

GUIDELINE FOR TOUR OPERATOR BUSINESSES AFTER THE COVID-19 IN THE CONTEXT OF THAILAND

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Abstract: In this qualitative study, data were gathered from tour operator managers, supervisors and administrative staff in Thailand to survey the impact of COVID-19, and adaptation after the crisis for tour operators in Thailand was also collected using in-depth interviews. The study also used a 7Ps Marketing Mix analysis, Crisis Management, and adaptation for tour operator businesses to survive after the COVID-19 crisis. According to the study, 7Ps Marketing Mix is recommended to offer more tailor-made tour programs to attract a new generation of tourists and new services to satisfy a variety of customer needs because manager's perceptions of changing tourist behavior are directly to use of information systems and technology to pull in a new generation of tourists. Tour operating companies must adopt policies and action plans for a successful post-COVID-19 recovery and the company's ability to continue surviving than competing with other companies.

Key words: Tour Operator, Impact and Adaptation, COVID-19 pandemic, Human Resource Management, Crisis Management

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Introduction

In recent decades, tourism has undoubtedly played an essential role in the Thai economy and contributed positively to the overall economy. In 2009, the number of tourist visits to Thailand amounted to 14.15 million, translating into USD13,664.56M in revenue, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2009). Such an unhindered upward trend continued in the following decade, as in 2019, the number of tourists increased to 39.8 million, contributing to the revenue of USD52,525,844,000T (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020) (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2019). The Tourism Authority of Thailand had predicted that a rise of 2.5% from 2019 would be expected in 2020, translating to USD1,093,395.12M. In addition, the estimated revenue from the tourism industry was USD536,513,978,000T, which was an increase of 3% from 2019 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020). Despite a favorable impact on the country's economy derived from tourism, this sector remains extremely sensitive and vulnerable to any

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emerging circumstances (Santos and Moreira, 2021). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) categorizes the tourism-associated crisis into five categories: environmental crisis, social and political crisis, technological crisis, economic crisis and health crisis (Noranitiphadungkarn and Anusonphat, 2020). In the past, some crises occurring both inside the country and overseas have taken a toll on Thailand's tourism industry, especially tsunamis, coups d'état, the lockdown in Bangkok, or marine accidents (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020)

In December 2019, the unprecedented coronavirus epidemic, or COVID-19, broke out in Wuhan, Hubei city, China, and remains in 2022. As a result, various measures were declared to prevent the spread of the virus, e.g., restrictions on all travel, including the temporary suspension of both domestic and international flights (Weed, 2020). The spread of COVID-19 has undoubtedly had severe repercussions all over the world. In addition to soaring rates of deaths and confirmed cases, the outbreak negatively affected the economy by depriving citizens in many countries of their income as well as causing a standstill in commerce. People were terrified of being infected, resulting in a surge in demand for disease prevention supplies (Pholphirul, 2020). Additionally, when the outbreak became more severe, daily travel and tourism restrictions were implemented, and the impact echoed across the tourism industry and others. Sektrakul (2020) highlighted that the impact of COVID-19 on the airline industry, which took place over the outbreak period, involved airspace closures, travel restrictions, and even flight suspensions, generating unprofitable running costs. Even after restrictions were lifted, there were unpreventable impacts on transportation, as stated by Seanyen. et al. (2020). Airspace closures and flight suspensions forced several types of businesses to come to a sudden halt globally, including aviation, lodging, food and beverage, souvenir and car rental, especially tour operator and travel agency businesses, and also affected the tourism industry in Thailand. In 2020, there was an enormous drop of 83.21% (6,702,396 tourists) in the number of foreign tourists from 2019 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020), which tragically contradicted the prediction made by the Tourism Authority of Thailand before the outbreak.

Macroeconomic experts from many institutes have affirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Thailand's macro-economy by suggesting it is descending into a recession. In a technical sense, economic recession refers to the state in which a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at its real prices, compared to the previous quarter, witnesses a decline lasting for at least two quarters. COVID-19 has hit society on a scale transcending that of the "Tom Yum Kung crisis" between 1997 and 1998 (Sudsawasd, 2020). This is consistent with accounts from (Petchsiri, 2020), which confirm that this unprecedented virus outbreak has had an enormous impact on the economy, such that many countries have plunged into a recession.

Thailand is also faced with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the tourism industry and other related industries. The study of Seanyen (2020) pointed out some issues, such as restricting certain aviation routes, dissolving airlines, cutting costs, issuing a layoff order and imposing some travel conditions.

Significant actions that need to be promptly taken after the outbreak relief are that all stakeholders are actively aware of practical problem solving because airline industries are a vital variable of the country's economic drive.

In terms of ASEAN, Peeranon (2020) stated that, under the circumstance of the COVID-19 outbreak in which all economic systems, hotels and tourism businesses were hit hard, businesses had no choice but to pull together to combat the virus.

This was also a test to see whether the ASEAN countries could once again help one another and their 650 million citizens to navigate this crisis after many successful collaborations against past crises, including the financial collapse known as the "Tom Yum Kung crisis" starting in Thailand in 1997, the "SARS outbreak crisis" in 2003, and the "Subprime mortgage crisis" or the "Hamburger crisis" in 2008.

As a result, various measures were declared to prevent the spread of the virus, e.g., restrictions on all travel, including the temporary suspension of both domestic and international flights (Weed, 2020). Additionally, researchers have used crisis indicators to protect tourism businesses (Taneja, Pryor, and Zhang, 2010), communication and branding (Pongsakornrunsilp et al., 2021), corporate social responsibility (Ursic and Cestar, 2022; García-Rodríguez et al., 2013) and system vulnerability (Qin and Chen, 2022).

The COVID-19 epidemic, from the end of 2019 until 2022, has thrown the tourism industry and other related industries severely off balance. There is a knowledge gap in the study of marketing theories on the topic of "The Guideline for Tour Operator Businesses have performed after the COVID-19 Pandemic; the case of Thailand". Tour operator businesses could adapt themselves to overcome the crisis by using 7Ps Marketing Mix model for COVID-19 as a guideline. The researchers aimed to investigate the impacts inflicted upon tour operator businesses by the outbreak and to integrate marketing factors into the study of how travel agency businesses adjusted according to the coronavirus outbreak in 2019, turning the crisis into future opportunities for business operations and increasing the confidence of both employees and tourists.

Literature Review

Crisis management is a strategic tool to be used by administrators in dealing with unexpected or uncertain situations. Crisis events can be natural, financial, disaster, or disease epidemics. Tourism businesses have been affected by that crisis. (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020). Crisis management helps all stakeholders at the micro-level to survive and recover from damaging situations. In the future, it will be able to expand development at the macro level and develop sustainability (Sausmarez, 2009). A clear first step is to ensure that the economy recovers (Stead and Stead, 2004). Crisis management can be divided into 3 levels: pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis, and it can be implemented based on the 5Ps: predict, prevent, prepare, perform and post-action and assessment (National Security Council).

Global growth will lead us in the right direction. Alternatively, crises or risk situations will inevitably impact businesses, but if a business is stable, flexible enough, and capable of adaptation, it can overcome them.

Finally, we are always vigilant and ready to take intensive precautions against a new outbreak as soon as viruses mutate and can stay around for a long time. SMEs should also consider the development of strategies to rehabilitate their businesses by connecting the principle of crisis management with the principle of marketing, which are linked by a human resources element, allowing travel management systems to be more efficient and sustainable in the event of another crisis (Siriphattrasophon, 2020).

Numerous factors can negatively impact the tourism industry, such as environmental, social, political, terrorism, epidemic, health, and economic crises. Many unstable political situations in Thailand have significantly impacted the operation of the tourism industry (Noranitiphadungkarn and Anusonphat, 2020). These are detailed as environmental factors influencing the tourism industry change over time. Changes in global trends or mega-trends, such as global warming due to climate change phenomena, cause seasonal changes. Tsunamis and flooding situations have a negative influence on tourism (Wongmanee, 2018).

Turning to the consequences of the epidemic outbreak, as an example, Dombey (2004) discovered that the SARS outbreak had a significant economic impact on the Chinese tourism industry because tourism is a multi-billion-dollar industry in China and around the world. This is consistent with the findings of Hai (2004), who discovered that by the end of 2003, China's tourism revenue had dropped by 50-60. The SARS outbreak also had a political and social impact (Dombey, 2004).

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has significantly impacted the global economy and Pakistan (Shafi, Liu, and Ren, 2020). Small and medium size of businesses is the most severely impacted because epidemic crises cause financial disruption. The interruption or slowing down of the supply chain reduced demand and sales and profits. More than 83% of the businesses had no backup plans to deal with unpredictable situations. More than two thirds of the organizations polled said they would be unable to continue operations if the lockdown lasted longer than two months, in Thailand, small businesses who did not have sufficient funds gradually went out of business, including hotels and restaurants (E-Finance-Thai, 2020). This differs from a study by Bakar and Rosbi (2020), in which two small Malaysian businesses in Sabah attempted to adjust their strategies to survive and grow when others had gone out of business.

Sihabutr (2014) investigated the financial strength of tour operators in Thailand in the aftermath of the economic and social crisis in Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Nong Khai. According to the findings, the financial strength of the tour operators in all three provinces influenced their ability to adapt. By categorizing entrepreneurs into three groups, Safe Zone, Gray Zone, and Weak Zone, it is clear that, despite the crises of 2007 and 2012, the entrepreneurs' financial performance was not affected in any of the three provinces, showing the operators' ability to adapt well in crises.

Many tourism businesses have been impacted by the crisis caused by COVID-19 outbreak. The first thing that occurred and was immediately noticeable was the disruption of travel (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Different measures were implemented to prevent a lockdown, such as home–local–state quarantine, state of emergency, curfews, social distancing, fit-to-fly (Chamnina,2020), restricting certain aviation routes, dissolving airlines, cutting running costs and issuing a layoff order and imposing some travel conditions (Seanyen et al.,2020). Pongsakornrangsilpa et al. (2021) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the most economically viable solution for tour operator owners in Thailand was to close temporarily. Keeping on staff when the businesses had no income was futile. The study discovered that it also affected the behavior and attitudes towards travel, such as self-awareness, fear, anxiety, and panic, affecting travel and tourism, including domestic travel. There has been a decrease in the number of tourists visiting Thailand. As a result, tourism demand is drastically and rapidly declining. Tourists became less confident due to the crisis situation (Suwannat, 2020; Chamnina, 2020). Most customers who had booked tours preferred to cancel rather than change their plans. Corporate customers who had not cancelled the trip chose to travel to a less risky destination or postpone their journey instead (Suwannat, 2020). Some entrepreneurs were forced to cease operations, and revenues fell due to closures in various supporting sectors (Fabeil, Pazim, and Langgat, 2020). After the outbreak, all stakeholders must be made actively aware of practical problem solving because airline industries are a vital variable of the country's economic drive.

In terms of the adaptation of tourism businesses when entering the ASEAN Economic Community (Rattanpeanthamma, 2015) found that the private sector has accelerated the development of its capacity and administrative capabilities, service skills, language skills, SWOT analysis, business alliances, and social media marketing by defining both passive and proactive strategies to expand their share in the ASEAN tourism service market.

In the context of globalization, Thailand's tourism industry is expanding. However, a portion of travel agencies and tour operators have been replaced by online travel agencies (OTAs) with support from the government sector, which focuses on economic reform through innovation and drives management through technology. Furthermore, SMEs are encouraged to expand their organizational potential by developing and focusing on research, as it has been discovered that travel agencies can adapt to survive.

The context of connecting innovation concepts and theories can be divided into six dimensions: product development, process innovation, management innovation, innovation in business models, marketing creativity, and technological advancement to match the fluctuation of tourist behavior in Thailand (Attanasi et al., 2013). In the economic and Thai political crisis, tourism business operators in Chiang Mai province have adapted products in terms of price processes, distribution channels, personnel, marketing promotion, and image, respectively (Maitrikaew, 2011)

Less drastic business adaptations include lowering production costs and reducing services, either via a reduction in the consumption of raw materials or various inputs or both. This could start with reducing overtime work, working hours or normal days without pay. Salary and bonus reductions, layoffs, reductions in capital use, equipment, tools, reductions in office equipment, the lease of space, etc., will undoubtedly have both direct and indirect impacts on factors such as passenger transportation, restaurants, personal services and recreational activities (Chamnina, 2020).

This is consistent with the findings of Bartik (2020), who studied the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses. The findings were as follows: 1) After only a few weeks of the crisis, many businesses were forced to close their doors; 2) The risk of closure was inversely related to the anticipated time of the crisis. Furthermore, businesses have widely disparate views on how to combat the COVID-19 epidemic; 3) Many small businesses are financially vulnerable. During the survey, it was discovered that there was enough cash on hand to last for only two weeks. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act will provide relief assistance to major travel businesses, but they will continue to face accessibility issues (Bartik et al., 2020). Due to bureaucratic challenges and eligibility issues, even state policy assistance to tourism businesses is insufficient to assist MSMEs through the crisis. However, these precautions will allow them to deal with the aftermath (Shafi et al., 2020). Pongsakornrangsilpa et al. (2021) suggested that the solution for tourism businesses is an adaptation by down-sizing the company's scale and limiting the use of human resources by using IT instead.

In a study using data mining techniques to present travellers' reactions during the COVID-19 outbreak, 23,515 data from forums in the United States, Europe and Asia were used. Data analysis found the tourism industry particularly vulnerable to the global financial crisis. With the spread of worrying news among tourists, tourists often cancel or delay their travel at the last minute. An in-depth examination of travel insurance benefits and refunds due to trip cancellations was conducted based on firsthand experience. Travel insurance is a hot topic currently. The travel industry can be revitalized by offering travel packages that include travel insurance (Uğur and Akbıyık, 2020).

Knowing the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic are also beneficial to developing or upgrading tourism businesses. Prideaux (2020) discovered in their study that COVID-19 pandemic had taught the global tourism industry a valuable lesson regarding the economic transformation required to combat climate change; it showed that COVID-19 outbreak is an opportunity to change tourism from its current state. Higgins (2020) studied the topic of "Socializing tourism for social and ecological justice following COVID-the 19"; the analysis revealed that it could be a great opportunity for tourism businesses to plan and implement a new tourism system (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 is an opportunity to transform tourism into a more sustainable form by covering and caring for a large number of stakeholders who depend on tourism (Cheer, 2020).

To combat the COVID-19 epidemic, all countries must band together. In the business sector, particularly the 7Ps Marketing Mix adaptation, namely, product, price, process, location for distribution channels, personnel, marketing promotion, and image, should be used for potential development and tasks in a variety of fields, including building groups, building business partnerships and promoting more social media marketing. On the other hand, the COVID-19 crisis provides an excellent opportunity to plan and implement a new tourism system that prioritizes the rights and interests of tourists by creating innovative organizations and guidelines for managing tourism businesses in order to survive a crisis.

Research hypothesis

Tour operator businesses affected by COVID-19 pandemic must manage the crisis and adapt themselves to recover the business for post-COVID-19 by using the 7Ps of the marketing mix and crisis adaptation principles.

Research Methodology

The study was qualitative research, data collection using a semi-structured interview, focusing on the crisis management, impact and adaption of tour operator businesses during the COVID-19 outbreak since October 2020. Department of Tourism and Sports has operated for over 3 years in Thailand's Bangkok, Phuket and Surat Thani provinces. Purposive samples were top tour operator businesses and were willing to share data. Informants were administrators and employees who were equipped with experience, expertise and decision-making power over actions related to their responsibility. Data were collected online based on applying the 7Ps Marketing Mix from a total of 11 businesses that consented.

Research Results

In the current study, the interview was divided into three sections:

Section 1: Demographic data of Key informants

The researchers collected the interviews during October 2020, which comprised a total of 11 interviews from 10 companies in Thailand, such as Destination Asia (Thailand) Co., Ltd.; I Asia (Thailand) Co., Ltd.; EXO Travel Co., Ltd.; Celtours (Thailand) Co., Ltd; Irin Travel and Tour Co., Ltd; Vitamin Sea Co., Ltd.; Go Thailand Tours Co., Ltd; FAVSTAY Co., Ltd; Asian Trails Co., Ltd-1; and Asian Trails Co., Ltd-2. The results were presented using the reference symbols ranging from TOT#1 to TOT#11 randomly; 11 samples comprised key informants with decision-making powers and executives in their organization. Some of them had experience from many places but had not been at their current company for a long time and were chosen for this interview.

Table 1. Characteristics of informants from tour operator businesses in Thailand

Informants	Position	Age	Educational Level	Type of Tour Operator	Years of Experience
TOT#1	RSVN & Quote Sup	41	Bachelor Degree	Inbound	20
TOT#2	Sales & RSVN	48	Bachelor Degree	Inbound	30
TOT#3	Internet Sales Sup.	40	Bachelor Degree	Inbound	15
TOT#4	Supervisor	44	Master Degree Bachelor	Inbound	10
TOT#5	Tour Operation Managing	23	Degree Bachelor	Inbound	3
TOT#6	Director	51	Degree Bachelor	Domestic & Inbound	10
TOT#7	Tour Operator	25	Degree Bachelor	Domestic & Inbound	4
TOT#8	Product & Quote Team Manager	53	Bachelor Degree	Inbound	30
TOT#9	Business Development Consultant	39	Bachelor Degree	Inbound	13
TOT#10	Reservation Tour	46	Bachelor Degree	Inbound	22
TOT#11	Administration	47	Bachelor Degree	Inbound	25

The characteristics data suggested that all the informants were female; 10 informants had a bachelor's degree, and one had a master's degree. They were categorized based on age, where the majority were older than 40 years; most of the informants had more than 10 years of experience (10-30 years). The majority were also on incomes higher than THB 35,000. The informants' positions in their companies varied: Tour Operation, Reservations, Tour Administrator, Sales and Reservations, Internet Sales Supervisor, Reservation and Quotation Supervisor, Supervisor, Product and Quote Team Manager, Business Development Consultant, and Managing Director. Data on the type of businesses revealed that most operated as inbound tour operators, except for two, which operated as domestic and inbound tour operators.

Section 2: Impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on Tour Operators' employees in Thailand

From the interviews, the researchers summarized data on the impacts of COVID-19 on tour operator business employees collected through in-depth employee interviews in four major aspects, as described below. In terms of salary, most of the employees

from 8 tour operators had their salaries cut by 50% and were temporarily suspended, and 3 tour operators were offered some leave without pay.

In terms of hours, 2 tour operators were not affected because they converted from working on-site to working from home instead. The majority resorted to a reduction in working hours by taking a voluntary leave of absence, a reduction in working hours each week for 4 tour operators, a reduction in working hours of 1-2 days for 1 tour operator, a reduction in working hours for 1 tour operator, and a reduction in working hours of more than 5 days for 3 tour operators.

To reduce the companies' expenses, 6 tour operators had to lay off some employees to retain only necessary positions, and 5 tour operators had to announce temporary business shutdowns. In 1 tour operator business, executives consented to have their base salaries cut by 100% during the pandemic.

In other aspects, it was found that some employees were laid off while some were on furlough, as per the explanation below:

"...Company began to implement, 1) pay-cut measure in an initial phase, 2) temporary shutdown to stop paying salaries, employees were also asked with the Social Security to receive a 62% of a salary for three months compensate. Problems following were with delayed payments or installment payments, meaning doubly reduced income..."(TOT#3)

"...unable to organize a tour causing a temporary business shutdown..."(TOT#6)

"...employees changed in lifestyle, sky train services with restricted number of passengers causing a long queue, fewer seats at restaurants, inability to meet with friends..."(TOT#8)

"...complying with a company's work from home's policy increasing household expenses e.g. utility bills..."(TOT#10)

"...some amounts of expenses with decreased incomes..."(TOT#11)

For the above reasons, the tour operator business adapted for survival, and the employees adapted themselves by choosing a cheaper means of transportation and cutting back on socialization. Some stated that their reduced incomes collided with rising expenses incurred by a WFH policy.

Section 3: Adaptation of Tour Operators to the COVID-19 pandemic

An aspect of marketing worth studying is the adaptation of tour operators to COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews to gather the opinions of employees on how Tour Operator Businesses have performed after the COVID-19 Pandemic, focused on the 7Ps Marketing Mix, namely, 1) product, 2) price, 3) place, 4) promotion, 5) people, 6) physical evidence and 7) process. The details are summarized in Figure 1.

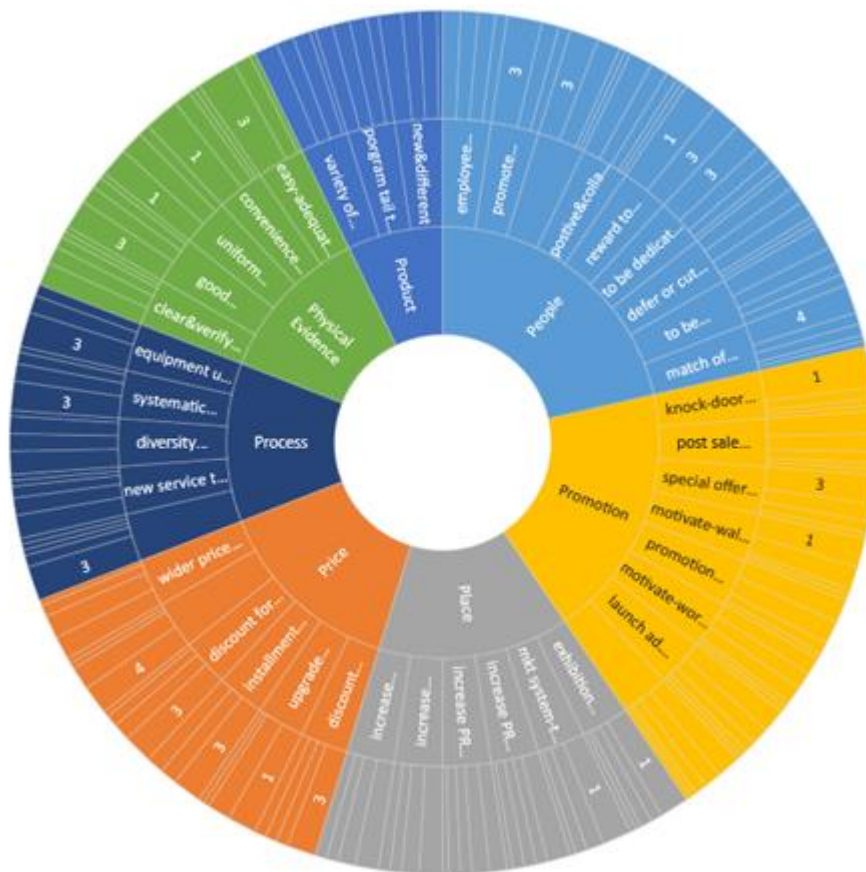


Figure 1: Diagrams The 7Ps Marketing Mix of adaptation following the COVID-19 outbreak.

In Figure 1, the details of the 7Ps Marketing Mix of adaptation from COVID-19 outbreak are summarized as follows:

- 1) Adaptation of product: The opinions suggested that most tour operator employees preferred companies to adapt tour programs at a sometimes-to-often level by offering new, different products. However, some argued against the adaptation of tour programs in relation to their difference, flexibility and variety.
- 2) Adaptation of price: The data demonstrated that the employees of most of the tour operators preferred the prices of a tour program to be adapted at a fair-to-often level; prices were reasonable when compared to rival companies. Discounts were given to those paying in advance. Dates could be set for installment payments, and cheaper rates were offered for group bookings. However, employees did not express the opinion that prices had to be raised to upgrade the program.
- 3) Adaptation of place: The opinions indicated that employees in most of the companies would prefer companies to set up a marketing system both offline and

online; join exhibition booths at tourism trade fairs both within the country and outside, via tourism magazines, journals, and selling through online agencies; and improve sales channels via both online and offline media. Nevertheless, the idea of branching into website sales and increasing the public relation volume through online platforms was rated at a sometimes-to-often level.

4) Adaptation of promotion: The opinions suggested that most employees of most tour operators would prefer promotions involving diverse tour programs and launching advertisements, e.g., appealing and updated banners and brochures on a webpage, at an often level. The informants rated special offers for group bookings, such as discounts, exchanges, giveaways, and complimentary deals, increasing motivation and positive reviews from satisfied customers, as well as promotions to meet customers' needs at a sometimes-to-often level.

On the contrary, company adaptation for increasing motivation among agencies, corporations, governments and walk-in customers was rated at the never level, but visiting paying customers at their homes was still supported.

5) Adaptation of people: Most of the employees agreed on adaptation involving promoting employees to higher positions, building positive customer relationships, and establishing a unique organizational culture at a sometimes level, which showed a sense of commitment, pride in their companies, building morale and encouraging employees to be dedicated to their organizations. Training employees to multitask is needed. Most agreed on matching the right employees with each position at an often level.

The practices most employees preferred to maintain or not to adapt were giving rewards/compliments to employees who showed good performance, which was announced to the whole company. Nevertheless, there was still an equal number of employees vouching for adaptation in such areas.

6) Adaptation of physical evidence: Most employees agreed on the adaptation of physical evidence at a sometimes level, namely, a) the company's easily accessible location; b) the provision of adequate parking spaces; c) beautiful, appealing and clean aesthetics; d) employees being well prepared, dedicated to providing high-quality hospitality, friendly, well-mannered, and providing clear and verifiable information on prices, terms, conditions, and services.

On the contrary, most employees saw no need for adaptation, including having conveniently accessible, quick websites with attractive designs and updated information and employees neatly dressed in a uniform representing the company's identity.

7) Adaptation of processes: The opinions suggested that employees of most of the tour operators agreed on adaption in this aspect at a sometimes level in every topic, particularly having supplies and work equipment whose quality measures up to the standard, delivering services professionally, making a good impression on customers and operating under a systematic process, allowing traceable checks in case of any mistakes.



Figure 2: Tour operation management systems using 7Ps Marketing Mix in a Crisis situation.

Figure 2 shows the 7Ps Marketing Mix in tour operator business, which are essential factors for business adaption systematically of the entrepreneur's marketing principle for achieving sustainable development goals; economic, social, and environmental. The adaptive feedback led to the development of marketing factors as a marketing cycle, with the reaching to reach a sustainable equilibrium at the conclusion.

Discussion

Crisis management theory, the 7Ps Marketing Mix, and human resource management are linked by a human resource element, which is important in any leadership position. The leaders of the organization must have the leadership skills to make quick decisions in every situation, especially in uncertain/crises. Both leaders and followers must have the knowledge and ability to make predictions, pro-plan, and deal with crises situations effectively because product advantages and high-quality service performance affect customer perceived value. (Kan, T.C., 2022). They must be creative and have the technical skills to apply marketing principles to tour programs that can reach different customer target groups in accordance with changes in their needs. Even in normal situations, staff in the organization must have good interpersonal skills when offering services to build relationships with customers and maintain the image of the organization.

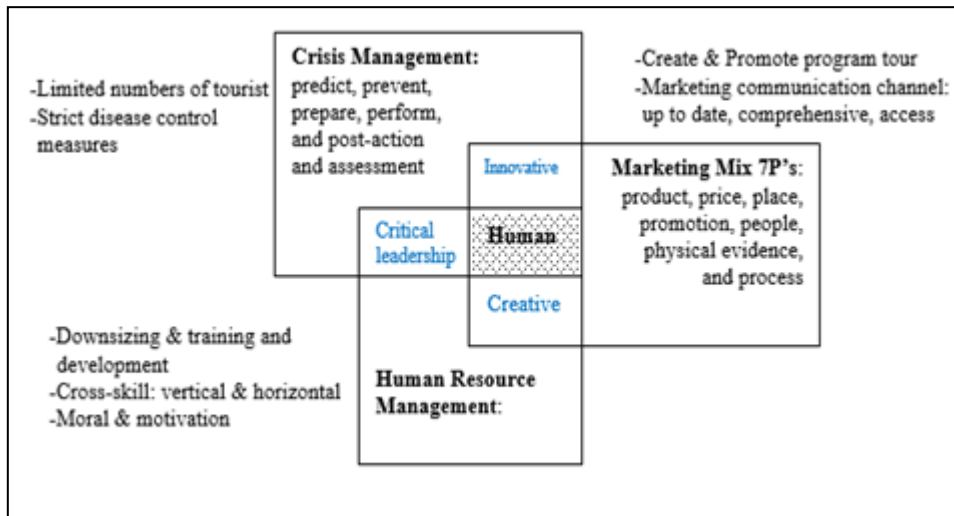


Figure 3. Adaptation of tour operators in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Conclusion

The interview revealed that the majority of employees had more than 10 years of experience, had obtained a bachelor's degree to earn a higher salary than the average national income, and worked at an inbound tour operator company. The results demonstrated that job promotion and salary raises depend on employees' capacities and company policies, which were not related to the employees' years of experience. The result focused on 4 major aspects; salary, working hours, expenses and others. The results revealed the following: 1) For salary, most underwent a pay-cut policy and unpaid furlough 2) For working hours, it was found that the majority of employees faced a working-hour reduction policy. However, this measure was not applied in some companies, but employees were asked to convert from on-site working to working from home 3) Regarding expenses, it was found that most employees incurred the same expenses despite reduced incomes. In regard to the companies that laid off some employees and announced a temporary shutdown to save on costs 4) Other impacts were layoffs and earning no income but incurring the same expenses. This resulted in some employees adjusting accordingly by setting a new living routine to make income, selling food, cosmetics, clothes, etc. Some decided to move to rural areas and engage in vegetable planting or gardening. This adjustment helped them form a new normal way of living.

The following is related to the 7Ps Marketing Mix:

1) Adaptation of product: Data suggested that most employees would like their companies to adapt their product (tour program) to novelty, flexibility and variety. The latter opinion was attributed to the fact that it has already become common practice for companies to offer tailor-made tour programs on new routes.

- 2) Adaption of price: Most of the employees were in favor of adapting their prices. However, the notion of price reductions was not endorsed; high prices had to be maintained to denote product and service quality superiority. For instance, the standard prices for European inbound visitors would normally be set to a certain standard differing from other groups. Tour operator business companies with market shares of the same customer groups have long confirmed such a norm. The original prices would not be reduced to attract customers with a lower budget to services standardly classified as premium tourism services.
- 3) Adaptation of place: Most of the employees would like to maintain the originally employed channels of sales and marketing both offline and online: telemarketing, publicizing services in tourism magazines and journals, exhibition booths at tourism trade fairs in local and overseas, email marketing and sales through online agencies. They claimed that the original sales channels were sufficiently effective. However, important information on tour programs on a company's website must be up-to-date and comprehensive.
- 4) Adaptation of promotion: The employees agreed on increasing motivation among agents, corporate, governments and walk-in customers. Additionally, customer visits had to be maintained since customers would be updated more clearly on the full details of the products, services, terms and conditions. This method was another way to create a good rapport with customers.
- 5) Adaptation of people: Most employees agreed on adaptation by promoting positive customer relations, establishing a unique culture, which promotes a sense of commitment and pride in their companies, building morale and encouraging employees to be dedicated to their organizations and organizing training to develop multi-tasking employees. The majority agreed on matching the right employees with the right positions at an often level, meaning that the companies endorsed multi-taskers but did not notify those employees. When unskilled employees were assigned to the positions without being trained accordingly, mentors must coordinate with them. To fill the gaps in job-related knowledge, some training may need to be organized to equip employees with the required skills and knowledge before reassigning them to another responsibility. However, the employees preferred their companies to continue to present rewards to employees who demonstrated good performance and officially announce this to the company.
- 6) Adaptation of physical evidence: Most of the employees would like to adapt physical evidence, including easy accessibility, the provision of adequate parking spaces, and beautiful, appealing and clean aesthetics. Personal qualities are among the most important factors to making a good first impression on customers, such as professional dress, employees being well-prepared and dedicated to good hospitality, friendliness, good manners, and providing a display of clear and verifiable information about the prices, terms and conditions of the tour. This shows the company's preparedness and the respectable attributes of the employees in this type of business.

7) Adaptation of processes: Most employees would like to adapt supplies and work equipment so that their quality measures up to the standard whilst delivering services professionally, creating a good impression with the customers, operating under a systematic process, and allowing traceable checks in case of any mistakes made. The supplies and equipment that the employees utilize for their online or WFH should be provided to ensure fairness across employee and managerial positions.

These opinions on adaptations of the 7Ps evidence that providing more tailor-made tour programs and new services to meet various customer needs should be realized by managers. These employee perspectives and opinions on tourism are directly related to the use of information systems and technology and changes in tourist behavior. Therefore, the employees appreciate the need for companies to add more tour programs or other services to attract a new generation of tourists.

The adaptation of the 7Ps is the main role of the manager, who should understand and have a vision of how to manage these 7 elements effectively for the benefit of the organization and personnel in order to encourage them to have both the physical and mental power to drive businesses through the crisis and allow them to continue to develop.

Suggestions for employees in managerial positions

The tour operators' employees stated the following recommendations regarding customers, employees, marketing and management in the crisis:

"...Strict stipulations should be imposed on inbound tourists to prevent a repeated outbreak..."(TOT#1)

"...In the future, more restrictions on the number of visitors may be introduced..." (TOT#4)

"...Given that the companies' customers are inbound visitors from EU and USA, unless the outbreak situation in these countries improves, their returns to Thailand will be on long pause. So, during this time, tour business companies should take time on improving the tour programs or staff training to save the budget for employees' salary increased, and maintain a good connection for future customer return..."(TOT#3)

"...Mostly, the tour operation agents are in a difficult position because partners choose to seek customers by themselves to reduce commission payment by marketing their services via social media. Therefore, a training program on Online Marketing should be added..." (TOT#9)

"...Training programs to develop low proficient employees should be organized such as a training on language skills and inspection trip..." (TOT#11)

"...Both domestic and international tourism activities should be promoted more to stimulate the spending by offering appealing promotions in coordination with tour operator companies and the government..." (TOT#6)

"...Making terms and conditions, cancellation policy and payment more flexible should ease tourists' decision to travel more..." (TOT#8)

Suggestions

This study was limited of small sample size: qualitative data were collected from only 11 tour operators' businesses using in-depth semi-structured interviews; however, most tour operators had been affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The researchers propose the following suggestions:

1. This adaptation analysis based on the 7Ps Marketing Mix can shed light on crisis management. In the future, the impacts and adaptation of tourism from a tourist perspective should be investigated to gain an insight into customers' needs and behavior, so that tour operators can apply this knowledge appropriately.
2. Tour operators across Thailand and worldwide have been hit by the impacts of COVID-19. Therefore, studies whose scopes extend to all types of tourism businesses in all areas will effectively project the overall impacts on Thailand's tourism businesses in both quantitative and qualitative sense. These businesses will be equipped to face new waves of crises and quicker at strategizing, seeking ways to adapt themselves sustainably. This is because, in addition to tour operator businesses, the impacts of crises also cause difficulties at the household level and severe setbacks for individuals in the business sectors.
3. According to the study by Boonon et al. (2020), travel agents "TUI" in Thailand possess great potential in selling and promoting health tourism-related travel programs. This is part of a tour program which specifies what tour operation businesses must do, who is expected to improve, and how they should extend their knowledge and understanding of health tourism-related travel programs to provide accurate and thorough information to customers. This is one of the many ways to survive after COVID-19 outbreak.

Recommendation for future crisis management

1. Businesses should expand the potential of their employees in response to emerging changes. All uncertainties are derived from crises, the economy, politics, and disease outbreaks. These ever-changing circumstances necessitate the preparedness of employees of all levels to handle any changes affecting their duty and responsibility. They must build confidence in handling unexpected situations, which will affect the image of the organization in future activities, playing a role in the economy at personal and national levels.
2. The business should adapt by establishing business connections to increase opportunities for diverse and flexible business channels.
3. The business should adjust its perspectives on tourism marketing to accommodate the different types and levels of customers to adapt to situations or crises at hand.
4. Technological development has undeniably meant a huge and modern leap in business operations. Such movement also necessitates adaptation in the tourism industry to stay competitive in terms of advertisement, financial administration and management, marketing, and customer communication.

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WYTYCZNE DLA PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW TURYSTYCZNYCH PO COVID-19 W KONTEKŚCIE TAJLANDII

Streszczenie: W tym badaniu jakościowym zebrano dane od menedżerów, nadzorców i pracowników administracyjnych touroperatorów w Tajlandii, aby zbadać wpływ COVID-19, a adaptacja po kryzysie dla touroperatorów w Tajlandii została również zebrana za pomocą wywiadów pogłębionych. Badanie wykorzystało również analizę 7Ps Marketing Mix, zarządzanie kryzysem i adaptację dla firm turystycznych, aby przetrwać po kryzysie COVID-19. Według badania, 7Ps Marketing Mix jest zalecany, aby oferować bardziej dopasowane programy wycieczek, aby przyciągnąć nową generację turystów i nowe usługi, aby zaspokoić różnorodne potrzeby klientów, ponieważ postrzeganie przez menedżerów zmieniających się zachowań turystów jest bezpośrednio związane z wykorzystaniem systemów informacyjnych i technologii, aby przyciągnąć nową generację turystów. Firmy turystyczne muszą przyjąć politykę i plany działania dla udanej naprawy po COVID-19 i zdolności firmy do dalszego przetrwania niż konkurowania z innymi firmami.

Słowa kluczowe: Tour Operator, wpływ i adaptacja, pandemia COVID-19, zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi, zarządzanie kryzysowe

泰国 "十九大 "后旅游经营者业务指南

摘要：在这项定性研究中，从泰国的旅游经营者经理、主管和行政人员那里收集数据，调查COVID-19的影响，并通过深度访谈收集泰国旅游经营者在危机后的适应情况。该研究还采用了7Ps营销组合分析，危机管理，以及旅游经营者企业在COVID-19危机后的适应。根据研究，7Ps营销组合被建议提供更多量身定制的旅游项目，以吸引新一代的游客和新的服务，以满足客户的各种需求，因为经理对游客行为变化的看法是直接使用信息系统和技术来拉拢新一代的游客。旅游经营公司必须采取政策和行动计划，以实现COVID-19后的成功复苏和公司继续生存的能力，而不是与其他公司竞争

关键字。旅游经营者，影响和适应，COVID-19大流行病，人力资源管理，危机管理