or using the alcohol gel can reduce a spread of the virus (Alderman, 2020; Jefferson et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020; Villani, Aiuto, Paglia, & Re, 2020).

Currently, hygiene is considered as one of the crucial factors in the tourism and hospital industry which can lead to the customer's first impression (Mmutle, 2017; Pillai, Haldorai, Seo, & Kim, 2021). When hotels are ready to serve customers, ensuring their confidences is essential in increasing cleanliness measures, taking care of the health of the guests, assuring them about the hygiene of the hotels they choose to use (Pillai et al., 2021). Hotels must ensure that every corner of the hotel is clean and safe. There are several

measures that the hotels are using, such as installing a virus remover, air purifier, disinfectant alcohol gel, regular disinfection of surface germs, and maintaining hygiene in the bathroom (Dighe, Memon, Shaikh, Khan, & Samanta, 2020; Force, 2020; Nakat & Bou-Mitri, 2020). The common area of the hotel that the guests share together must be organized and clean (Binns & Kempf, 2020). Sometimes it may be necessary to refuse to serve guests who are sick and have abnormal symptoms such as frequent sneezing, and a runny nose. Many studies have investigated the hygiene attributes as affected by COVID-19 to ensure the customer trust.

Table 2 Perceived hotel hygiene attributes of COVID-19

Articles	Perceived hotel hygiene attributes of COVID-19				
	Hotel facilities	Hotel equipment	Hotel system	Hotel staff	Hotel guests
Awan et al. (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Dimitrios, Christos, Ioannis, and Vasiliadis (2020)	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
Hoefer et al. (2020)	-	✓	-	✓	✓
Jiang and Wen (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Rattanakosin (2020)	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
Rawal, Pal, Bagchi, and Dani (2020)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Algassim and Abuelhassan (2021)	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
Bonfanti et al. (2021)	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Garrido-Moreno, García-Morales, and Martín-Rojas (2021)	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Pillai et al. (2021)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Robina-Ramírez, Medina-Merodio, Moreno-Luna, Jiménez-Naranjo, and Sánchez-Oro (2021)	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Yu et al. (2021)	✓	✓	-	✓	-

According to Table 2, it can be concluded that most hotels focus on the facilities, equipment, and staff as a hygiene attribute which are related to the latest study of Yu et al (2021) who summarized perceived hygiene attributes in the hotel industry toward customer retention amid the COVID-19 crisis. Their study revealed that there are 3 perceived hygiene

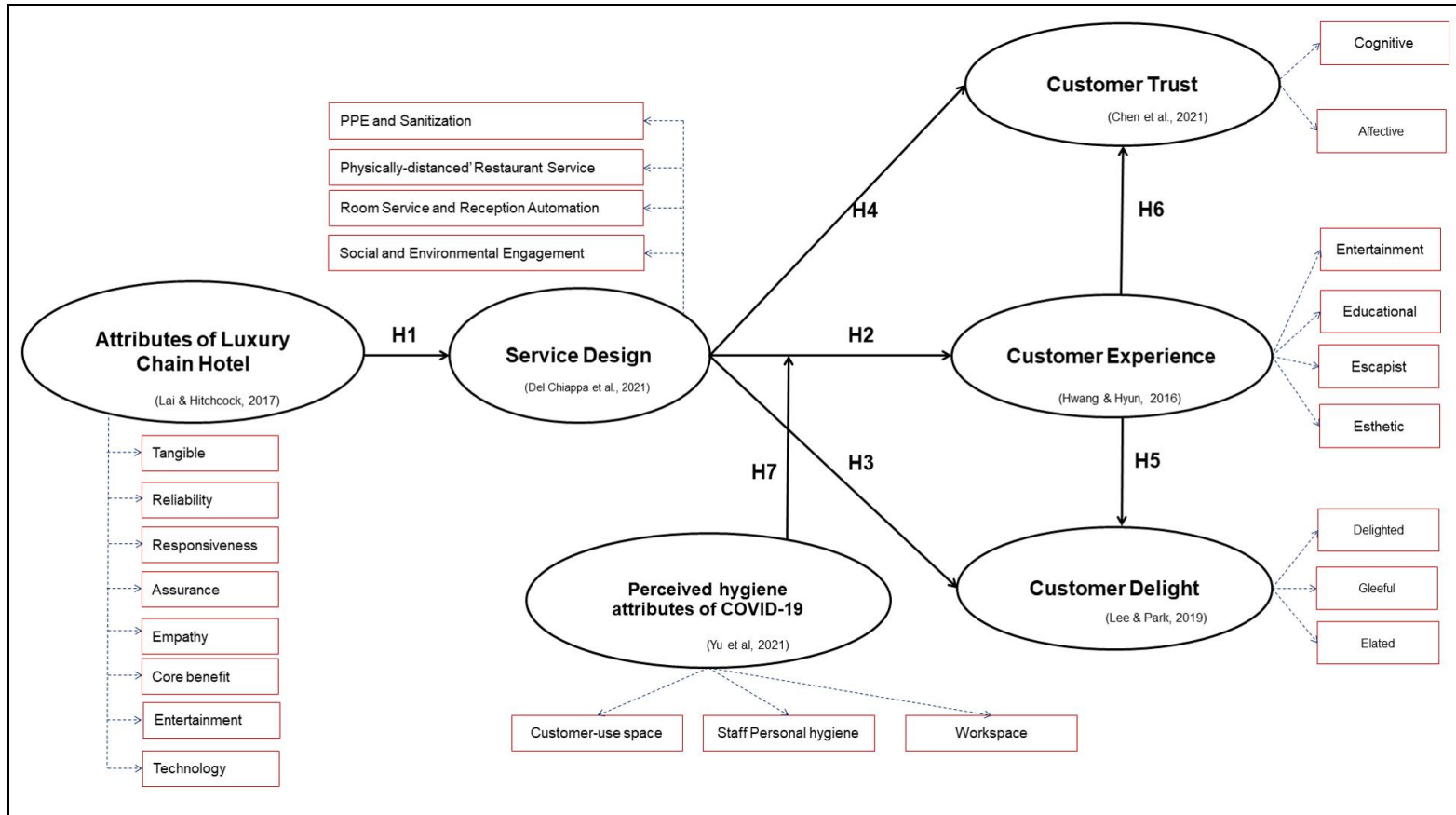
attributes: (1) hygiene of customer-use space, (2) personal hygiene of staff, and (3) hygiene of workplaces. This research will adapt these observed variables.

Hygiene is considered as one of the crucial factors in the tourism and hospital industry which can lead to the customer's first impression (Mmutle, 2017; Pillai et al., 2021). Hotel businesses need to reassure guests about hygiene (Sann & Lai, 2020). This study aims to study the influence of perceived hotel hygiene attributes of COVID-19 on customer trust, customer experience, and customer delight. According to Yu, Seo, and Hyun (2021), there are three perceived hotel hygiene attributes of COVID-19 which are customer-use space, staff personal hygiene, and workplace. The COVID-19 pandemic has evoked various hygiene measurements among consumers. Palmer (2010) pointed out that hygiene attributes can emerge as an experience to an uncertain situation. Hygiene attributes are linked largely to threatening customer experiences (Medhi & Bora, 2020). Therefore, hotels that design and provide a high-quality service will have a stronger influence on customer experience with a high degree of perceived hygiene attributes as they confer social and pragmatic legitimacy to the hotel, compared to those with weaker perceived levels of hygiene attributes.

Hypothesis 7: Perceived hygiene attributes of COVID-19 moderate the positive relationship between service design and customer experience.

From our literature review, we propose the research conceptual framework with the observed variables as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Research conceptual framework with observed variables



Theoretical Framework

This study applies the “SOR Model” of Mehrabian and Russell (1974) to explain the relationship of research hypothesis. The literature review found that service design is Stimulus (S) that creates customer experience in luxury chain beach hotel attributes, while customer experience in luxury chain beach hotel attributes is applied to evaluate Organism (O) to reflect the efficiency of customer experience and luxury chain beach hotel attributes. Implementing “S” and “O” aims to have a Response (R) which is customer delight and customer trust. Many studies on service design lack of a clear understanding about service design in hotel business. Hence, the researchers choose a study of Bonfanti et al. (2021) who measured a safety design to create customer experience which consist of hygiene and protection measures, internal work reorganization, servicescape reorganization, investments in technology and digital innovations, customer wait time reorganization, staff training, and updated communication. Another aspect is customer experience in hotel business as a performance indicator of service design is not clear in concept and measurement dimensions. From the literature review, there are different measurement dimensions in tourism and hospitality industry. Pine, Pine, and Gilmore (1999) summarized four realms of experiences as entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist, while Schmitt (1999) and Verhoef et al. (2009) recapped customer experience dimension as having cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social components. This diversity of concepts reflects a lack of clarity and coherence regarding concepts and the proper definition of variables. It was also found that the dimensions used in the measurements differed in the same way that there were both single-dimensional measurements and multi-dimensional measurements.

Therefore, the researchers used consumer experience to reflect the interactions between guests and hotel services and summarized as the interaction between guests and service design specific to the level of experience namely entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist. Consumer experience is a concept that is appropriately consistent with the S-D logic, which focuses on interactive interactions and collaborative experiences in a network of stakeholders. In addition, the researchers were interested in studying the dimensions used to measure experience creation which consisted of 4 dimensions: entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist to reflect the broader scope of the customer experience concept (Mody, Suess, & Lehto, 2017; Pine et al., 1999; Sipe & Testa, 2018; Yue, 2021).

Research Methodology

The researchers applied a mixed method approach using both quantitative and qualitative research strategies. The area of study in this research is in Phuket, Phang-Nga, and Krabi, where are considered as the leading tourism cities in Andaman coast of Thailand. The researchers found the luxury chain hotels used in the study from Booking.com, which is

the most visited online travel agent (OTA) providing hotel booking services (Mellinas & Martin-Fuentes, 2021). Another source was Tripadvisor.com, which is considered the most popular travel and hotel platform for customers who want to leave a review (Borges-Tiago, Arruda, Tiago, & Rita, 2021). There are 80 luxury chain hotels in Phuket, Phang-Nga, and Krabi.

Key Informants for Qualitative Research

Key informants were defined by a quota and purposive sampling based on knowledge, expertise and at least 5 years of work experience at a luxury chain hotel. These attributes contributed to a high level of knowledge and opinion among the informants about the management and operations of the hotel business (Huang Yin, Goh, & Law, 2019; Ibidunni, Olokundun, Motilewa, Atolagbe, & Osibanjo, 2018; Van Nguyen, Lu, Hill, & Conduit, 2019). Key informants were working as hotel owners, general managers, and hotel marketers of luxury chain hotels in Phuket, Phang-Nga, and Krabi for at least 3 years. According to Macmillan (1971), if a panel size of experts is 17 or more, the rate of error reduction would be very small until it begins to be stabilize at 0.02. At the same time, if the researchers felt that the key informants continued to highlight the same themes in the interviews, the data would be sufficiently saturated (Köseoglu et al., 2020). As unit of analysis was 80 hotels in 3 provinces, the researchers used quota sampling to get 21 key informants for in-depth interviews: Phuket = 12 people, Phang-Nga = 5 people, and Krabi = 3 people shown in Table 21, plus one expert from Thai Hotel Association.

Respondents for Quantitative Research

Quantitative data came from online questionnaires given to hotel guests staying at luxury chain hotels in Phuket, Phang-Nga, and Krabi. The researchers asked for permission from hotels to collect the data and it was distributed by guest service agents. The researchers did not collect the data directly from hotel guests because we didn't want to disturb their privacy. For determining the suitability of the samples used in this research, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) statistical tools were used to determine the size of the sample group. According to Comrey and Lee (2013), an appropriate sample size by defining the scope of the sample should be a sample unit used at least 200 subjects. This is in line with Kline (2011), who suggested that a sample of 200 or more would be suitable for a relatively complex model. While Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2021) recommended that sample sizes should be between 15-20 samples per predictive parameter. This corresponds to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), who suggested that 15-20 times the number of observed variables.

This research has 23 observed variables in the model. Therefore, the appropriate and sufficient sample size should be at least $(15 \times 23 = 345)$ to $(20 \times 23 = 460)$. So, a

minimum sample size of 345 can be used for data analysis with SEM statistical tools. This supports a study of Yuan, Wu, and Bentler (2011) that a good number and suitable for a structural equation model would be about 300 - 400. Given a sample size of 390, the researchers collected the data from 200 guests in Phuket, 100 guests in Phang-Nga, and 45 guests in Krabi. This sample size is considered a good fit for the randomization since the data collection period was during the COVID-19 outbreak, it is necessary to choose a random method that is suitable for the situation to obtain information.

Data analysis

Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

A qualitative method aims to understand the meaning of phenomena or events in life which is interested in the experience of the key informants without including the experience of the researchers. It is interpreted by the key informant and described only the findings from the key informants.

In phenomenological research, the researchers will find the meaning of the phenomenon or the meaning of being a person in that phenomenon. The information obtained will be from the point of view of the key informant only. It's not an outsider's perspective (Moustakas, 1994; Yilmaz, Sezerel, & Uzuner, 2020). Researchers analyze the data throughout the data collection process. While collecting the data, the researchers examine the data by continuously analyzing the meaning of the received data. This allows the researchers to determine whether the data obtained is diverse, saturated, and answers the research questions. After collecting the data, the researchers analyze the additional information to come up with a clear explanation and conclusion. Data analysis methods commonly used in phenomenological studies based on Husserl's philosophy (Bernet, Kern, & Marbach, 1993) consist of 1) Colaizzi's concept, 2) Giorgi's concept, and 3) Van Kaam's concept. These three approaches are different from each other: Colaizzi's (1978) approach is a method in which the researchers must return the data to the key informants to review (Colaizzi, 1978). Giorgi's approach: the reliability of the data is verified solely by the researchers, no information will be sent to the key informants to review (Giorgi, 2009). Van Kaam's method will bring opinions of the key informants in the data analysis (Van Kaam, 1967).

Data Analysis in Quantitative Research has processes as follows.

The analysis to test fundamental conditions for analyzing the measurement models and research models

Normal distribution analysis by considering the skewness and kurtosis, which the skewness should be in the range of -3 to +3 and the kurtosis should be in the range -10 to

+10, indicating that the variable is normal distribution (Cain et al., 2017).

Testing for the independence of the variables with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values between 0 and 1 and Bartlett's test of Sphericity is checked the suitability of a variable group that the variables are correlated. If Bartlett's test of Sphericity is statistically significant, it shows that the variables can be related and analyzed (Hair et al., 2010).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): It is used to identify the service design, perceived hygiene attributes of COVID-19, customer trust, customer experience, customer delight, and customer loyalty by determining the loading factor, which should be more than 0.5 and the Eigen value should be greater than 1.0 and analyze the sentiment of the measure (reliability) with Cronbach's Alpha method, the value should exceed 0.8.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): It is tested to confirm that the observed variables could measure latent variables by using first order CFA and second order CFA (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017).

Expected Research Implications

This paper fills the research gap from previous studies due to the fact that most of them studied how to reduce health risks and promote tourism campaigns or strategies to revive businesses from the pandemic. The research presented in this study focused on designing a customer experience as a survival strategy for hotel businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, this research is also beneficial in terms of academic and operational approaches as follows:

Academic Implications

1) The study sheds light on what key elements are involved in the design of services to enhance the new normal customer experience of luxury chain beach hotels on the Andaman Coast of Thailand. Based on the research, there are seven key elements that can be applied in conjunction with service design and customer experience management in various contexts to know the trends in the behaviors of future hotel guests as COVID-19 continues to have an impact on hotel businesses.

2) The results of this study also reveal the 26 sub-components (observed variables) leading to the development of a service design strategy in times of crisis to support tourism, which will benefit future studies.

Operational Implications

1) This research purposes a service design strategy to enhance the new normal customer experience for luxury chain beach hotels on the Andaman Coast of Thailand, which can be applied to improve and develop the hotel operation services as a guideline to provide their customers with an impressive and memorable experience.

2) This research will be useful for the public sector, private sector, and educational institutions related to the hotel business and the service sectors, such as the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Thai Hotels Association. The results of this research can be used as a guideline for service development to enhance the experience for hotel guests.

Future Research Directions

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 (Esichaikul, Chansawang, Songsoonthornwong, & Kaewudom, 2020). The high end hotel business market tends to be more competitive 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. The COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged marketers to intentionally focus on implementing and designing ways to provide a memorable experience to their guests. Many studies have proposed marketing strategies to help hotels survive this crisis. Scholars have suggested to analyze loyalty behavior through customer's experience factors.

The hotel industry must adapt itself to the effects of COVID-19. As soon as hotels 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, as well as various personal services (Mourmoura, 2020). Additionally, hotel staff will need to sanitize all areas of the hotel (Bove & Benoit, 2020; Sanlier, Sormaz, & Güneş, 2020). It's time for the hotel to leverage all strategies, restore the confidence to their guests, and introduce new service experiences.

From the proposed perspective mentioned earlier, designing customer experience is a vital for marketing scholars and practitioners. Guests may be surprised with the level of service unlike in the past, especially in a service of luxury hotels. Shared space services such as buffet rooms and mini bars, as well as services that require intimacy such as spas, porter services, and valet services may be suspended for a while. Other forms of operation and innovation will be created from this behavior shift. For instance, Jiang and Wen (2020) suggested there were three issues that will be influential to hotel businesses affected by COVID-19: artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, hygiene and cleanliness, and health and health care. Even though many research antecedents, mediators, and moderators have been extensively examined through various service experiences, there is still a need to take other relevant factors into consideration, such as the service journey influencing service experience. In line with Hussain and Khanna (2019), marketing research should examine

both the demand side (customer) and supply side (hotel management), then compare if the antecedents are confirmed and significant according to the hypothesis.

In sum, future research related to this topic should study with the hotel marketers who have authorization and decision power in designing the customer experience from perspective proposed here. Future research should also seek to investigate more factors influencing the guests' experience for international luxury beach hotel chains, develop the guidelines on managing customer experience creating customer loyalty, and propose customer experience management model for international luxury beach hotel chains in Thailand from the perspective of hotel marketers. The sample subjects should be selected from experienced hotel marketers who are professional and have sufficient experience and level of knowledge about the research subject. This will enable them to provide an effective and useful point of view on issues related to the field.

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