



**IMPACT OF ONLINE FEEDBACK AND HOTEL'S
RESPONSE TO CONSUMER'S DECISION
MAKING PROCESS**

BY

MISS PATRAPORN SRI-UTENCHAI

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAM IN MARKETING
(INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM)
FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND ACCOUNTANCY
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2014
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INDEPENDENT STUDY

BY

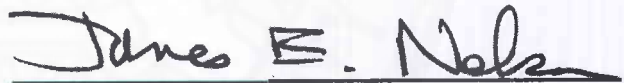
MISS PATRAPORN SRI-UTENCHAI

ENTITLED

IMPACT OF ONLINE FEEDBACK AND HOTEL'S RESPONSE TO
CONSUMER'S DECISION MAKING PROCESS

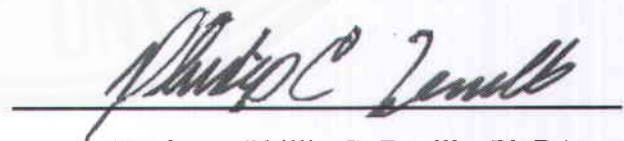
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the degree of Master of Science Program in Marketing (International Program)
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Chairman



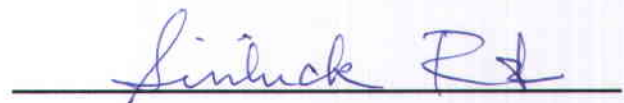
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Author	Miss Patraporn Sri-Utenchai
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Independent Study Advisor	Professor Phillip C. Zerrillo, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

The Internet is now easy to access for everyone at a minimal cost and it has become an essential source of information to influence the consumer's decision-making process. Compared with information from brand / product's websites, consumers tend to trust user-generated content or online reviews from user's experience more. That is, consumers believe peer reviews are a more reliable source of information before a purchase decision as it is perceived as less biased. For manufacturers or service providers, user-generated content has also become an important tool for assessing brand reputation, managing that reputation or position in the market and gaining vital consumer insights for product and or service development.

These findings are especially true in the hospitality industry wherein the service cannot be evaluated before booking. In this domain, user-generated content has become even more powerful. Online review sites continue to have a great impact on the hospitality industry. Most travelers today, would not make a booking decision unless they have read reviews from experienced guests. Other than the feedback itself, how hotels respond to this feedback is no less important than the feedback's content.

Therefore, hoteliers should realize changes in this evolving industry and adapt themselves to the changing behavior and attitude of their customers. The hoteliers need to not only understand the new business landscape but also be able to tackle feedback and reviews from their customers as professional input in order to gain hotel reputation. Finally, hoteliers could obtain the amount of potential customers through the online review as another communication channel to customers.

This study is intended to investigate a contemporary topic in applied marketing. The study is intended to help hoteliers understand the consumer decision making process through online reviews in order to tackle customer satisfaction and the hotel's reputation as a professional.

Keywords: online review, hotel review, word of mouth

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Miss Patraporn Sri-Utenchai



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, technology has altered the consumer's journey in the purchasing decision. Increased adoption of Internet search has turned the online media into a key communication channel where consumers and business or even consumer and consumer interact with each other. The Internet has become a powerful channel in influencing the consumer's decision-making process due to the easy accessibility to large amounts of information and lower search cost. (Daniel and Klimis, 1999).

Other than getting information from brand or product websites, many consumers search for online reviews for guidance in brand and or product comparisons. Consumers are more likely to share their negative experiences online because the anonymity of a person on the Internet prevents them from facing any social consequences (Woong Yun & Park, 2011).

This is especially true in the hotel business in which intangible products cannot be evaluated before consumption and are perceived as a high-risk purchase (Lewis and Chambers 2000), and word-of-mouth becomes even more powerful online. Online travel reviews are changing the entire industry. According to a study from TripAdvisor, 93 percent of travelers worldwide say that their booking decisions are influenced by online reviews while 53 percent of respondents would not book a hotel without any review on it (Tripadvisor.com, 2013). User generated content such as reviews or feedback are becoming a key factor for customer decision making in the hotel industry.

Particularly, online review sites continue to create a great impact on the hospitality industry, which represents \$116 billion in the US alone. According to the Cornell's research, it was stated that the impact of online reviews and social media has now exceed an expected level within the hotel industry. Hotel executives have realized the value of online reviews and social media as a key source of customer insight, and as a tool to achieve operational and service excellence. (hotelschool.cornell.edu.2015)

Therefore, it is becoming more and more important for hoteliers to understand the consumer's behavior and attitude toward online reviews so that hoteliers are able

to manage the hotel's reputation by addressing negative feedback as a professional and ultimately essential insight to obtain a competitive advantage and insight in terms of revenue management.

Objectives

The scope of this study is to investigate a contemporary topic in applied marketing. The study is designed to help hoteliers understand the consumer decision making process through online reviews in order to tackle negative feedback and also be able to recover the customer satisfaction and the hotel's reputation through their professionalism. The research objectives are to:

1. To provide a demographic and a lifestyle profile of the consumers who prefer checking online reviews before booking a room
2. To understand consumer behavior in booking a hotel for each purpose, leisure or business and including the membership program of the hotel
3. To study how the consumer goes through the online review before making a hotel booking decision.
4. To understand how the online review affects the consumers' decision making process and how each kind of hotel's response could improve an audiences' attitude toward that hotel.
5. To identify the appropriate way to manage the online review in order to improve customer satisfaction and the hotel's reputation

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Solomon 2012, “consumer behavior is a study of the processes when consumers, both individual and group, searching for, choosing, buying, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services to satisfy their needs, wants and desires.”

The official definition of consumer behavior is defined by Belch, 1998 as "The study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society."

The study of consumer decision-making processes are reviewed to help the company management develop their marketing campaigns and marketing strategies to reach consumers effectively by understanding what is going on inside customers' head. Consumer decision-making models are commonly used in marketing research and studies to structure theory and research.

There is a widely used model of the consumer buying decision process developed by Engel, Blackwell and Kollat in 1968. The process has been divided into five main stages and described as following (Perreau, 2013);

Stage	Description
1) Problem/Need Recognition	The most important stage describing the gap between the actual situation and the desired one. The consumers perceive this gap as important then motivate the need to solve the problem.
2) Information Search	Once the need is recognized, consumers start to seek for the possible solution from both internal information and external information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal information – the information in their memory, past experience with the brand / product or opinion they have in their mind • External information – information obtained from friends, family, media or user's review

Stage	Description
3) Evaluation of Alternatives	After the information collection, consumer would be able to evaluate the alternatives based on their own criteria to find the most suitable for their needs. The higher level of involvement of the consumer, the more number of alternatives the consumers consider.
4) Purchase Decision	The consumers found the best alternative for their need then make a purchase. Their decision is based on their evaluation process.
5) Post-Purchase Behavior	Once customer have purchased and used the product / service, they would evaluate the actual performance with their expectation whether it is the right decision or not. Whether positive or negative, consumer might share their opinion toward the brand / product to their friends, family and especially in social network.

Customers usually searched for online reviews before making a purchase decision on any product or service. (Kim, Mattila & Baloglu, 2011). Professional experts are used to review the products or services since they are more persuasive than non-experts (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). However, some studies concluded that people believe the reviews or recommendation by fellow consumers rather than the review from professionals since they are perceived as less biased and more reliable.

Social media has been seen as playing an increasingly important role in many aspects of the hospitality industry, including guest satisfaction and process improvement. Several researchers have found that hotel reviews have impact on customer's purchase decisions. Consumers would consider hotels that they are aware of. After information searching, consumers would create a consideration set consisting of alternative hotels that they have positive attitudes toward. Both positive and negative reviews could increase awareness and improve attitude toward hotels,

especially for the lesser-known hotel (Vermeulen & Seeger, 2009). Online hotel reviews could lead customers to a consideration set for hotel (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Jang, Prasad, & Ratchford, 2012). Therefore, it can be assumed that hotel reviews have a significant impact on customer's attitude toward the hotel and consequently the hotel's revenues.



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research was conducted employing two approaches: exploratory research and descriptive research. The process began by investigating secondary data to understand the broad picture of the hotel industry and online reviews. Then hotel staff who administered the online review would be interviewed to elaborate on the common practices for hotels in online review management. In addition, in-depth interviews with customers were conducted to understand the customer's journey in the decision-making process and their attitude towards online reviews and the hotel's eventual response. The gathered data was analyzed and used to assist in developing questions for an online survey. The research was conducted in four steps in order to cover the issues of interest as follows:

3.1.1 Exploratory Research

Secondary Research

- The first step in the research process is to study the existing research regarding the customer's journey before making hotel booking decisions and impact of online review to their decision making process. Additionally, research was done to assess how the hotel's response affects the customer's satisfaction.
- Observed the common practices of leading hotel chain, Accor Hotels and Starwood Hotels in response to guest feedback, mainly focused on how the hotel management responded to TripAdvisor.com as it is a global influencer within the industry.
- Gather information from hotel review website and online community about the "interesting cases" hard to define of negative hotel reviews, which were managed by the hotel and attitudes of the audiences toward the consequent hotel feedback and response.

In-depth Interview with hotelier

- Interviews with the Director of Sales and Marketing from Anantara Sathorn Hotel was conducted to confirm the researchers understanding of the relevant issues and to ask more question regarding common practices in online feedback management
- These interviews looked at the common practices for hotel management to monitor the online review and tools to manage negative feedback.

(See appendix A: The sample for a list of the questions employed for in-depth interviews with hotelier)

In-depth Interview with customers

- Understand how consumers process on online feedback before making decisions, the websites they typically search and the average number of feedback responses they utilized in making impact on their decisions.
- Explore the consumer thinking process and evaluation, the criteria before making decisions, how they weigh those criteria, how they make sure that the feedback are perceived as reliable and how they judge the hotel in the case of both positive and negative feedback toward same hotel
- To understand how the online review affects decision making and how each kind of hotel's response could improve their audiences' attitude toward that hotel.

(See appendix B: The sample question for in-depth interview with customers)

3.1.2 Descriptive Research

The survey was distributed to those who had experience in reading online feedback before making a decision to book the hotel in order to quantify the research results from exploratory research.

The questionnaire was developed based on the gathered data from exploratory research in order to cover the issue as follows;

- To analyze the segmentation of target respondents based on demographics, psychographics and behavior.

- To understand the customer journey through online review in making a purchase decision
- To understand the impact of online review and hotel's response on their decision-making process.
- To identify the appropriate hotel's response that could recover customer satisfaction and the hotel's reputation in consumer's view

(See appendix C: The sample question for questionnaire survey)

Sampling Procedure

Due to the time constraints, convenience sampling was employed to conduct this research. As the purpose of this research is focusing on consumers who prefer checking online review before making decision, the sample selection will be as follow:

- Thai nationality
- Have experience in checking online reviews before booking a hotel at least 3 times a year

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Exploratory Research

In-depth interview with hotelier

- A hotelier who directly engages in monitor and handle the online feedbacks was recruited into in-depth face to face interview sessions.
- The reason to focus on frequency is to explore the impact of online review to the hotel's reputation confirm and to understand the general approach for online review management.
- The process duration was approximately 30 minutes.

In-depth interview with customers

- A total of 6 respondents who had experience in online review checking every 3 months or less than 3 months were recruited into in-depth face to face interview sessions.

- The reason to focus on frequency is to gain a deeper understanding into the thinking process of consumers who are keen on checking online review.
- The process duration was approximately 30-45 minutes for each respondent.

3.2.2 Descriptive Research

- The survey was launched in a Thai version in order to capture only Thai respondents.
- The survey was only launched in an online format, which could basically screen out those who could not be reach for online feedback.
- The survey was shared in an online community related to personal travel to make sure that those respondents mostly decide on their own accommodation.
- The length of time to complete the survey was not intended to be longer than 10 minutes.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Qualitative Data

Data collected from in-depth interviews was analyzed individually using coding, categorizing and making sense of the essential meanings of the phenomenon to define the key findings of each customer. The data were then summarized into the following topics;

- General demographic information: Gender, age, level of education, occupation, SES
- Lifestyle, travelling behavior and membership program with hotel
- The frequency: Frequency of online review checking per year (Heavy, Moderate, and light users)
- The thinking process: how the consumer goes through the online review before making decisions and how the online review could impact their decision-making.
- The evaluation: the criteria used before making decision, how they differently weighed those criteria, how they made sure that the feedback is reliable and how they judged the hotel in cases of both positive and negative feedback toward the same hotel property.

- The types of hotel's response commonly found and attitude toward each type of response
- The recommendations on appropriate hotel's response

3.3.2 Quantitative Data

Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyze qualitative data, focusing on frequency, cross-tabulation; top-two box analysis, and other statistical analysis as appropriate.

The variable of this study are

- 1) Consumer's characteristics such as demographic, psychographic and lifestyle
- 2) Buying behavior such as travel frequency, travel purpose, and travel companions.
- 3) Customer's decision making process
- 4) Consumer's attitudes toward online feedback
- 5) Consumer's attitude toward hotel's response

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Desk Research

According to Trip Advisor, hotel response has become very powerful in the customer decision-making process. Failing to manage the response could result in a significant decline in occupancy rate. More than 50% of customers would not book a hotel unless they have read the review regarding the hotel.

Most editors write reviews to share their good experience with others. More than 80% of respondents read at least 6-12 reviews before making decision. Consumers also feel that those reviews make them more comfortable with their decision. Online readers mostly focus on the recent reviews. 93% of respondents perceived accommodations as a significant factor to overall trip experience. (Tnooz, 2015)

The study also showed that hotel responses had a positive impact on the ensuing customer's decision-making process. 87% said that the hotel's response could improve customer's attitude toward the hotel. Meanwhile, 70% said that a bad hotel response also discourages them to book a hotel. 62% of them agreed that hotel response to the review attract them to book a hotel rather than a hotel that did nothing. (Hotelnewsnow.com, 2015)

Hoteliers also agreed that the response to “apologize and show their sympathy” with unsatisfied guests could win the guest back to the hotel. Service recovery attempts should begin with an appreciation to the reviewer and acknowledgement of a positive comment. Then it should be followed by the modest apology and an action to manage the issue/complaint. The right words at the right time bring those unsatisfied customer back to your hotel. Vice a versa, an improper response could make the situation even worse and potentially lead to a viral spread in online media.

The study results support the assertion that online reviews have a significant impact on hotel ratings and ultimately have a significant relationship with the hotel's revenue. Customers are 3.9 times more likely to choose a hotel with higher review

scores at an given equal price. 76% of customers are more willing to book the hotel with high scores despite the higher price. (Ady, 2014)

Professional response to online reviews is a key success factor that brings your hotel up to the next level of digital marketing. Customers become internet-savvy and are likely to seek the real information from the user reviews other than the corporate website. Online reviews consequently have become the most important source of information and are powerful in spreading the word of mouth. Therefore, hotel operators should monitor those reviews and manage the customer's perception to ensure the positive word-of-mouth toward the property in order to bring the guest to your hotel.

4.2 In-depth Interview

4.2.1 Hoteliers

To understand how online reviews can impact the hotel's reputation and sales, interview with hoteliers Mr. Chaiyabutr Prasertsuk, Director of Sales and Marketing, Anantara Sathorn Hotel, Bangkok was conducted.

In the hotel manager's view, online reviews do matter for the hotel and reviews should receive a proper response from hotel staff as soon as possible. Online reviews are even more important than internal feedback as it is public and can impact to hotel reputation across large groups.

All reviews that can cause a loss in hotel reputation should be responded to. Reviews with no response can lead travellers or review reader to believe that the issue is true and the hotel's decision to ignore the complaint is an acknowledgement of their culpability. If applicable, hotels should also send a private message to acknowledge the reviews personally. Even with positive reviews, it is an opportunity for the hotel to show your attention and reinforce the positive. However, the response should be modest and not boastful.

It can be seen that reviewers and online readers would appreciate the response comes from a senior level. The person or team who is in charge of responding should be able to make individually tailored responses but still maintain the tone of professionalism. Online readers could recognize if the response is adjusted from the template. It is important to show great empathy to the situation. Moreover, the way to

resolve the issue should also be addressed. Last but not least, do not mention the compensation in an online response as it might boost up the following complaints.

To respond to the online review, it is essential to respond timely. Frankly, the sooner the better applies in these cases. Although it might take time to study the incident and to get the solution, some quick reply should be taken in order to acknowledge and to show that the hotel is working on that issue. Such responses alone could recover customer satisfaction.

It cannot be said that the hotel itself can manually track all reviews from online content. Revinate, a reputation management software firm, has been adopted in order to monitor the comments and reviews related with the hotel. Revinate tools would search the online content that related to the hotel and provide a daily summary of comments and reviews direct to your desktop. However, with the limited resources, time and staff, hotels could not capture all responses. Hoteliers should know their targeted customers and where they search for information, then management can review those websites that should be prioritized.

Since the Anantara hotel is located in Bangkok, a majority of guests are foreigners, reviews from foreigners are firstly prioritized. TripAdvisor.com has become a key source of information for foreigners. The hotels mainly focus on managing both positive and negative reviews on TripAdvisor.com.

Lastly, Mr. Chaiyabutr agreed that online reviews or user-generated content from guests has become powerful to travelers' decision-making process. Consequently, the well-managed electronic WOM is crucial to maintain the hotel's reputation.

4.2.2 Customers

Interviews with 6 travelers who experienced searching for guest reviews before booking decision were conducted. All of them shared their thinking process before booking decisions including how they go through online reviews, how they evaluate each review and their attitude toward the hotel's response. Most common review websites they usually visited were Pantip.com, TripAdvisor.com, Agoda.com and Booking.com. Respondents could be classified into 2 major groups, which are addicted users and occasional users.

(1) Addicted Users

Addicted users always check online reviews as their daily routine regardless of travel opportunity. When they have to make a booking decision, they would evaluate their alternatives based on recalled information they have read to make a decision. Not only the review's content, but also the hotel's response is taken into account for their evaluation. The number of positive reviews supports their confidence in making a booking decision. Attached photos make the review more credible. If there are some minor topics included, addicted users perceive the review as more reliable and less biased. However, when they need a real booking, they still have to get back to those reviews and rehearse the information again.

In terms of sales promotion, they are less sensitive to the sales promotion since they have much more information regarding other factors than just the sales promotion for their evaluation. Consumers would not book a particular hotel if their attitude toward that hotel was negative, despite the attractiveness of the sales promotion. Meanwhile, they would definitely book a hotel if that hotel matches with their criteria.

(2) Occasional Users

Occasional users check information only when they are going to book a hotel. They would search for information after they have a travel plan. They usually go directly to online review for the particular hotels in their consideration set. Positive and negative review including hotel response to those reviews would be taken into account for their evaluation. They would lose confidence in booking once they found the negative reviews. However, a professional hotel response could make them feel better.

Occasional users seem to be more sensitive to the sales promotion. They agree to trade off probability to face some inconvenience that they could accept with attractive promotion.

4.3 Descriptive Research

The data are collected from 60 respondents who have experience in checking online reviews before booking a hotel at least 3 times a year. The key findings are categorized into 5 sections as following:

4.3.1 Demographic

- **Gender and Age**

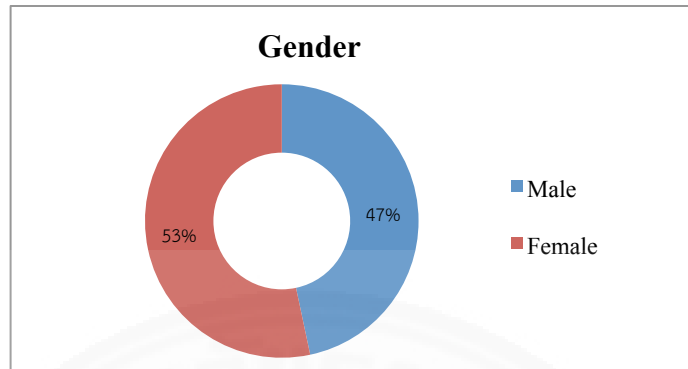


Figure 1: Gender

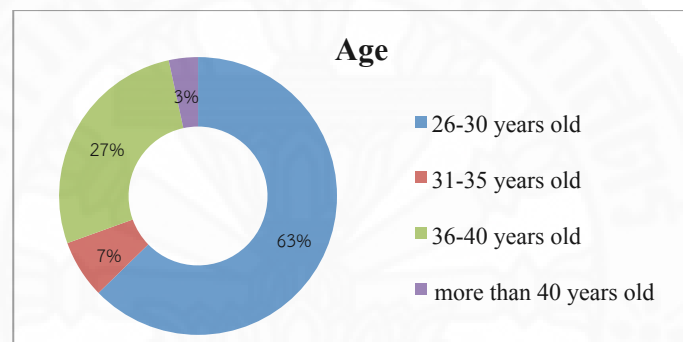


Figure 2: Age

From 60 data sets, female respondents accounted for 53% of total respondents while male respondents accounted for 47%. 63% of all respondents were between 26-30 years old, followed by 36-40 years old, 31-35 years old and more than 40 years old with 27%, 7% and 3% respectively.

- **Occupation and Monthly Income**

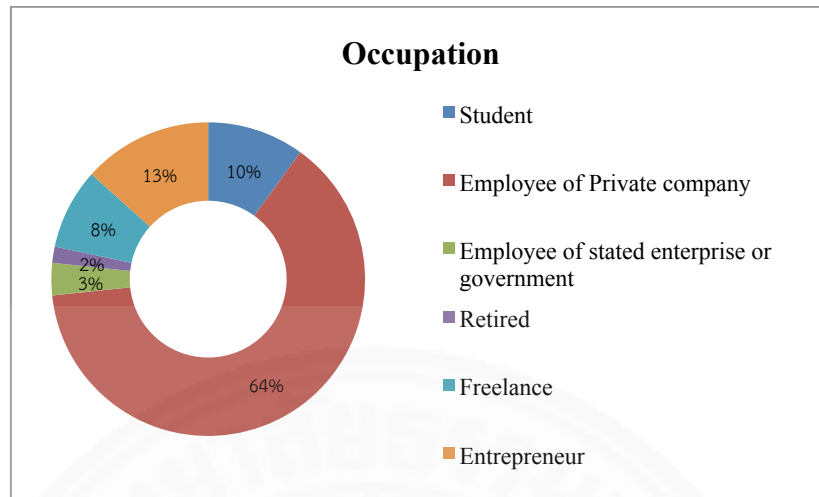


Figure 3: Occupation

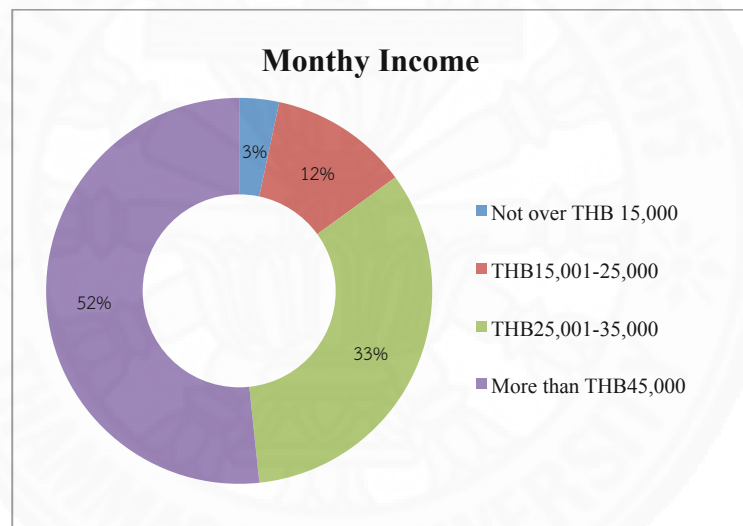


Figure 4: Monthly Income

All of the 60 respondents are classified into 6 types of occupation. 64% of them currently work for private company while 13% of them are entrepreneur. The rest are student, freelance, government officer and retired with 10%, 8%, 3% and 2% respectively. Half of them earned more than THB 45,000 a month, followed by 33% who earned between THB25,001 - 35,000, 12% who earned between THB15,001 - 25,000 and 3% who earned not over than THB15,000.

4.3.2 General behavior on traveling

All respondents were asked about their traveling behavior regarding frequency of traveling, purpose of traveling and their travel companions.

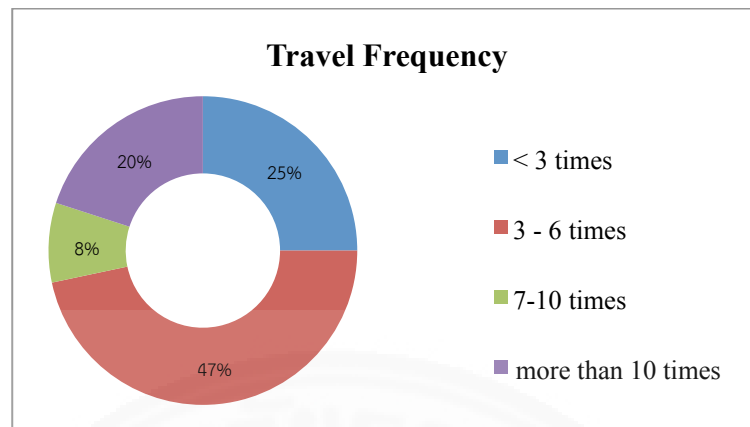


Figure 5: Travel Frequency

Within the last 12 months, most of sample (47%) traveled 3-6 times, 25% of them traveled less than 3 times and 20% of them traveled more than 10 times. From cross tabulation, it was found that 44% of those who aged between 36-40 years old traveled more than 10 times within last 12 months.

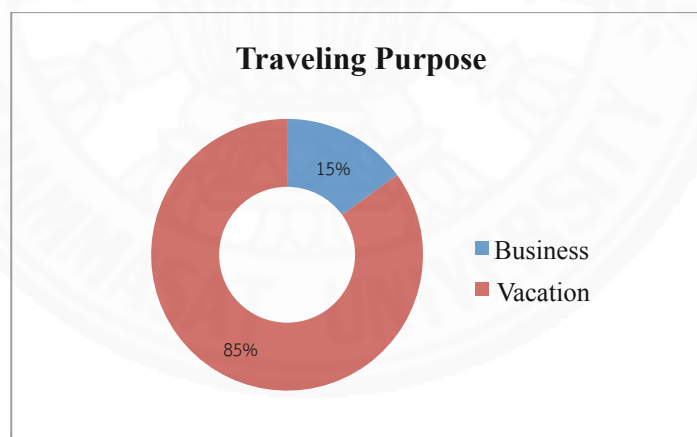


Figure 6: Travel Purpose

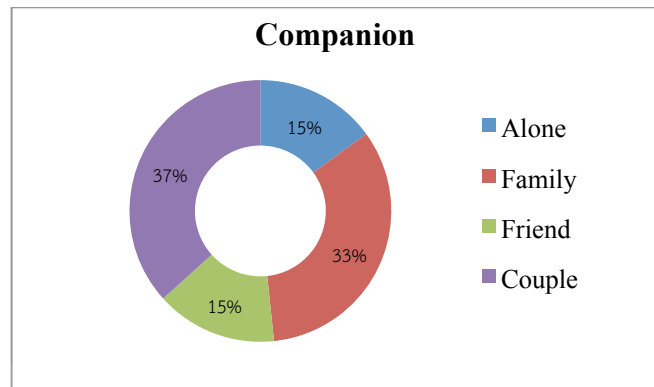


Figure 7: Companion

85% of all respondents traveled for their vacation while only 15% traveled for business purpose. Most of them traveled with their couples (37%) and families (33%). 15% traveled with their friends and another 15% traveled alone.

4.3.3 Factors affecting decision-making process

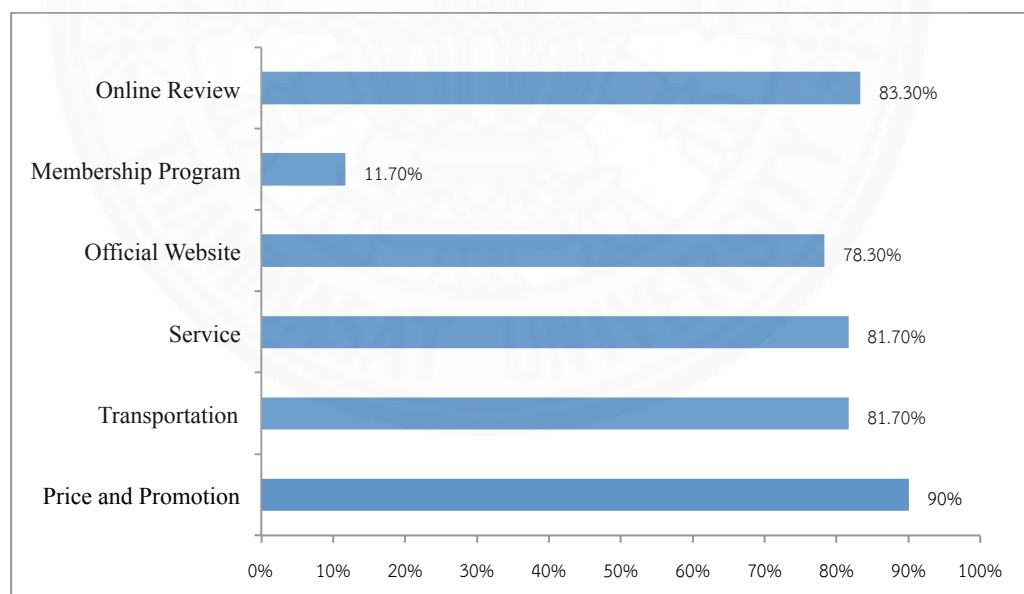


Figure 8: Factors affecting decision making process

According to the top two-box analysis, “Online review” from experienced guest (83%) has become the significant factor affecting their decision-making on hotel service just less than “Price and promotion” (90%). Respondents rated “Service” as important factor as “Transportation” at 82%. It is interesting that they rated the

importance of “Official website” (78%) less than online review. It can be assumed that they tend to seek for information from online review rather than official website. Only 12% of total respondents rated “Membership program” as important to their decision-making.

4.3.4 Decision making process regard the online review

About 90% of all respondents have searched for hotel information from online review before making decision. Those who do not search for online reviews before hotel booking were screened out from analysis.

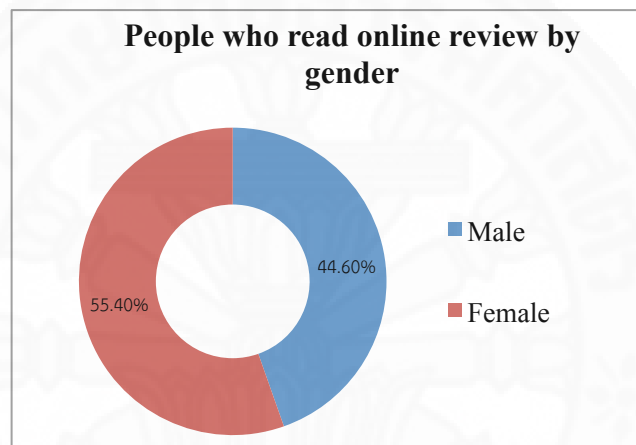


Figure 9: People who read online review by gender

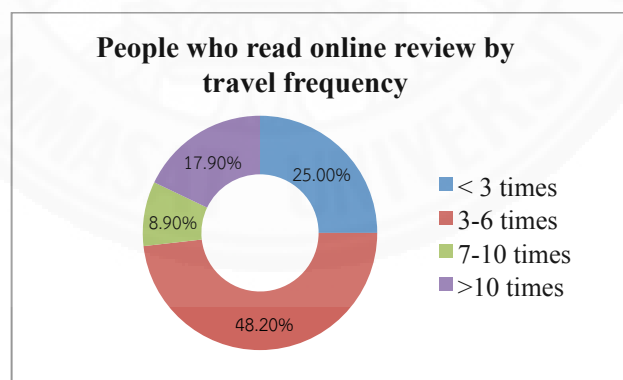


Figure 10: People who read online review by travel frequency

From those who read online reviews before the hotel booking decision, 55% are female and 45% are male. 48% of those who read online review before making decision on hotel booking are people who usually travel 3-6 times within last 12 months, followed by people who travel less than 3 times a year, people who travel more than 10 times a year and people who travel 7-10 times a year with 25%, 18%

and 9% respectively. (See appendix D: Appendix D: Cross Tabulation for people who read online review and other factors)

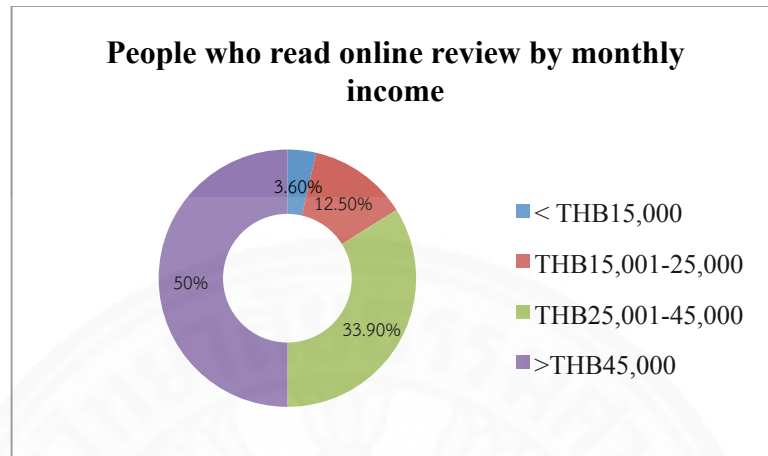


Figure 11: People who read online review by monthly income

When grouping them by monthly income, people who have more than THB45,000 a year accounted for 50% while people who earned between THB25,001-45,000 accounted for 34%. Only 12.5% and 3.6% are people who earned between THB15,001-25,000 and less than THB15,000 accordingly.

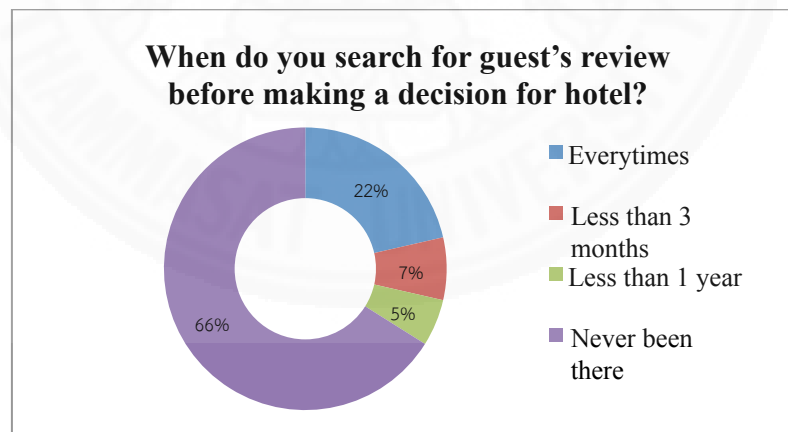


Figure 12: Frequency of online review searching

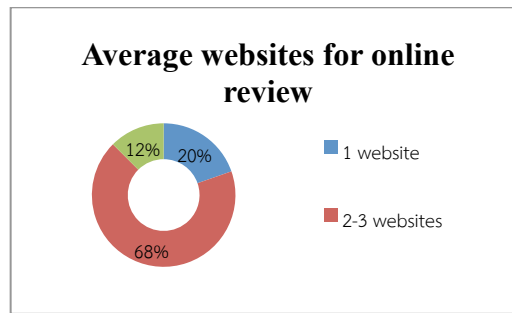


Figure 13: Average website for online review

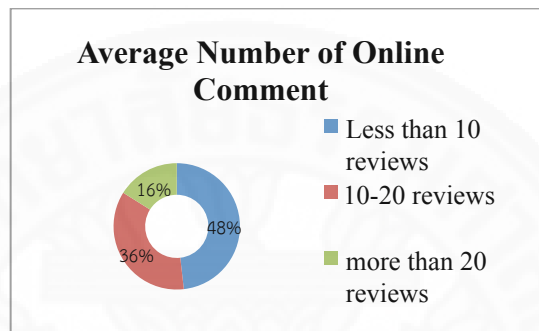


Figure 14: Average no. of online comment

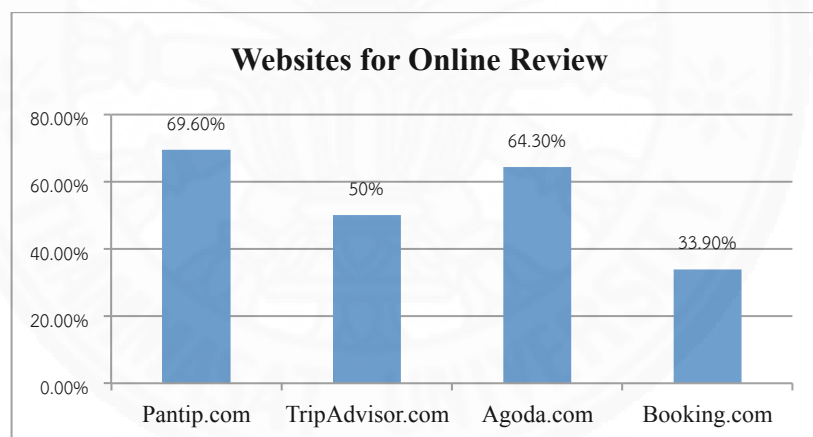


Figure 15: Most frequently visited websites

66% of those respondents searched for online review only when they never been there while 22% search for online review even they used to be there. Most of respondents searched for online review from 2-3 websites mostly in Pantip.com (70%), Agoda.com (64%), TripAdvisor.com (50%) and Booking.com (32%). However, most of them do not read over 10 comments.

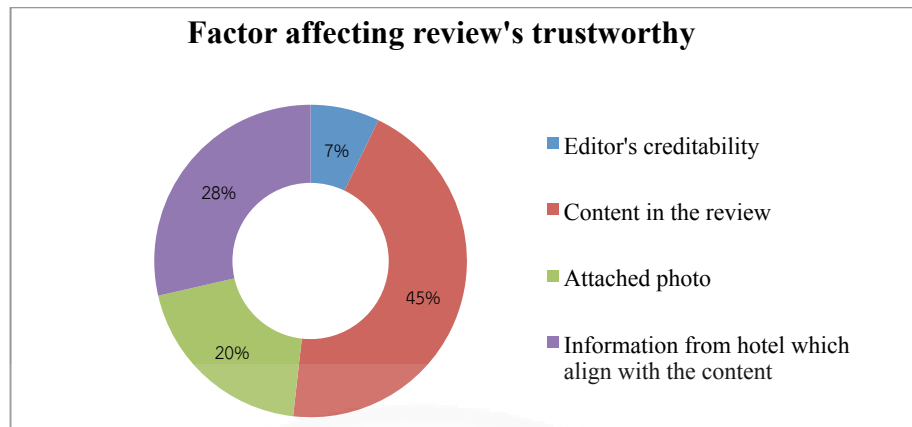


Figure 16: Factor affecting review's trustworthiness

According to top two box analysis, 45% of respondents agree that it depends on the content in the review whether they would trust that particular review or not. 28% of respondents said they would trust the review only if the information from the hotel aligned with the review's content. 20% of them believed that an attached photo would make the review more credible. Only 7% would believe if they know that editors are reliable.

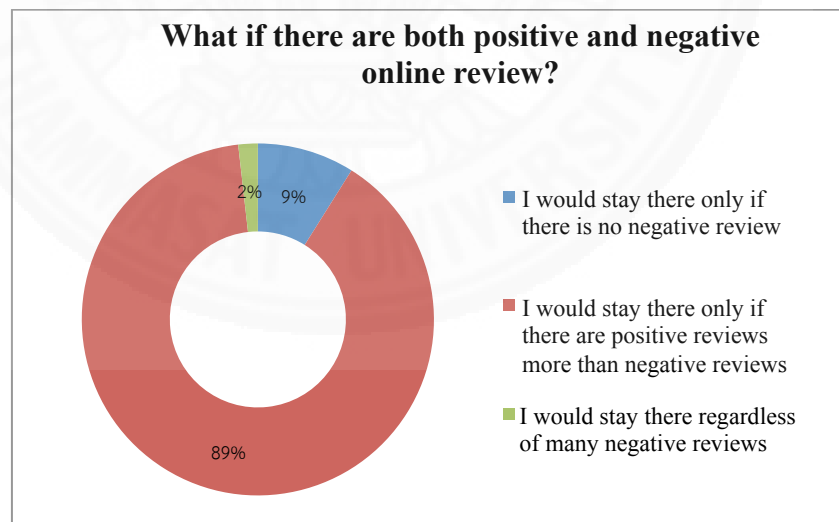


Figure 17: Attitude toward both positive and negative review

Respondents were asked how they make a decision in the case that they found both positive and negative review toward your targeted hotel. About 90% of them would go there only if positive reviews for that particular hotel are more than negative

review. 9% of them would go there only if there is no negative review toward that hotel while only 2% would still go there regardless of negative reviews.

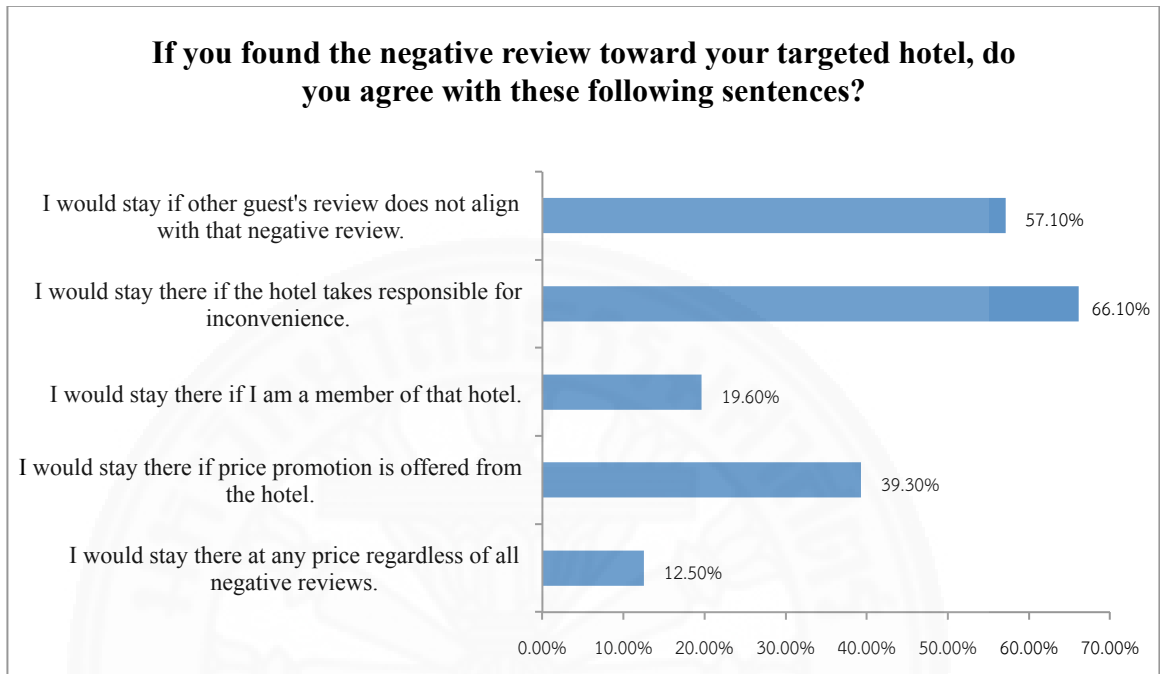


Figure 18: Attitude toward the targeted hotel after negative comment

In case that people found negative review toward the hotel they are looking for, most of people (66%) would still book that particular hotel if hotel take responsible for those inconvenience. About 57% of them would go there if they found that the review's content from editor does not align with the hotel's response. Price and promotion from that hotel could attract only 39% of them to go there while membership program of that hotel could overcome the hesitation of not going there for only 20% of them. However, 13% of total respondents would definitely stay at that hotel regardless all negative reviews.

However, when the traveling purpose was taken into account, it can be found that 71% of people who mostly travel for business purpose do not agree to stay even the hotel has take responsible for those inconvenience.

4.3.5 Attitude toward hotel's response to online review

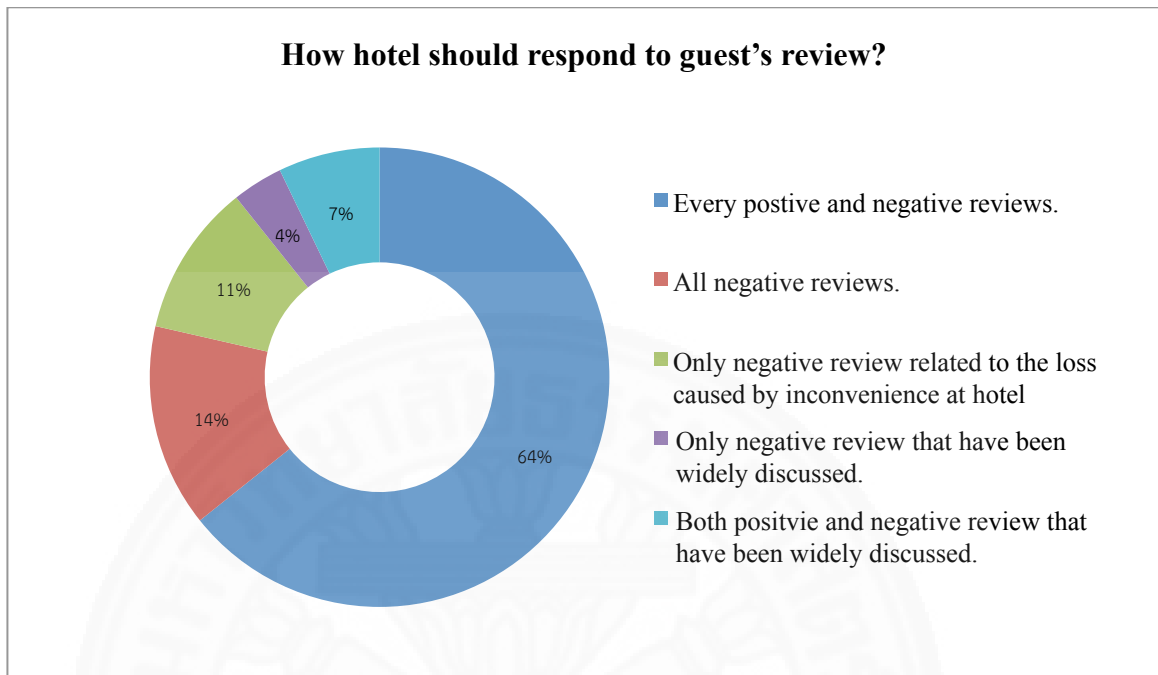


Figure 19: Hotel's response coverage

Respondents were asked the questions to explore their attitude toward hotel's response. 64% of respondents agree that hotel should make a response to every positive and negative review while 14% agree that hotel should at least respond to all negative reviews.

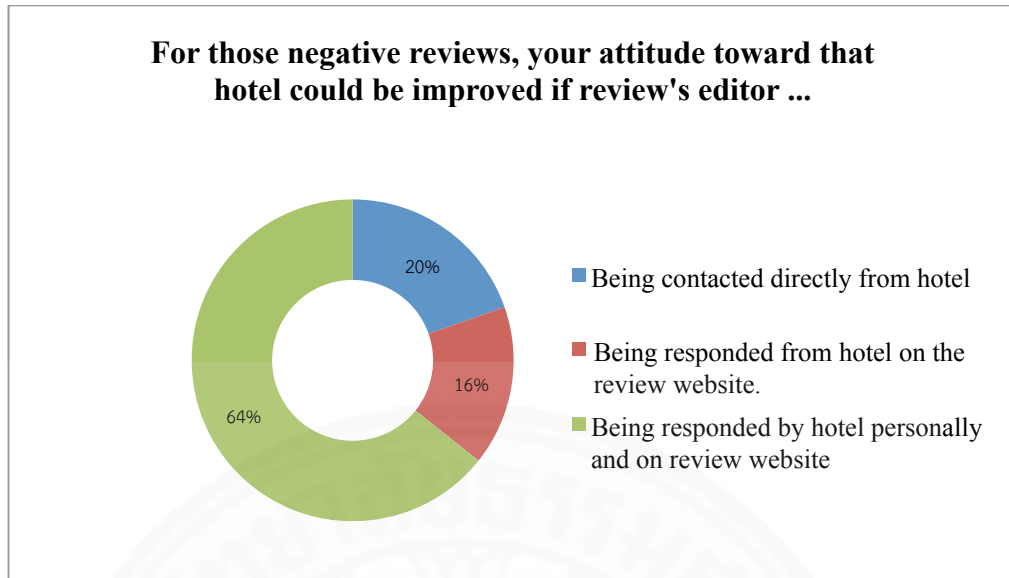


Figure 20: Method of hotel's response

Most people (64%) agree that in case of negative review, they would change attitude to be positive if hotel contact the review's editor to take responsible for that mistake both personally and publicly especially in the website that review took place. 20% of the respondents would change their attitude if hotel contact directly to review's editor to apologize and take action.

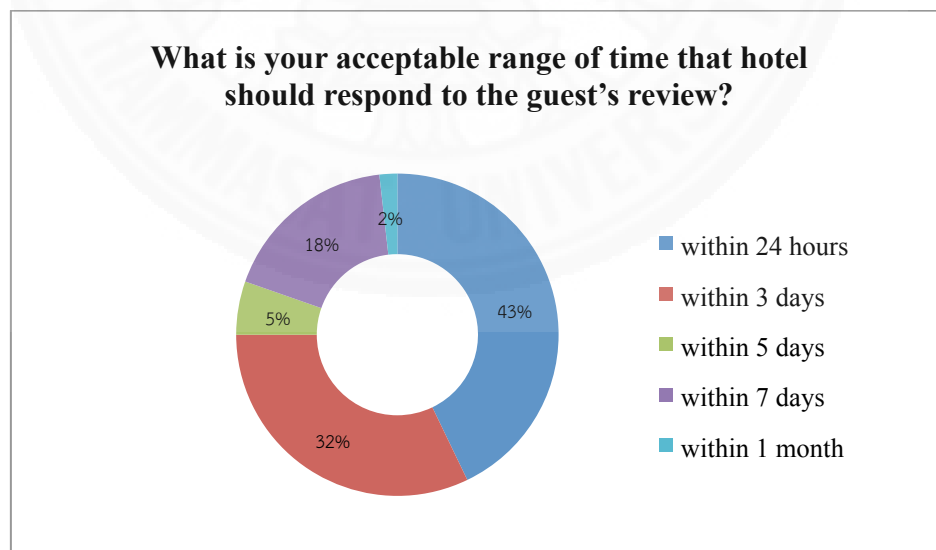


Figure 21: Acceptable range for hotel's response

Respondents were further asked for the acceptable range of time that hotel should respond to the guest's review. 43% of respondents said that the hotel should

take action to those review within 24 hours while 32% said that taking action within 3 days is still fine.

When the respondents are classified by traveling purpose, it showed that 45% of those who traveling for their vacation would satisfy if hotel take response within 24 hours. However, 43% of those who traveling for business said it is acceptable if hotel take response within 3 days.

When the gender of the respondent was taken into account, 52% of female gender can wait for hotel's response just only 24 hours while 56% of male gender can wait for hotel's response within 3 days. *(See appendix E: Cross Tabulation Acceptable range of hotel response and other factors)*

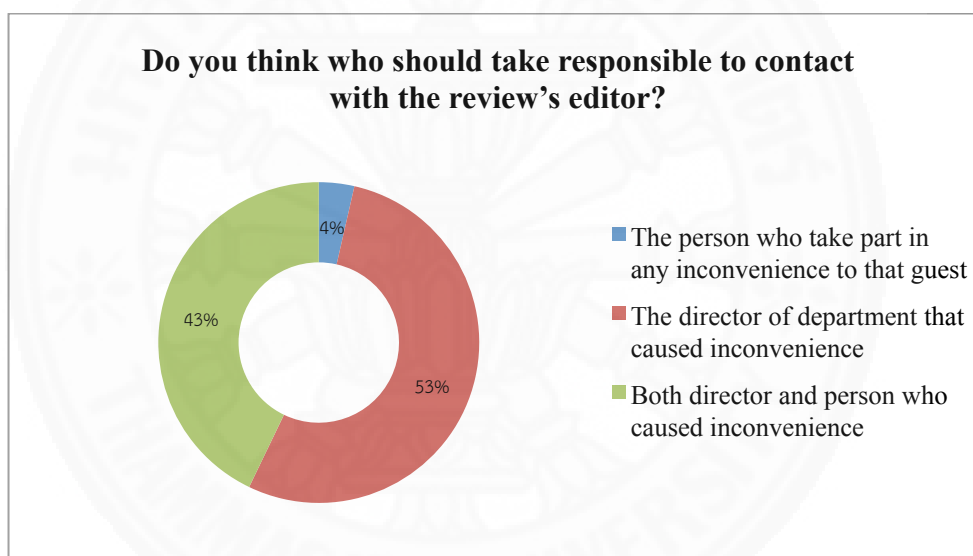


Figure 22: Responsible person for hotel's response

About the person who should take responsible for the mistake, 53% of all respondents thought that only director of department that caused inconvenience should take a role to recover guest's satisfaction. 43% of total respondents agree that both director of department and person who caused inconvenience should take action to recover the guest's satisfaction.

When respondents were categorized into gender, it is interesting that 52% of female guest prefer response from both director and issued person while 64% of male guests would satisfy if only director of department take some action. *(See appendix F: Cross Tabulation Responsible Person and Gender)*

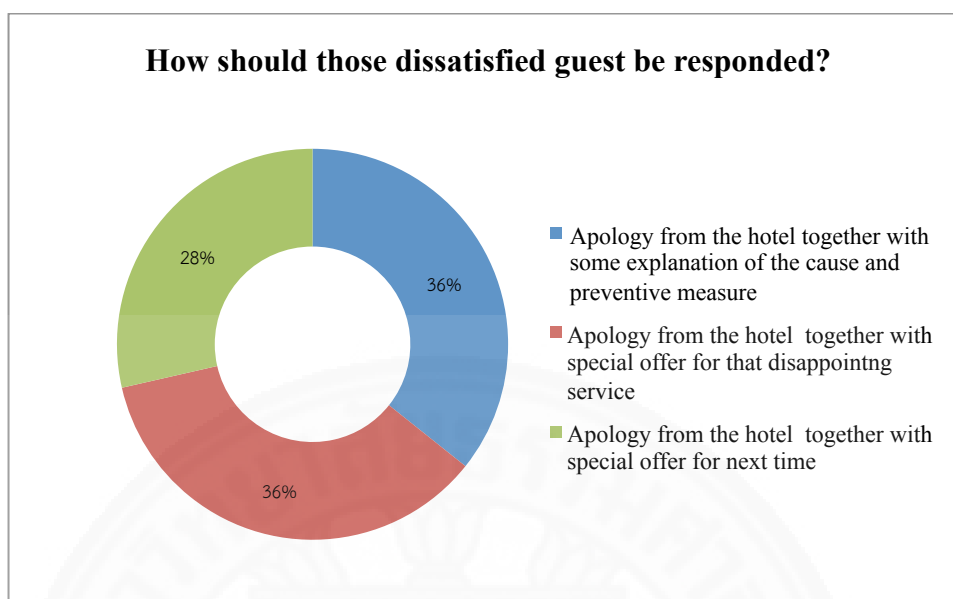


Figure 23: Content of hotel's response

Regarding how hotel should respond to dissatisfied guest, the same amount of respondents at 36% each prefer apology from hotel together with some explanation of cause and preventive measure and apology from hotel together with special offer for that disappointed service. Only 28% of them prefer apology from the hotel together with special offer for the next time.

It is obvious that 57% of people who travel for business purpose prefer apology from hotel together with some explanation of cause and preventive measure while most people who travel for vacation (39%) prefer apology from hotel together with special offer for that disappointed service.

Moreover, it can be seen that most people who travel alone (50%) and with friend (43%) prefer apology from hotel together with some explanation of cause and preventive measure. Meanwhile, most people who travel with their families (35%) and their couples (38%) prefer apology from hotel together with special offer for that disappointed service. *(See appendix G: Hotel Response and other factors)*

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study will be beneficial as insightful information for hoteliers to know the characteristics of travelers who prefer checking online reviews before booking a room and to understand the customer's journey before making a booking decision and their attitude toward hotel's responses to negative reviews.

The results of data analysis and recommendation are summarized according to the research objectives, which were specified at the beginning as follows;

- **To provide a demographic and a lifestyle profile of the consumers who prefer checking online reviews before booking a room**

Female travelers tend to read online reviews before making their hotel decisions more than males. People whom usually travel less than 6 times a year, tend to read online reviews more than those who travel more often. People who have higher monthly incomes tend to read online review more than those who earn less.

- **To understand consumer behavior in booking a hotel for each purpose, leisure or business including the membership program of the hotel**

According to the survey results, official websites are now less important than online reviews from experienced guests. People tend to search information from online reviews regardless of how information appears on the hotel website. They perceived that reviews from experienced guests are more reliable and not as biased. No matter how beautiful or credible hotel website are, people still would not book a hotel if there is no response from the hotel toward negative feedback on review websites. Meanwhile, people tend to book a hotel that has a positive review or they could see a professional response from the hotel toward those negative reviews despite the messy website. Most of them would not make a booking decision unless they have read reviews from an experienced guest. Thus, online reviews play a significant part in influencing a decision to book a particular hotel. Membership is the least important factor for their decision-making. Being a member of hotel chain does

not mean that they would get back to that hotel if the price and promotion is not attractive and the hotel has received negative reviews without any response.

- **To study the online decisions making process of consumers in booking a hotel**

Pantip.com is the most reliable source for the Thai travelers in searching information, followed by Agoda.com and Trip Advisor. Hotel management are recommended to monitor these popular review websites. Recent reviews should be prioritized and management should not ignore even the positive reviews. If hotels have limited time and resource, it is recommended to capture average 10 recent reviews from each websites. Online review is another interesting tools to capture the new guest since most of them would know more about your hotel by online review.

- **To understand how online reviews affect their decision making process and how each kind of hotel's response improves the audiences' attitude toward that hotel.**

Hotel's should monitor the reviews they receive and also make any improvements according to those comments. Having negative reviews more than positive reviews might be harmful to the hotel's revenues. However, a customer's attitude can be improved if the hotel makes a proper response to the guest with the right thing at the right time. If some negative reviews are not based on the truth, the hotel management should take action by explaining the situation with the modest tone. When this action is taken, online readers tend to reconsider the creditability of that review and the customer's attitude toward the hotel might be repaired. Managing customer satisfaction and attitude in order to create the positive word-of-mouth is more effective than investing marketing expenses to promote the hotel.

- **To identify the appropriate way to manage the online review in order to improve customer satisfaction and the hotel's reputation**

Respondents expected that both positive and negative reviews should be responded to by the hotel management team. Especially in negative reviews, the response should be taken personally and publicly on the website that the review took place on. Negative reviews should be responded to within 24 hours. For male guests,

they could wait for the response within 3 days. The hotel response should include your appreciation toward the reviews and apology for the mistake. Moreover, the corrective action with the specified deadline and future preventive measures should be included in the reviews. For those who travel for vacation, they expect to get a special offer for disappointing service.

It was found that how a hotel responds to the review has more influence on customer's booking decision than the review itself. The response shows that sympathy from the hotel to that situation and is an opportunity to let travelers and online readers who are probably the potential guests know how the hotel tackles problems. For positive reviews, demonstrating appreciation for feedback can be a means to create loyal customers.

Time to respond is a key indicator that demonstrates that the hotel does not abandon the guest. The guest is always a guest. The service you provide either before or after the guest's staying is always important. Your response to any feedback allows you the opportunity to serve the repeating guests and new guests. An immediate response indicates that you pay attention to guests' perceptions and proactively manage the hotel staff to ensure that guests would leave the hotel with a positive experience. A great way to reinforce the positive response is to show you are happy to know and it is a result of guest's feedback that hotel take in account to provide the best experience for all guest. When online readers see a proper response with positive changes in hotel service at the right time, they will be likely to book at your hotel.

After studying this research, hotel management teams would gain insights into how to monitor and manage the online review process toward the hotels. Knowing the right manner to address each particular group of guests in order to recover customer satisfaction and the hotel's reputation is a key step in managing revenue. Ultimately, hotels could boost their revenues through significant hotel ratings, which have a significant positive relationship with hotel's booking.

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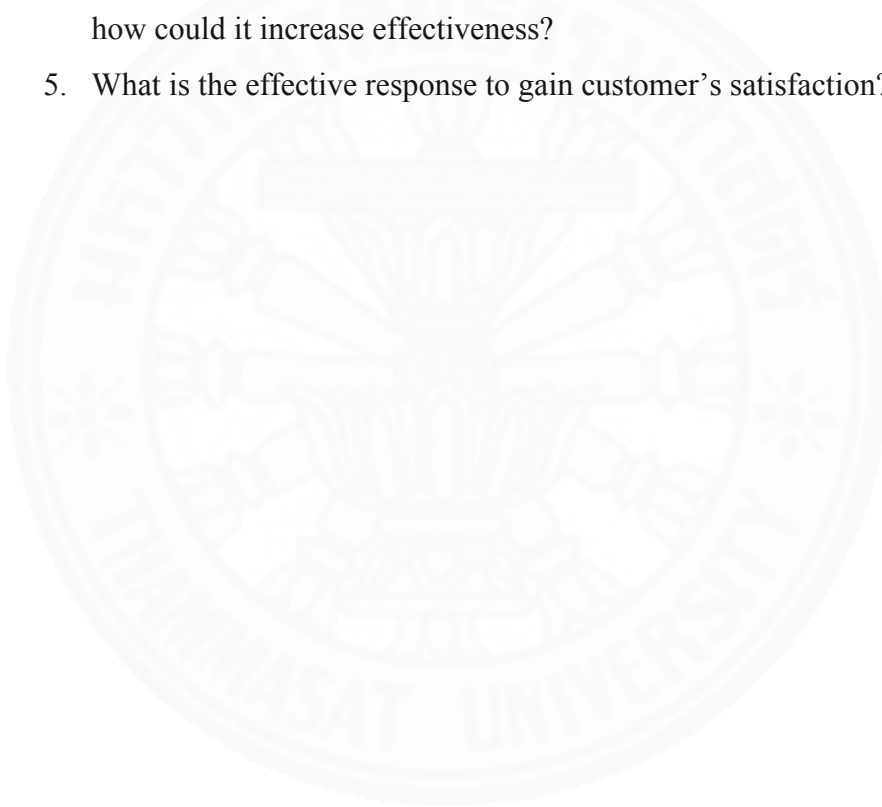


APPENDICES



APPENDIX A
THE QUESTIONS FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH
HOTELIER

1. How do you think the impact of online review to hotel reputation?
2. How do you monitor online review?
3. Normally, how do you manage negative feedback from customers?
4. Do you think hotel needs the software to manage online review? If yes, how could it increase effectiveness?
5. What is the effective response to gain customer's satisfaction?



APPENDIX B

THE QUESTIONS FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH CUSTOMERS

1. Do you normally study online feedback before making hotel-booking decision?
2. Where do you normally go to acquire information you need before making a decision?
3. How many websites do you visit to check online review?
4. What is the average number of online feedback to facilitate your decision making?
5. What factors will convince you to make a decision whether booking or not booking particular hotel? (E.g. numbers of positive feedback, famous online review sites or reviewers, convincing content, etc.)
6. How do you justify that the review you are studying is credible and reliable?
7. If there is an attractive promotion from the hotel that has negative review, are you still going to book that hotel? And why?
8. Would you book a hotel that has negative review but hotel has taken care of those issues?
9. What do you expect from the hotel response in terms of time, responsible person and message from hotels?

APPENDIX C

THE QUESTION FOR QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Survey regarding Hotel's Response to Guest's Review

INTRODUCTION: I am a graduate student in marketing program from Thammasat University. Could you spare a few minutes of your time to answer question on your decision making process for hotel service and attitude towards hotel's response to guest's review as a part of my independent study? This survey would take approximately 10-15 minutes. There is no right or wrong answer and your response will be used for the academic purpose only.

Screening Question

1. Have you ever used a hotel service within last one year?
 - a. Yes (Go to next question)
 - b. No (End of survey)
2. Did you take part in decision making for hotel service?
 - a. Yes (Go to next question)
 - b. No (End of survey)

General Behavior on decision making for hotel service

3. How many times did you take part in decision making for hotel service within last one year?
 - a. Less than 3 times
 - b. 3-6 times
 - c. 7-10 times
 - d. more than 10 times
4. What is your main purpose for hotel service?
 - a. Business
 - b. Leisure
5. Whom do you usually stay with at hotel? (Please rank 1 = mostly 4 = hardly)
 - ____ Alone
 - ____ Family
 - ____ Friends
 - ____ Lover

6. How important of the following factors to your decision making for hotel (1 = Least important, 5 = Most important)

Factors	1	2	3	4	5
Price and Promotion					
Transportation					
Service Quality					
Official website					
Membership					
Guest's review					

Decision Making Process based on Guest's Review

7. Have you read guest's review before making a decision for hotel?
- Yes
 - No
8. When do you search for guest's review before making a decision for hotel?
- Everytime I book a hotel service even I used to stay there
 - When I used to stay there more than 3 months ago
 - When I used to stay there more than 6 months ago
 - When I used to stay there more than 9 months ago
 - When I used to stay there more than 1 year ago
 - When I never been there
9. Which websites do you visit for guest's review? (can choose more than 1 answer)
- ___ Pantip.com
- ___ TripAdvisor.com
- ___ Agoda.com
- ___ Booking.com
- ___ Other please specify _____

10. How many average websites do you visit for guest's review before making a decision for hotel?
- 1 website
 - 2-3 websites
 - more than 3 websites
11. How many guest's reviews (on average) do you read before making a decision for hotel?
- Less than 10 reviews
 - 10-20 reviews
 - more than 20 reviews
12. Please rank the following factors according to the importance to creditability of any particular review? (1 = most important, 4 = least important)
- _____ editor's creditability
- _____ content in the review
- _____ attached photo
- _____ information from hotel which align with the content
13. In case that you found both positive and negative review toward your targeted hotel, how would you make a decision?
- I would stay there only if there is no negative review.
 - I would stay there if there are positive reviews more than negative reviews.
 - I would stay there regardless of many negative reviews
14. If you found the negative review toward your targeted hotel, to what extent do you agree with these following sentences? (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

Factors	1	2	3	4	5
I would stay there at any price regardless of all negative reviews					
I would stay there if price promotion is offered from the hotel.					

I would stay there if I am a member of that hotel.					
I would stay ther if the hotel takes responsible for inconvenience.					
I would stay there if other guest's review does not align with that negative review.					
I would not stay there regardless of any condition.					

Attitude toward hotel's response to guest's review

15. In your opinion, how hotel should respond to guest's review?
- Hotel should response to every postive and negative reviews.
 - Hotel should response to all negative reviews.
 - Hotel should response to only negative review related to the loss caused by inconvenience at hotel
 - Hotel should response to only negative review that have been widely discussed.
 - Hotel should respond to both positvie and negative review that have been widely discussed.
16. What is your acceptable range of time that hotel should respond to the guest's review?
- Within 24 hours
 - Within 3 days
 - Within 5 days
 - Within 7 days
 - Within 2 weeks
 - Within 1 month

Attitude toward hotel's response to negative review

17. For those negative reviews, your attitude toward that hotel could be improved if
- the review's editor review has been contacted directly from hotel.

- b. the review's editor has been responded from hotel on the review website.
 - c. The review's editor has responded by hotel personally and on review website.
18. Do you think who should take responsible to contact with the review's editor?
- a. The person who take part in any inconvenience to that guest
 - b. The director of department that caused inconvenience
 - c. Both (a) and (b)
19. How should those dissatisfied guest be responded?
- a. Apology from the hotel together with some explanation of the cause and preventive measure
 - b. Apology from the hotel together with special offer for that disappointing service
 - c. Apology from the hotel together with special offer for next time

General Information

20. Gender
- a. Male
 - b. Female
21. Age
- a. Below 20 years old
 - b. 20 - 25 years old
 - c. 26 – 30 years old
 - d. 31 – 35 years old
 - e. 36 – 40 years old
 - f. over 40 years old
22. Occupation
- a. Student
 - b. Employee
 - c. Entrepreneur
 - d. Government officer
 - e. Retired
 - f. Freelance
23. Monthly revenue
- a. Less than 15,000 Baht

- b. 15,000 -25,000 Baht
- c. 25,001 – 35,000 Baht
- d. 35,001 – 45,000 Baht
- e. More than 45,000 Baht

----- End of Survey -----



APPENDIX D
CROSS TABULATION FOR PEOPLE WHO READ ONLINE REVIEW
AND OTHER FACTORS

Cross Tabulation between people who read online review and travel frequency

		Travel Frequency				Total	
		< 3 times	3 - 6 times	7-10 times	more than 10 times		
5. Read online review	No	Count	1	1	0	2	4
		% within 5. Read online review	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within 1. How many times	6.7%	3.6%	0.0%	16.7%	6.7%
	Yes	% of Total	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%	3.3%	6.7%
		Count	14	27	5	10	56
		% within 5. Read online review	25.0%	48.2%	8.9%	17.9%	100.0%
	Total	% within 1. How many times	93.3%	96.4%	100.0%	83.3%	93.3%
		% of Total	23.3%	45.0%	8.3%	16.7%	93.3%
		Count	15	28	5	12	60
Total	% within 5. Read online review	25.0%	46.7%	8.3%	20.0%	100.0%	
	% within 1. How many times	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	25.0%	46.7%	8.3%	20.0%	100.0%	

Cross Tabulation between people who read online review and gender

		Gender		Total	
		Male	Female		
5. Read online review	No	Count	3	1	4
		% within 5. Read online review	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	10.7%	3.1%	6.7%
	Yes	% of Total	5.0%	1.7%	6.7%
		Count	25	31	56
		% within 5. Read online review	44.6%	55.4%	100.0%
	Total	% within Gender	89.3%	96.9%	93.3%
		% of Total	41.7%	51.7%	93.3%
		Count	28	32	60
Total	% within 5. Read online review	46.7%	53.3%	100.0%	
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	46.7%	53.3%	100.0%	

Cross Tabulation between people who read online review and monthly income

		Monthly Income				Total
		Not over THB 15,000	THB15,001-25,000	THB25,001-35,000	More than THB45,000	
5. Read online review	Count	0	0	1	3	4
	No					
	% within 5. Read online review	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
	% within Monthly Income	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	9.7%	6.7%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	5.0%	6.7%
	Count	2	7	19	28	56
	Yes					
	% within 5. Read online review	3.6%	12.5%	33.9%	50.0%	100.0%
	% within Monthly Income	100.0%	100.0%	95.0%	90.3%	93.3%
	% of Total	3.3%	11.7%	31.7%	46.7%	93.3%
	Count	2	7	20	31	60
	Total					
% within 5. Read online review	3.3%	11.7%	33.3%	51.7%	100.0%	
% within Monthly Income	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
% of Total	3.3%	11.7%	33.3%	51.7%	100.0%	

APPENDIX E
CROSS TABULATION FOR ACCEPTABLE RANGE OF TIME AND
OTHER FACTORS

Cross Tabulation between the acceptable range of time that hotel should respond to the guest's review and Traveling purpose

		2. Traveling purpose		Total
		Business	Vacation	
Acceptable range of time for hotel response	Count	2	22	24
	within 24 days	8.3%	91.7%	100.0%
	% within Acceptable range	28.6%	44.9%	42.9%
	% within Traveling purpose	3.6%	39.3%	42.9%
	% of Total			
	Count	3	15	18
	within 3 days	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%
	% within Acceptable range	42.9%	30.6%	32.1%
	% within Traveling purpose	5.4%	26.8%	32.1%
	% of Total			
	Count	0	3	3
	within 5 days	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within Acceptable range	0.0%	6.1%	5.4%
	% within Traveling purpose	0.0%	5.4%	5.4%
	% of Total			
Count	2	8	10	
within 7 days	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%	
% within Acceptable range	28.6%	16.3%	17.9%	
% within Traveling purpose	3.6%	14.3%	17.9%	
% of Total				
Count	0	1	1	
within 1 month	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
% within Acceptable range	0.0%	2.0%	1.8%	
% within Traveling purpose	0.0%	1.8%	1.8%	
% of Total				
Count	7	49	56	
Total	% within Acceptable range	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%
	% within Traveling purpose	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%

Cross Tabulation between the acceptable range of time that hotel should respond to the guest's review and Gender

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Acceptable range of time for hotel response	within 24 days	Count	8	16	24
		% within Acceptable range of time for hotel response	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within Gender	32.0%	51.6%	42.9%
		% of Total	14.3%	28.6%	42.9%
	within 3 days	Count	10	8	18
		% within Acceptable range of time for hotel response	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
		% within Gender	40.0%	25.8%	32.1%
		% of Total	17.9%	14.3%	32.1%
	within 5 days	Count	0	3	3
		% within Acceptable range of time for hotel response	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	0.0%	9.7%	5.4%
		% of Total	0.0%	5.4%	5.4%
	within 7 days	Count	6	4	10
		% within Acceptable range of time for hotel response	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	24.0%	12.9%	17.9%
	% of Total	10.7%	7.1%	17.9%	
within 1 month	Count	1	0	1	
	% within Acceptable range of time for hotel response	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
	% within Gender	4.0%	0.0%	1.8%	
	% of Total	1.8%	0.0%	1.8%	
Total	Count	25	31	56	
	% within Acceptable range of time for hotel response	44.6%	55.4%	100.0%	
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	44.6%	55.4%	100.0%	

APPENDIX F

CROSS TABULATION FOR RESPONSIBLE PERSON AND GENDER

Cross Tabulation between the Responsible person for hotel response and Gender

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Do you think who should take responsible to contact with the review's editor?	The person who take part in any inconvenience to that guest	Count	1	1	2
		% within responsible person for hotel response	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within Gender	4.0%	3.2%	3.6%
		% of Total	1.8%	1.8%	3.6%
	The director of department that caused inconvenience	Count	16	14	30
		% within responsible person for hotel response	53.3%	46.7%	100.0%
		% within Gender	64.0%	45.2%	53.6%
		% of Total	28.6%	25.0%	53.6%
	Both director and person who caused inconvenience	Count	8	16	24
		% within responsible person for hotel response	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within Gender	32.0%	51.6%	42.9%
		% of Total	14.3%	28.6%	42.9%
Total	Count	25	31	56	
	% within responsible person for hotel response	44.6%	55.4%	100.0%	
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	44.6%	55.4%	100.0%	

APPENDIX G

CROSS TABULATION FOR HOTEL RESPONSE AND OTHER FACTORS

Cross Tabulation between the Hotel response and Age

			Age					Total
			20-25 years old	26-30 years old	31-35 years old	36-40 years old	more than 40 years old	
Hotel response	Apology from the hotel together with some explanation of the cause and preventive measure	Count	0	10	2	6	2	20
		% within Hotel Response	0.0%	50.0%	10.0%	30.0%	10.0%	100.0%
		% within Age	0.0%	27.8%	50.0%	46.2%	100.0%	35.7%
		% of Total	0.0%	17.9%	3.6%	10.7%	3.6%	35.7%
		Count	1	14	2	3	0	20
		% within Hotel Response	5.0%	70.0%	10.0%	15.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Age	100.0%	38.9%	50.0%	23.1%	0.0%	35.7%
		% of Total	1.8%	25.0%	3.6%	5.4%	0.0%	35.7%
		Count	0	12	0	4	0	16
		% within Hotel Response	0.0%	75.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Age	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	30.8%	0.0%	28.6%
		% of Total	0.0%	21.4%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	28.6%
Total	Count	1	36	4	13	2	56	
	% within Hotel Response	1.8%	64.3%	7.1%	23.2%	3.6%	100.0%	
	% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	1.8%	64.3%	7.1%	23.2%	3.6%	100.0%	

Cross Tabulation between the Hotel Response and Traveling purpose

		2. Traveling purpose		Total	
		Business	Vacation		
Hotel Response	Apology from the hotel together with some explanation of the cause and preventive measure	Count	4	16	20
		% within Hotel Response	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
		% within Traveling purpose	57.1%	32.7%	35.7%
		% of Total	7.1%	28.6%	35.7%
	Apology from the hotel together with special offer for that disappointng service	Count	1	19	20
		% within Hotel Response	5.0%	95.0%	100.0%
		% within Traveling purpose	14.3%	38.8%	35.7%
		% of Total	1.8%	33.9%	35.7%
	Apology from the hotel together with special offer for next time	Count	2	14	16
		% within Hotel Response	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%
		% within Traveling purpose	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%
		% of Total	3.6%	25.0%	28.6%
Total	Count	7	49	56	
	% within Hotel Response	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%	
	% within Traveling purpose	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%	

Cross Tabulation between the Hotel Response and Traveling companion

			Travel Companion				Total
			Alone	Family	Friend	Couple	
Hotel Response	Apology from the hotel together with some explanation of the cause and preventive measure	Count	4	6	3	7	20
		% within Hotel Response	20.0%	30.0%	15.0%	35.0%	100.0%
		% within Traveling Companion	50.0%	30.0%	42.9%	33.3%	35.7%
		% of Total	7.1%	10.7%	5.4%	12.5%	35.7%
	Apology from the hotel together with special offer for that disappointng service	Count	3	7	2	8	20
		% within Hotel Response	15.0%	35.0%	10.0%	40.0%	100.0%
		% within Traveling Companion	37.5%	35.0%	28.6%	38.1%	35.7%
		% of Total	5.4%	12.5%	3.6%	14.3%	35.7%
	Apology from the hotel together with special offer for next time	Count	1	7	2	6	16
		% within Hotel Response	6.2%	43.8%	12.5%	37.5%	100.0%
		% within Traveling Companion	12.5%	35.0%	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%
		% of Total	1.8%	12.5%	3.6%	10.7%	28.6%
Total		Count	8	20	7	21	56
		% within Hotel Response	14.3%	35.7%	12.5%	37.5%	100.0%
		% within Traveling Companion	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	14.3%	35.7%	12.5%	37.5%	100.0%

BIOGRAPHY

Name	Miss Patraporn Sri-Utenchai
Date of Birth	July 14, 1987
Educational Attainment	2009: Bachelor degree in Business Administration, Assumption University
Scholarship	Year 2005-2009: “72 nd anniversary celebrations of His Majesty's birthday” scholarship, Assumption University
Work Experiences	April 2009 to April 2012: Senior Associate Consultant KPMG Phoomchai Business Advisory

