

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON MAINTAINING CONSISTENCY
OF BRAND STANDARDS IN THE EXPANSION OF
INTERNATIONAL HOTEL CHAINS IN THAILAND**

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Thesis
entitled
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INTERNATIONAL HOTEL CHAINS IN THAILAND**

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON MAINTAINING CONSISTENCY OF BRAND STANDARDS IN THE EXPANSION OF INTERNATIONAL HOTEL CHAINS IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

Seeing from the rapid growth of the number of tourist arrivals as well as a number of hotel properties, Thai tourism has been widely recognized as the most powerful effects to the growth of the country's economy. However, considering the nature of hotel service, it takes the risk of inconsistency experience due to variable factors. Therefore, this research aims to make a clear understanding on the methodologies such as differences business entry modes and the level of control of operation, brand standards key elements; product specification, service process, people factor, and governance consistency management that has been used by international hotel chains in order to maintain the consistency of brand standards when it increasing number of hotel properties. The adopted of qualitative method using semi-structured interviews with 10 top executives from international hotel chains in Thailand is used for data collection. The result shows that different hotel companies are using similar methods with diverse details.

KEY WORDS: INTERNATIONAL HOTEL CHAIN/CONSISTENCY/ BRAND STANDARD/ HOTEL EXPANSION

152 pages

การศึกษาเชิงสำรวจเรื่องวิธีการในการรักษาความสม่ำเสมอในมาตรฐานของแบรนด์ ในการขยายตัวของเครือโรงแรมต่างชาติในประเทศไทย

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON MAINTAINING CONSISTENCY OF BRAND STANDARDS IN THE EXPANSION OF INTERNATIONAL HOTEL CHAINS IN THAILAND

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บทคัดย่อ

เนื่องจากการเติบโตอย่างต่อเนื่องของธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยวในประเทศไทย ทำให้จำนวนห้องพัก และ โรงแรมมีการขยายตัวอย่างเห็นได้ชัด ธุรกิจท่องเที่ยวและงานบริการจึงเข้ามามีบทบาทสำคัญต่อการเติบโตของระบบเศรษฐกิจในประเทศ อย่างไรก็ตาม ด้วยธรรมชาติของธุรกิจบริการ งานบริการมีความเสี่ยงด้านความไม่คงเส้นคงวาของงานบริการซึ่งเป็นผลมาจากปัจจัยหลายประการ

ดังนั้น งานวิจัยนี้จึงมีจุดประสงค์ เพื่อศึกษาเชิงสำรวจเรื่องวิธีการรักษาความสม่ำเสมอในมาตรฐานของแบรนด์ ในการขยายตัวของเครือโรงแรมต่างชาติในประเทศไทย โดยเก็บข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพ ด้วยการสัมภาษณ์ผู้ที่มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องในการวางแผน เพื่อรักษาความสม่ำเสมอในมาตรฐานของแบรนด์ จากโรงแรมต่างๆจำนวนทั้งสิ้น 10 แห่งจากในเครือต่างๆของโรงแรมต่างชาติในไทย เพื่อสร้างความเข้าใจเรื่องปัจจัยการขยายตัวของเครือโรงแรมต่างชาติ และการควบคุมคุณภาพงานบริการ ศึกษาความเข้าใจในมาตรฐานของแบรนด์ และเพื่อศึกษาวิธีการในการรักษาคุณภาพของงานบริการตามปัจจัยพื้นฐานหลักในมาตรฐานของแบรนด์

ทั้งนี้ ผลจากการศึกษาพบว่าแม้จะเป็นโรงแรมที่อยู่ภายใต้เครือโรงแรมต่างชาติต่างกัน แต่ส่วนใหญ่ก็ใช้วิธีคล้ายคลึงกันในการรักษาความสม่ำเสมอในมาตรฐานของแบรนด์

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Worldwide, the number of available rooms has rapidly increased in the equivalent direction with the growth in domestic and international tourism (University of Hawaii, 2010). World Travel and Tourism Council (2007) declared that the accommodations or hotel business sector is now becoming the leading business in the travel industry because of the revenue directly generated by hotels and other accommodations, the employment they provide, and the support services and supplies that the industry requires.

In Thailand, the statistics from the Office of SME Promotion revealed that there was a total number of 4,637 hotels during the year 2004. And, it was estimated that in 2006, there were approximately 4,800 hotels located all over Thailand with approximately 285,000 guest rooms (THMA, 2004).

In 2007, a list of hotels by the Act of Hotel (2004) has 4,811 properties containing 277,263 rooms averagely 58 rooms/hotels. The top 5 provinces that hotel located are Surat Thani (331 hotels), Bangkok (282 hotels), Chonburi (269 hotels), Phuket (243 hotels), and Chiang Mai (192 hotels). When classified by region, Central (including Bangkok) has the highest number of hotels located (1,638 hotels) following by South (1,353 hotels), North (967 hotels), and North-Eastern (853 hotels).

Moreover, there is information showed in Thailand Hotel Association's website (2011) (Figure 1) that there has been an increasing number of hotels with legal license in Thailand starting from year 2008 until 2010 with 337,299 total rooms. Among those numbers, 63,879 rooms are operating in Bangkok area legally with license while 38,604 rooms in Bangkok area are operating without licensed. Furthermore, the presentation of Thailand Hotel Association's website (2011) also showed the number of rooms opened in Bangkok in 2011 and 2012 by international

hotel chains with 2,363 rooms in total and there will be 1,929 rooms more by the end of the year 2013.

No. of Hotels With Legal License						
Region	Year 2008		Year 2009		Year 2010	
	No. of Hotels	No. of Rooms	No. of Hotels	No. of Rooms	No. of Hotels	No. of Rooms
North	1,002	41,152	1,090	43,846	* 1,090	43,846
Northeast	890	30,419	1,091	34,051	1,357	53,436
Central	1,401	84,100	1,467	87,532	1,403	63,802
*Chonburi					293	32,574
*Prachuab					161	5,505
South	1,361	69,379	1,498	74,257	* 1,498	74,257
Bangkok	291	58,358	314	60,272	325	63,879
Total	4,945	283,408	5,460	299,958	6,127	337,299

Remark * Info. from Year 2010

Figure 1.1 - The 3-year increasing number of legal licensed hotel properties and rooms in Thailand. (Information from year 2010 - Thailand Hotel Association)

Furthermore, there are also the news releases from international hotel chains that have been invested in Thailand regarding the business expansion (increasing number of properties) with a rapidly growth ratio. In June 2005, The Accor Group had announced the largest ever expansion in Thailand and Vietnam with total of 23 properties all over the country and 10 more properties in Vietnam (ehotelier.com, 2005). In December 2011, there were 53 Accor hotels with 12,285 rooms in Thailand (Accor, 2011). Starwood, the operator of Sheraton, Westin, W and Le Meridian chain, has also announced the rapidly expansion in Thailand. In 2012, they hold 24 hotels with over 4,500 rooms in Bangkok, Samui, and Phuket (www.horizonhomes-samui.com, 2011). Moreover, Marriott International released the announcement to strengthen the leadership position in Thailand with the opening of three new properties in 2012. This expansion brought Marriott International's portfolio to 16 hotels in

Thailand (Marriott, 2012). Recently, Intercontinental Hotel Group just opened Holiday Inn Express Bangkok Siam with 12 additional properties to be opened in South East Asian region in the next two years (Intercontinental Hotel Group, 2012). In addition to this, Minor International (MINT), the owner, operator and investor of more than 70 hotels, resorts and serviced suites, has announced the holding of 36 hotels in Thailand, where 15 properties are majority-owned, 13 are joint-ventured, and 7 are purely managed (mint.listedcompany.com, 2012).

The significant growth of number of hotels in Thailand is a consequence from the continuous growth of tourism industry. It has been widely recognized that Thai Tourism is regarded as one of the most powerful affect to the growth of country's economy. Besides, it has been one of the major sectors that contributed prosperity of the country's economic over the decades (Narangajavana and Hu, 2008). As a result, figures and statistics that portrayed following have been attracted many of service and hospitality investors not only from international hotel chains, but also from local hotels and resorts owners and SMEs entrepreneurs.

Since 1991, the growth of international tourist arrivals in Thailand has been continuously increased. Further, the number of international visitors as well as the amount of tourism-derived revenue has been progressively growing. During 1992 and 2002 the Thai hotel industry saw the number of available bedrooms nearly double from 130,000 to 240,000 and guest stays increased from 15.5 million to more than 40 million (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2003a, b). In 2003, according to the World Tourism Organization, Thailand had been the third largest accommodation capacity in Asia with a total of 321,000 guestrooms in hotels and similar establishments (World Tourism Organization [WTO], n.d.). Even the number of foreign tourists declined in 2004, due to the disaster from the Tsunami in December 2003. However, number of foreign tourists gradually increased in the second half of 2005 through 2006 (THMA - Thai Hotel and Hospitality Management Association, n.d.).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) reported the 10 years statistic regarding the number of international tourists' arrival that grew nearly double from 7.8 million people in the year 1998 to 14.5 million people in the year 2007. Additionally, Thai tourist travelling within the country grew from 51.7 million people to 83.2

million people in the same period (Tourism Authority of Thailand - Tourism Statistics, n.d.).

Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sport states that in The Foreign Tourists' Annual Report (year 2011) and The Foreign Tourists' Forecast (year 2012) mentioned Thailand would still be the popular destination among foreign tourists. In 2011, there were 19,098,323 foreign tourists visited Thailand. While comparing with the same period of the year before, there were more 3,161,923 foreign tourists or 19.84% greater. The top three visited tourists came from three main markets; Malaysia, China, and Japan. Tourism industry in the year 2011 provided total revenue at 734,591.46 million Baht which was higher than the same period of the year before at 141,797.37 million Baht or 23.92%. However, in 2012, there was slightly growth in tourism industry at 8 -10% (Department of Tourism, 2012)

Hence, with these rapidly growth, providing an adequate accommodation is an essential preparation strategy for the country, which hotel is a place that most travelers are looking for. Therefore, an expansion of hotel business from international hotel chains as well as local hotel owners could be seen worldwide. In recent years, hotel business has become more international. The US, UK, European, and Asian hotel chains are now operating throughout the world (University of Hawaii, n.d.). These chains include well-known names like Hyatt, Hilton, Four Seasons, ANA, Accor, Radisson, and Nikko Hotels. With respect to the investor approach, expanding the business is equal to the creating of chance or business opportunity. Additionally, market share, brand awareness, capabilities, resources, and skills profoundly influence a service firm's competitive and international advantage. As a result of matching internal resources and complex bundles of skills with an altering external environment, international hotel chains are able to achieve the competitive advantage in a foreign market (Javalgi and Martin, 2007).

Accordingly, internationalization has now become one of the key preoccupations since the 1990s. The latest books, articles and courses launched with the word "international" in their titles, both in mainstream management areas and in the hospitality industry in particular (Burgess, et al., 1995). Besides, the world business competition these days has reached such a level that the growth of world trade has risen further than that from world gross domestic product (Deresky, H.,

1994). Therefore, by distinguishing this extreme competition in hotel business has driven many of international hotel chains to internationalize their firm globally.

Reast (2005) mentioned that internationalization has become a progressively accepted technique of gaining growth (Springen and Miller, 1990). It also been stated that, when the firm has launched the business expansion, there is an expectation that the loyalty will drive trial – if the consumer is loyal to the parent brand there is a good chance that they will try the extended brand (2005). However, for service business, the newly entering into the foreign market is immediately facing the internationalization problem such as lack of resources or limitation of law and regulations (Carmen and Langeard, 1980 - retrieved from Gronroos, 1999). Therefore, the entry mode or mode of expansion is a necessary policy that helps the business to cope with this situation (Gronroos, 1999)

Gronroos (1999) suggested that the traditional technique for service business in expanding itself abroad is following the manufacturers that are supplied with service in the target domestic market. Thus, nowadays, many companies using different strategies to internationalizing which often the combination of entry and exit strategies (Axinn and Matthyssens, 2002). The internationalization strategies included the growing of the brands variety (brand extension) and business segment as well as introduce additional properties or even using the technology to expand the distribution channel of the business toward globalization.

In Thailand, starting mode of expansion of several international hotel chains is joint ventures based on the granting of management contracts with Thai property owners/developers to international hotel companies (the “operator”). The international hotel chain/companies provide the management know-how and characteristically establishment under the hotel brand name (Panvisavas and Taylor, 2006). Additionally, the establishment of service policy has also been provided as an organization’s pillar in order to keep the equivalent level of the service in various properties in the same brand.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

However, considering the nature of hotel services, hotel guests leave the hotel with memories of their experiences (Kayaman and Arasli, 2007). The biggest challenge for hotel industry nowadays is “tangiblizing the intangible hotel experience”. One of the recommended methods for overcoming this challenge can be the creation of a strong hotel brand name, which represents the hotel services and appears to the customer’s tangible characteristics of a touchable product (Berry, 1986; Levitt, 1981). In other words, customers can easier visualize and understand the intangibility side of the hotel services using the strong brand name (Berry, 2000; Bharadwaj et al., 1993). Therefore, many international hotels, nowadays, are using the strong brand name as a communication tool to better visualize the standard of services among various hotel properties. It is also a tool to illustrate such a level or characteristic of service under a particular hotel brand name. As a result, the brand standards have been provided from international hotel brand companies to ensure that all hotel units are delivering the same service characteristic. Also, it applied as one of the service policy to guarantee the experience and satisfaction under the customer expectations of a particular hotel brand name.

Nevertheless, hotel that internationalized using business entry mode plus brand standards or a strong brand characteristic still risky to the failure of customers’ satisfaction and loyalty. Due to the consequence from the nature of the firm – as considered services as a main selling product. The key failure in hotel business expansion is the inconsistency of service from the hotelier, which is considered as the key component in delivering the main product.

Leslie de Chernatony and Segal-Horn (2001) stated that the successful services brands considered consistency as being almost as important as focused positioning. Particularly in hotel business, customers always create an expectation according to their experiences with the brand and/or corporate communication from the brand before arriving at the hotel. As many others have observed (e.g. Lovelock et al., 1999), service procedure of the hotels presents the challenge of inconsistent quality arising from dependency on employees' behavior and consumer/employee interactions. In addition to this, Chernatony (2001) stated that the eight consultants has mentioned the service as the most important and most difficult factor in achieving some kind

consistency in experience that customers have of the brand (retrieved from Chernatony, 2001). Therefore, with respect to the nature of service business, the business expansion and internationalization model can easily be a cause of inconsistency especially when certain hotel created expectations that might unable to be produced by staff (Chernatony, 2001). This service inconsistency is the main failure in customer satisfaction's fulfillment and it can cause the brand entrusted which affect to brand loyalty and re-purchasing behavior.

Apart from that, different entry mode provided different level in control of the operation in the hotel business. For example, a franchising, the franchisor (the owner of the hotel brand name) enters into a contract with a franchisee (agent) to use a specific business formatted service concept to sell services or goods under the franchisor's trademark. In general, a business formatted service consists of a branded set of procedures, designs, management approaches, and services that are to be delivered exactly as specified by the franchisor (Fladmoe-Lindquist & Jacque, 1995). Even some has been recommended that the franchising standardized operation which guarantees the consistent product quality across different properties. However, under one particular hotel brand name, there are always possibilities that the adopted entry mode will cause the inconsistency of either products or services. It is, accordingly a consequence from the ability to control the standardized operation of the owner and the hotel operator.

In conclusion, the international hotel chains internationalize their service business to create their opportunity. The service firms have to prior significantly building the strong brand name in order to tangiblizing and visualize the hotel service experiences. Besides, hotel business owner/operator has to decide on adopted entry mode in order to control the standardized operation. Nevertheless, under the same brand name, when international hotel chains expand number of properties, the failure in managing consistency of service is possibly occur. It is because of the different adopted entry mode and level of control in operation. Consequently, inconsistency can eliminate hotel's brand name that the business firm are trying to build.

1.3 Research Question

This research study is an exploratory study on the method in maintaining consistency of brand standards of international hotel chains in Thailand. By using the different factors; business entry mode, and brand standards key elements; product specification, service process, people factor, and governance to investigate the method that has been used by international hotel chains in Thailand on their daily operation in order to achieve the consistency of their brand standards.

Therefore this exploratory research would conduct to answer the question; “what are the methodologies used by international hotel chains in order to maintain the consistency of brand standards when expanding the business?”

1.4 Research Objectives

This exploratory research is aimed to investigate how can international hotel chains in Thailand maintain the consistency of brand standards when the number of hotel properties has been increasing. Therefore, the research attempts to study on the issues regarding the consistency of brand standards in the international hotel chains among different hotel properties in Thailand and to make a conclusion according to the evidence.

Therefore, the objectives of research paper are;

- 1) To investigate the impact of business entry mode towards to level of control of operation and the management of its.
- 2) To explore the scope and understanding towards the term ‘brand standards’ and the key elements of brand standards.
- 3) To examine the method used by international hotel chains in maintaining consistency of brand standards among different properties.

1.5 Benefit of the Study

In 2015, ten countries in South-East Asian region will communize to ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), this alter will expand better relationship

among countries in South East Asian region for the diverse aspect such as agriculture, commerce, technology, tourism, and career opportunity. With respect to the growth of the AEC, the chance in expanding their business within the region may vary. Including firms in the hospitality industry, it has been found that the competition level has hit such the highest point. Thai SMEs owners will be able to internationalize their hotel, resort, restaurant, or tour operator to other countries. However, without any internationalization knowledge, the business expansion might be at risk, especially in service segments.

Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of this study will able to be applied as an applicable know-how in service consistency maintaining method for the hotel business owner or operator as well as SMEs entrepreneurs that expected to expand the business. Moreover, the study would be able to show the management know-how of service consistency maintaining method which other business entrepreneurs such as the restaurant, spa, hospital, and tour operator are able to adopt or apply the conclusion to acclimatize with their business firm or phenomena.

In addition, it is expected that the result from this study would be benefit information for Thai Hotel Association (THA) as a further understanding in method of consistency management of the international hotel chains. This study may benefit to the customers if the hotel and resort implied the service consistency management model in their expansion and able to deliver the service as consistence as its brand standard.

Ultimately, it is hoped that the findings from this research paper would help to facilitate researchers, educators, scholars and industrialists comprehend some of the management features that underpin successful in international hotel business internationalization and their management of brand standard consistency as well as raise awareness of the sector in mainstream management literature.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

This study concerns the exploration of brand standards consistency management in international hotel chains with relations to the hotel industry, and the

target population for this research is reliable representatives from each of the established international hotel chains in Thailand. In-depth interviews are time consuming for participants. Therefore the limitation to this study is the accessibility to international hotel chains representatives and their willingness to give in-depth organizational information and strategies.

Furthermore, this research focuses only on the method of brand standards consistency maintenance of international hotel chains from the management point of view. Even this research has somewhat related to the consumer perspective but with the limitation of time and resources, this research only be conducted in strategic exploratory. As a consequence, this research paper will not measure or/ as well as include the success of the methodologies, comparison of hotel brand standards and customer point of view.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to better understand the background and the concept, this chapter will define the related literatures as following;

- 2.1 International Hotel Chains
- 2.2 The Internationalization of Hotels
- 2.3 Entry mode and Control of Operation
 - 2.3.1 Alliance Ownership and Management
- 2.4 Hotel Brand Standards
 - 2.4.1 Hotel Brands
 - 2.4.2 Brand Standards
- 2.5 Consistency of Brand Standards
 - 2.5.1 Product Specification
 - 2.5.2 Service Process
 - 2.5.3 People Factor
 - 2.5.4 Governance
- 2.6 Conceptual Framework

2.1 International Hotel Chains

The hospitality industry is normally allied with hotels and restaurants (University of Hawaii, n.d.). The accommodations industry or known as hotel business includes a wide variety of facilities including luxurious resorts, business hotel, youth hostel, and modest bed and breakfast establishments. The word ‘accommodation’ in the hotel context, means a place to stay, especially a place to sleep. In addition to a room, furniture, a bed as well as bathing facilities and toilet facilities will be provided (Cambridge International College, n.d.). In the business dictionary (2013), the hotel is defined as a commercial establishment providing or offering lodging, meals, and other

guest services. Some hotels provide accommodation for long-staying guests however the majority of hotels provide accommodation for the short-staying guests, with a very large proportion of travelers (Cambridge International College, n.d.). In order to call a building as the hotel, the common requirement is a minimum of six letting bedrooms with at least three of them must have en suite (attached with) private bathroom facilities (The Vienna Tourist Board's consultation & booking, 2008).

In this study, the international hotel chains refer to the hotel (accommodation business) that has internationalized itself from its home country. It could, perhaps be a single-brand name or multi-brand name under the chain. As well, the chains could be internationalized with various entry modes and the international hotel chain must holds more than one property.

The range of facilities represents the different needs and preferences of travelers and the changing markets (University of Hawaii, n.d.). The classification of accommodation could be varied due to the wide range of room types and amenities. The OHG - Official Hotel Guide (reference source for accommodations, it was published in the US, and followed worldwide) has classified the hotels and ranked into nine categories as (1) Moderate Tourist Class, (2) Tourist Class, (3) Superior Tourist Class, (4) Moderate First Class, (5) Limited Service First Class, (6) First Class, (7) Moderate Deluxe, (8) Deluxe, and (9) Superior Deluxe (Todd & Susan, 2005).

The varieties of types of rooms have developed in response to the customer needs (Gillette, 1996). The contemporary hotel classification classified hotel in a number of ways with many different categories. For example, in the United States, the hotel type is based on its amenities and also by the location and the target markets that the hotel wishes to attract (University of Hawaii, n.d.). Some subgroups of hotels include:

- Airport hotel: Located near an airport with amenities for the air traveler including facilities for business meetings.
- Convention hotel: Located in major cities, often near a municipal convention center with major space for meetings and exhibition areas.
- Commercial hotel: Located in urban areas with business travelers as the primary target market with upscale or midscale facilities. Sometimes it is called business hotel.

- Suite hotel: Apartment-style hotels which offer more space and upscale amenities. This type of hotel currently targets the long-staying guest. In some country it is called service suite or service apartment.

- Condominium hotel: Located in resort destinations with individually owned hotel units often with kitchen facilities where owners use the units as personal vacation homes and also rent out the units at other times.

- Timeshare hotel: Located in resort destinations, where the unit ownership is shared and each owner has a fractional ownership and is entitled to use the unit for a fixed time period in the year.

- Motor hotel or Motel: Located close to a highway for automobile travelers with provisions for parking and amenities which may include swimming pool, coffee shop, and family-oriented facilities.

- Bed and breakfast hotel: Located in private homes or small inns. This type of accommodation includes hostels and pensions, it usually a self-effacing establishments which offer breakfast and sometimes light meals. These accommodations are usually family-run operations.

- Resort Hotel: The resort hotels have become the most important segment of the accommodations sector for vacation destinations. Resorts are found worldwide, wherever people gather for recreational and relaxation activities that include golf, tennis, skiing, health spas, or a combination of these activities with more extensive amenities than in urban hotels (University of Hawaii, n.d.). The typical guest at a resort is a longer staying customer and/or seeks either a vacation or pleasure or a combination of business with pleasure. The average length of stay is longer and the standard of service, facilities, food and beverages, entertainment, and other amenities are much higher than found in most other types of accommodations.

From the perspective of hotel development, the first difference between chains and unaffiliated hotels is in the starting point. Although there is no standard of starting point, but for unaffiliated hotels the development process typically starts with a site, which means that the city, the country and the economy in which the venue is located is determined (Slattery, 2003). The formation of the concept stage of development then seeks to establish the most effective market level, hotel configuration, room configuration and size for the proposed hotel (Slattery, 1996).

In contrast, hotel brands start with concept formation typically by identifying the market level and the configuration of facilities for the brand (Litteljohn and Beattie, 1992). The chains approach to hotel configuration has been to improve the financial structures of hotels mainly by increasing the proportion of turnover derived from rooms, which in turn produces higher margins and higher returns. In up market hotels such as those in the Hilton, Intercontinental and Sheraton brands, this has been achieved by locating hotels in the larger cities and increasing the number of rooms per hotel. At the mid-market level this has been achieved through the creation of limited feature brands such as Holiday Inn Express and Courtyard by Marriott. At the economy lodging and budget levels the improvements have been achieved by developing brands such as Travelodge and Formula 1 as room only hotel brands (Mathews, 2000).

At the present, attitudes and lifestyles differ the target market of international hotel chains between the main generation segments. These can be referred to as the matures , the silver baby boomers and the younger travellers of the Generation Xs ' and ' Generation Ys ' . These silver baby boomers, for example, are living longer, enjoying a more active, younger outlook, are brand wise, travel more and desire new experiences both in culture and tourism (Harvey, 2007). This is important to understand, as the percentage of the population aged 65 and over in Europe will increase from 15 percent in 2000 to nearly 25 percent by 2015 (Payne, 2007). Therefore, the hotel industry needs greater investment in technology, particularly in customer relationship management (CRM) systems, as a means of influencing customer behavior (Harvey, 2007).

Harvey (2007) also draw an interesting aspect of international hotel chains in human resources. The industry has a high turnover rate of employees and it needs to be better in attracting and retaining employees. In addition, It is suggested that the industry must not lose touch with its local roots and like many industries it must 'think globally and act locally'. Cultural differences, local traditions, customs, multi-generational travel, dietary requirements and language must be kept in mind of the international hotel chain management team. For example, with the number of Chinese tourists rising rapidly, Mandarin language skills will become increasingly in demand worldwide. Although on the one hand globalisation of the industry is underway, more

sensitivity towards cultural differences in marketing, hotel development, employee recruitment and training will be crucial.

In the future, innovation in hotels must meet the diverse needs of the different generational requirements. Hoteliers need to define the brand persona including operations, sales, marketing and service delivery so they are adapted to the different needs of their target generational segment. Today, there are an estimated over 140 hotel brands, up from approximately 80 in 1995 (World Tourism Organization, n.d.). These increasing numbers of brands are trying to address the issue of diversity albeit such variety can confuse the customer. Many people in this industry (Wuest, 2001; Wood, 2000; Todd and Susan, 2005, et al.) foresee and recommend that Customer loyalty on the other hand will depend on a hotel operator's ability to deliver the brand promise consistently throughout their hotel experience, so creating a brand premium. Getting it right will deliver sustained returns and brand premium.

2.2 The Internationalization of Hotels

Narangajavana & Hu (2008) mentioned that internationalization is a method that each industries often used to gradually increase their worldwide involvement (Eroglu, 1993). This term has been extensively used to describe the outward movement of the international operations (Welch and Luostarinen, 1988). Internationalization involves the process of adapting the business's operations to cope with the strategy, structure and resources of international environments (Calof and Beamish, 1995). Generally, the exporting and FDI (Foreign Direct Investment - i.e., wholly owned) are the two common basic market entry options. The previous entry mode provides little control in the host market and is not a practicable option in the service sector (Preble, Reichel, & Hoffman, 2000).

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) - The FDI provides full local control, full profit retention, and often-longer survival rates to the business compare with other alliance entry mode (Barkema and Vermeulen, 1998; Pennings et al., 1994). However, the FDI is costly and risky. As the business firm completely replicates an entity, incurs

all investment and political risks, and may not gain new competitive skills or resources (Preble, Reichel, & Hoffman, 2000). Even as the internationalization theory has explained the reason for the firm to choose FDI, it fails to explain the role of location advantage (Rao and Erramilli, 1990). For example, the advantage of rights in ownership has been shown but the disadvantage of destination and resources know-how has been not yet explained. To overcome some of the shortcomings of the internationalization theory, Dunning (1988) suggested the eclectic theory of FDI, including the three key components: ownership advantage, location advantage, and internationalization advantage (Javalgi & Martin, 2007).

Additionally, Ohmae (1989) argues that globalization consents the other entry mode, making them essential to strategy. In fact, the number of equity-based (e.g., international joint ventures) and non-equity-based (e.g., franchising) entry mode has been increasing steadily over the past two decades (Beamish and Delios, 1997).

Nonetheless, in the service industry, the procedure of internationalization is a recent phenomenon which just started in 1960s. Consequently it did not gain much force until the 1980s (Narangajavana & Hu, 2008). Eclectic and transaction cost theories are the two conventional theories, which are emphasized research studies in the internationalization area (Ohmae, 1989). The mainly quoted academic journal regarding to the internationalization of organizations is the eclectic theory developed by Dunning and McQueen (1981). According to them, the leverage, pattern and growth of value-added activities undertaken by international organizations outside their national boundaries is dependent on the value of and interaction between three main variables:

- 1) the ownership specific advantages of multinational organizations,
- 2) the location-specific advantages of countries, and
- 3) market internalization or coordinating advantages.

It was the Dunning and McQueen's (1982) study which explained the distribution, forms and growth of contribution of international hotel companies through the framework of the eclectic theory. The assumption was further utilized by Dunning and Kundu (1995) in order to re-evaluate some of the reasons for the increase in multinational activity in the hotel sector. However, while their investigations are mostly based on a numerical framework and the significance of expansion in

international travel, collectively, they have mentioned little theoretical knowledge about the internationalization of hotel groups (Narangajavana & Hu, 2008).

Dunning and Kundu (1995) quarrels the case for a broader-based industrial economic framework to monitor international hotel group expansion. This idea has been taken forward by Beattie (1991), who provided an instrument to examine the hypothesis that the internationalization process of hotels. It shown that the internationalization process of hotels must be considered against a “more scrupulously defined industry background” (Majkgard and Sharma, 1998). The study also identifies competitive groups of hotel companies in relation to three dimensions:

- (1) The degree of vertical incorporation of the parent firm;
- (2) The degree of internationalization of the hotel company (calculated as the number of hotels outside the home country of the company);
- (3) The size of the hotel company, based on the total number of hotels.

The findings from Beattie (1991) recommended that the majority of the 62 companies surveyed had internationalized at an early stage in their development, the implication being that management in these firms had to handle with a wide range of operating environments. Even though Beattie (1991) classified most of the hotel companies surveyed into convenient industry groups but the study has a number of flaws. For example, she found significant differences in company details within these clusters, but owing to the remit of her study she was unable to investigate these variations (Grönroos, 1999). In addition, in many cases numerical data have been preferred to the in-depth case-study method.

Likewise, there has been additional continually industry and academic interest in further investigation in internationalization process of the hotel business. The study of Dunning and McQueen (1982) about International Corporation in international tourism on behalf of the United Nations is one of the most extensively quoted empirical studies (Burgess, Hampton, Price, & Roper, 1995). Although the data collection in field (encompassing 81 firms from 22 countries) were collected in the late 1970s, this was the first main collection of industry research detailing the growing internationalization of hotel groups and remains the basis for comparative studies. However, the value of this research is not merely empirical (Narangajavana & Hu, 2008). A number of authors have attempted, however, to establish more hypothetical

bases for the internationalization of hotel groups, particularly Litteljohn and Beattie (1992). Litteljohn critically appraises the work of Dunning and McQueen and Dave, especially their preoccupation with forms of expansion – such as the franchise, management contract and technical agreement (Burgess, Hampton, Price, & Roper, 1995).

Additionally, there are further theories concerning internationalization processes, for example the Uppsala model (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977). This model focuses on marketing and sales activities and disregards R&D activities (Forsgren and Johanson, 2010). Differentiation among countries in terms of national values (Lunnan et al., 2005), culture (Hofstede, 2001), psychic distance, and institutional distance are often assumed to have similar implications for the internationalization process of business activities (Søberg, 2012). This is so even though distinct differences are likely to exist in terms of the characteristics of the knowledge, which are most important for the internationalization of different business activities (Søberg, 2012).

Consequently, the literature, in general, assumes that the exact nature of the business activity being internationalized is of little importance in the internationalization process (Petersen, Pedersen and Sharma, 2003). A gap in the literature exists concerning how the internationalization process of business activities differs depending upon the nature of the business activity that is being internationalized (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977). Knowledge sharing within MNCs has become increasingly important (Pihl, 2008). Differences in the characteristics of the knowledge, which is very important for the internationalization of different business activities, is likely to impact the extent to which the related knowledge transfer should be considered an act of replication or of re-creation (Lervik et al., 2005). Studies focusing on strategy in developed markets (Pehrsson, 2010) and international joint ventures (Lane et al., 2001) suggested that the sources of the knowledge and the extent to which knowledge is tacit in the internationalization process differ across different business activities. These findings provide indications that differences exist in terms of which knowledge is most important in the internationalization process of different business activities. However, the issue has been under explored in relation to fully-owned foreign invested R&D subsidiaries in emerging markets such as China and India (Dave, 1984). The conditions for knowledge transfer between home base and

fully-owned foreign invested subsidiaries often differ from the conditions for knowledge transfer between home base and international joint ventures (Forsgren, 2002). Therefore, it is necessary to further develop our understanding of internationalization of business activities to fully-owned newly established foreign invested R&D centers (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977). Previous research has mainly focused on developed markets (Litteljohn and Slattery, 1993).

Therefore, with respect to the hospitality industry, it is important in recognizing the importance of internationalization and its advantage to the business firm (Olsen and Murthy, 1994). Besides, the addition comprehension that significantly facilitates the internationalization process of particular firm to be success is the entry mode which concerning to the control of operation and recognized as one of the important key study.

2.3 Entry Mode and Control of Operation

Entering to the new markets, while financially attractive, are likely to have unique and individual barriers to entry, including political, ownership, business model and cultural challenges. Hotel companies will need to work through these to achieve the potential for success over the next few years (Contractor and Kundu, 1998).

In the literature it has been suggested that the choice of entry mode for service firms when going abroad is either to follow existing clients when they internationalize or to look actively for new markets (Erramilli & Rao, 1990); see also (Majkgard & Sharma, 1998). Today, the advancements of technologies like internet, satellite communication and digital television have created totally new forms of internationalization. With several explanations, direct investment in a foreign country is not a recommended choice of the service firm any more (Grönroos, 1999).

According to many literatures on international marketing of services, an internationalization strategy for hospitality business or service firm is often considered more risky compared to the manufacturers of goods (Carman & Langeard, 1980). One reason for this is that in many services the producer and the production facilities are part of the service, which requires that the firm has greater control of its resources

(Palmer & Cole, 1995). Additionally, potential customers on foreign markets pick up service offers for a domestic market and require the firm to deliver internationally as well (Grönroos, 1999).

Nevertheless, in order to internationalize, service firms may enter foreign markets using a variety of entry modes, including exporting, licensing, joint ventures, and wholly owned subsidiaries (Root, 1994). The selection of a foreign market and an appropriate foreign entry mode in a foreign market can have significant and far reaching consequences on a firm's performance and survival (Ekeledo and Sivakumar, 1998; Terpstra and Sarathy, 1994). For instance, an appropriate entry mode may not only block opportunities, but also limit the range options available to the service firm opting to expand the scope of internationalization (Ekeledo and Sivakumar, 2004).

Besides, referred to Weinstein (1977), entry mode is related to the degree of control, which is crucial as it ensures the ultimate success of strategic goals of service firms (e.g. follow clients, access to skills and other resources). Control is also important in the selection of entry mode as it determines risks and returns, the degree of interaction between customers and providers, the degree of intangibility of service type, and ultimately performance of the firm in a foreign market (Javalgi & Martin, 2007).

Theories of international entry mode choice come with different objectives and motivations to internalize (Vandermerwe and Chadwick, 1989). The internationalization theory, the eclectic theory, and resource-based theory have been used to explain the international market entry mode strategies of manufacturing and service firms (Ekeledo and Sivakumar, 2004; Javalgi et al., 2003). As an example, the resource-based theory views the firm as the source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

Regarding entry mode selection, the resource-based theory, unlike competing theories, explains not only the differences in entry mode choice observed across firms in an industry, but also why all firms in the industry do not and cannot pursue strategies that are likely to offer the highest returns. . . the resource-based approach to entry mode choice incorporates

the core notion of strategic management; the notion that a firm competes well in a setting in which there is fit between the firm resources and external opportunities (Ekeledo and Sivakumar, 2004, p. 73).

Other interesting mode of expansion or internationalization entry mode is the strategic alliances. It is a cooperative business arrangements include licensing, R&D partnerships, technology transfers, franchising, joint ventures, and other strategic business transactions (Beamish & Killing, 1997). Alliances offer a number of direct benefits to their members including: gaining quick access to new markets, technology, knowledge, and customers; circumventing or co-opting regulatory barriers; absorbing a key local competitor; and lowering risk by sharing costs and benefiting from a partner's political connections (Preble, Reichel, & Hoffman, 2000). The explanation of the alliance ownership and management has been shown in the following section

2.3.1 Alliance Ownership and Management

Licensing - Licensing is an contractual agreement of two companies in the different country, by mean of which an international company concedes to other company abroad to use productive process, patent, trade secret, or a royalty. The licencing involves the rights to use an intangible asset (e.g., trademark, design, formula, etc.) from one firm to another. The licensee buys the right to use the asset for a specified period usually in a specified market (Preble, Reichel, & Hoffman, 2000).

Licencing has been categorized into various conformation such as manufacturing contract and cession patents. The manufacturing contract is a licencing that consist in establish a working arrangement between two companies. When licensor permit the licensee to manufacture products under the brand of first subject to compliance with the certain quality requirements. This type of licencing has easily found in the consuming goods that has been produced for department store's brand. While the cession patents is more found in the service industry. It is the register and invention that serves its creator to protect against the manufacture or sale of the

mechanism of another member. For example, the use of the film production brand at the theater for enhancing film quality to the customers.

Joint Venture - Joint venture is an alliance in which two or more partners join together to form a new entity in a market for a specific purpose (equity is usually involved). Such as, Sheraton and the hotel division of Koor Corporation have formed a joint venture to engage in franchise activities in the Middle East (Preble, Reichel, & Hoffman, 2000).

In Thailand, one preferred starting mode of expansion of new hotel rooms are joint ventures based on the granting of management contracts by Thai property owners/developers to international hotel companies (the “operator”). The international hotel chain/companies provide the management know-how and characteristically establishment under the hotel brand name (Panvisavas & Taylor, 2006).

Management Contract - The management contract is frequently found in international hotel business where a hotel chain can establish a company without the investment of ownership (University of Hawaii, n.d.). According to Eyster (1988), the hotel management contract can be defined as a written agreement between the owner of a hotel and an operator. The operator is agreed to operate and manage the hotel property on behalf of the owner as per the operator is to receive a management fee in return. It also allows the separation of management ownership and operation for this entry mode.

The management contracts are widely used for the international hotel brand name in global marketing (Varadarajan and Cunningham, 1995). The international hotel companies or the operators provide the management team with tools and knowhow, with the expectation to operate by standard management practices of the chain (Palmer and Cole, 1995). For many hotels which are foreign-owned, this is very common revenue of operation. An example case, in Hawaii, many hotels are owned by Japanese investors, the hotels are operated by management contract using brand names such as Sheraton or Marriot (University of Hawaii, n.d.).

Panvisavas & Taylor, (2006) uttered that the use of management contracts as a market entry mode by international hotel chains is not uncommon in the

international hotel business. According to the previous research by Contractor and Kundu (1998), it indicates foreign market entry through high equity and control modes is not always feasible, though it is desirable for large global operations. Consequently, to be a global player, international hotel chains are frequently place significant dependence on non-equity partnerships and franchisees. In isolation, having an association with franchisees and operating hotels under management contracts can facilitate advantages in areas such as global logistics, supplies, architectural design, reservations, training, and brand recognition towards global hotel chains. This helps international hotel chains to capture some of the vital economies necessary for competitive international operations (Panvisavas & Taylor, 2006).

However, by the 1990s, in the listed hotel sector some 75 percent of hotels in Asia were operated under a management contract. This implies that the management contracts symbolize a key mode of market entry for international hotel chains to the growth hospitality economies of Asia (Slattery, 1996).

Franchising - A franchise is an arrangement in which the owner of a trademark, trade name or copyright licenses others to use the same trademark, trade name or copyright in providing goods or services (University of Hawaii, n.d.). It is an elaborate form of licensing, whereby, a firm (franchisor) grants an independent entrepreneur (franchisee) the right to use both intangible assets (e.g., brand name or service) along with tangible assets (e.g., products, methods of operations) in a specified geographic area (Preble & Hoffman, 1988). In the hotel business, the owner (franchisee) usually remains in control of the management and the property, but has the advantage of using a large chain's trademark or trade name in marketing (Aaker, 1991). For example, independent hotels benefit from the global brand name of the international hotel chain and its reservation system. The franchising firm (foreign) gains a quick, often smooth, access to a new market without the risk involved in ownership (Preble, Reichel, & Hoffman, 2000). Also, entrepreneurs can gain benefit from buying the right to sell franchises in a region for a franchisor; this is known as master franchising (Preble, Reichel, & Hoffman, 2000).

The common view of the demand for franchise market entry mode is that the most capable entrepreneurs start independent businesses, whereas less qualified

entrepreneurs become franchisees (Williams, 1999). Franchising allows the headquarters firm to grow more rapidly than it would if organized as a chain (Litteljohn and Slattery, 1993). This fast dispersion may provide “first mover” advantages in local markets; especially in small markets where there is potential for local monopoly (Knott, Corredoira, & Kimberly, 2008).

The underlying assumption of the internationalization model is that the basic goal of any franchising system is to survive by determining to increase long-term profitability (Williamson, 1975). The system is also motivating to keep risks at a low level (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). These two competing forces, which are shaped by a series of organizational (internal) and environmental (external) variables, determine the strength of top management's intentions to internationalize which, in turn, influences its commitment decisions and actions (Eroglu, 1993).

In conclusion, the market entry mode (business alliance) may be used in combination to form a web of relationships among firms (Preble, Reichel, & Hoffman, 2000). In order to build a cooperative business as viewed as strategic, firms must enable the cooperation to achieve some type of competitive advantage in the marketplace (Varadarajan & Cunningham, 1995). Key resources obtained through entry mode may include location, brand name, and customer base (Preble, Reichel, & Hoffman, 2000). Therefore, the suggested success factor for alliance is providing partners with superior resources and/or skills that they would not otherwise possess on their own.

2.4 Hotel Brand Standards

A strong brands and brand standards may enhance market share, create customer loyalty and increase profit (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003), they are valuable assets to a firm (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010).

From time to time, different attempts have been made to establish a globally uniform hotel standards classification system but the effort has faced many difficulties (University of Hawaii, n.d.). Some of the difficulties to raise a uniform hotel standards classification system include dissimilarity in definitions, facilities,

service standards, management, and cultural influences on service which differ in every country (Aaker, 1991; Beattie, 1991).

Generally, a number of hotel standards are classified into 'star' categories (1-Star to 5-Star). According to the World Tourism Organization and the International Hotel and Restaurant Association, hotel star rating classifies standards of the accommodation establishments in which the same type of establishments e.g., hotels, motels, and inns (Narangajavana and Hu, 2008). According to their common physical and service characteristics, those accommodation business has been conventionally broken down into classes, categories, or grades (World Tourism Organization [WTO] & International Hotel and Restaurant Association [IH&RA], 2004). However, there is no standard method of assigning these ratings (business dictionary, 2013), and the fulfillment with customs requirements is voluntary. For example, a US hotel with a certain rating, may look very different from a European or Asian hotel with the same rating, and would provide a different level of amenities, range of facilities, and quality of service. Besides, in Germany, only about 30 percent of the hotels choose to comply with the provisions of the rules established by the German Hotels & Restaurants association.

Although both WTO and ISO have been trying to persuade hotels to agree on some minimum requirements as world-wide norms, the entire membership of the Paris-based IH&RA opposes any such move (The Vienna Tourist Board's consultation & booking, 2008). According to IH&RA, to synchronize hotel standards classification based on a single grading which is uniform across the national boundaries would be an undesirable and impossible task. However, as world recognitions, according to the European Standardization Committee (CEN, the Comité Européen de Normalisation) clarifies a hotel standards classification system, providing an assessment of the quality standards and provision of facility and/or service of hotel accommodation, typically within five categories, often indicated by one to five star symbols (WTO & IH&RA, 2004, p.68), as a following rough guide:

A 1-Star hotel provides a limited range of amenities and services, but adheres to a high standard of facility-wide cleanliness.

A 2-Star hotel provides good accommodation and better equipped bedrooms, each with a telephone and attached private bathroom.

A 3-Star hotel has more spacious rooms and adds high-class decorations and furnishings and color TV. It also offers one or more bars or lounges.

A 4-Star hotel is much more comfortable and larger, as well as provided excellent cuisine, room service, and other amenities.

A 5-Star hotel offers more luxurious premises, widest range of guest services, as well as swimming pool and sport and exercise facilities.

The worldwide hotel standards rating systems can be categorized into two groups: official and nonofficial (Qing & Liu, 1993). Official hotel standards rating systems are established and conducted by government agencies and followed on a compulsory and regulatory basis, while nonofficial hotel standards rating systems are developed and implemented by private organizations, such as hotel or tourism associations and national or regional automobile associations, on a voluntary participation basis by the hotels (Narangajavana and Hu, 2008). The purpose of official systems is mainly to control lodging tariff and taxes, whereas nonofficial systems impose no social obligations (WTO & IH&RA, 2004). There are benefits of hotel standards rating systems offered to various sectors—travel agencies, tour operators, hotels, governments, and consumers (WTO & IH&RA, 2004). The systems facilitate travel agents' selection of hotels for their customers. Major tour operators have their own hotel classification systems to assist product packaging and marketing (Powers, 1992).

Hotel companies use the standards classification system to convey both qualitative and quantitative grading of properties to their customers (Slattery and Johnson, 1993). The standards rating system also facilitates consumers the easy way to compare and select hotels. In addition, governments use hotel standards ratings or classification systems to regulate the hotel industry with tariffs and taxes, in addition to meet basic requirements of safety and hygiene (Narangajavana and Hu, 2008). Callan (1994) specified that some hotels tend to oppose the compulsory hotel standards ratings system due to concerns over practical interfering, with customers expecting guaranteed service quality out of these official systems.

To reduce the complexity of numerous hotel standards rating systems in existence, the WTO and the IH&RA have been developing a universal hotel grading scheme that can be used in countries throughout the world to benefit both customers

and tourism service providers (Daily, 2004) On the other hand, most international hotel chains individually assure uniform standards as basic throughout, non-chain hotels (even within the same country) may not agree on the same standards.

2.4.1 Hotel Brands

The term “brand” has been variously defined (Charters, 2009). But in general, it is frequently used to make a differentiation towards one company and its products from another through its entities like name and logo (Kay, 2006). The American Marketing Association defined a brand in the early 1960s as:

“A name, term, sign symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors”.

This definition has been used by a number of marketing texts, such as McCarthy and Perreault (1987) or, in a modified form, as in the case of Kotler and his associates (e.g. Kotler et al., 1994). To be distinguished, the companies may achieve differentiation through brand name or symbol, while consumers gain symbolic or experiential value as well as any functional advantages that accrue through product or service usage (Chernatony, 2003). Davis (2000) interestingly also defined the brand in the new marketing phenomena as the following

“A brand is made up of three things: what a company sells, what a company does, and what a company is. A brand represents a set of promises. It implies trust, consistency, and a defined set of expectations. The strongest brands own a positioning in the consumer's mind that is unique to that brand”.

Companies today are beginning to realize that the brand is most important assets they own. So, capitalizing on one of the brand may help them to achieve their longer term growth objectives not only more quickly, but also in a more profitable way (Davis, 2000). These companies are starting to view their products and services as

more than just a 'thing' a customer buys (Askegaard, 2006). Because brands are not only what a company sells, they are what a company does and, more importantly, what a company is. In fact, most brands are why a company exists, and not the other way around (Davis, 2000).

However, many (Aaker, 1991; Hsieh et al., 2008; Knott, Corredoira and Kimberly, 2008) have observed that most branding definition focuses on manufacturer and product rather than the consumer. Such criticism has given the raise to an alternative philosophy whereby a brand is taken to reflect a consumer's core beliefs or personality. The consumer may perceive the most favorable value in the brand when the products or services combine with consistency in quality, style and production integrity (Kotler et al., 1994). Therefore, brands, nowadays, can be alternatively seen as a reflection of a consumer's core values (Sheth et al., 1991), a personality (Aaker, 1991) or as a means of adding value for the consumer (de Chernatony and Macdonald, 2003). This alternative philosophy balances the focus on the benefit to the producer with the benefit to the consumer.

In hotel business, a hotel brand embraces two parts: a basic registration standard and a grading standard (Callan, 1993). The basic registration standard is the minimum physical requirement and quality that a hotel property must meet. The grading standard is an extension of basic requirements. It is the qualitative and intangible services, which allowing a hotel to be compared with other properties (Narangajavana and Hu, 2008). To communicate this quality level and creating customer anticipation, a hotel uses variety of grading symbols and branding. Apart from the hotel brand name, the universally symbol that most recognized is stars, as most countries have at least one rating system using stars to represent quality grades (Callan, 1993; WTO & IH&RA, 2004).

Askegaard (2006), has noted, the academic focus on branding - in both product and service business has concentrated on standardization versus adaptation debate rather than any broader attempt at interpretation. Further, there is a discussion that whether or not the brands should be consistent in order to sustain consumer loyalty - is valid. In 2009, Charters has formed the basis consideration and established the idea that "brands always have to be consistent and unchanging".

The benefits of branding appear to be considerable for certain segments of the hotel accommodation market, however branding does not at present offer the same level of benefits to all hotels and the markets they serve (Connell, 1992). Besides, in hotel marketing, branding may help to strengthen outstanding hotel attributes based on core or augmented aspects. It may also reduce consumer risks associated with the purchase of intangible hotel services (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1989). Additionally, branding may help hotels to achieve higher levels of repeat business especially for the regular user segments. More generally, branding can facilitate differentiation and positioning in a competitive marketplace (Connell, 1992).

Hotel Brand Development - Branded hotel chains originated in the USA (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1989). After the Second World War, city centre hotels primarily targeted the business user without taking into account the more specific needs of the leisure user. Independently operated roadside inns were found by Kemmons Wilson (Connell, 1992) to be of an unpredictable quality and price. In 1952, he opened the first Holiday Inn motel in Memphis, Tennessee. The motel featured large rooms with two double beds, a telephone and TV. Each hotel also had a restaurant and swimming pool.

One of the primary objectives of Holiday Inn motel was to offer a consistent motel experience to the car-based leisure market. Holiday Inn kept a firm control on the quality of its franchised outlets. It used architects to develop motel designs specifically to suit its target market (Lee, 1985). Through such methods as regular monitoring of hotels and centralized purchasing of consumables like soap and certain foods it ensured that specified standards were maintained. Brand identification helped franchisees to increase sales and this soon became the driving force behind the growth of chain hotels in the 1960s and 1970s (Connell, 1992).

By 1980, branding had taken on a new significance in the USA. Due to saturation in the middle and luxury sector of the industry, hotel companies targeted new market segments and developed new brands to meet the needs of consumers, franchisees and their own corporate growth objectives (Pannell Kerr Forster Associates, 1990).

During the year 1980 to 1988, 75 new brands were introduced, however over 35 were either bought out by other companies or went out of business (Nykiel, 1990), explaining the view that the US industry has now reached a stage of maturity (Olsen, 1989).

In UK, Forte was the first UK company to develop a highly consistent national hotel brand in the form of the first generation of Posthouse Hotels (Foster, 1985). In the 1960s and 1970s Posthouse Hotels offered a hotel experience based on modern and mainly newly built properties offering limited services and value for money at locations near major motor routes. Other recognizable brands like Holiday Inn and Crest began to make an impact in the 1970s (Connell, 1992) and today there are considerably more, and for that matter hotel chains, have generally speaking been slower to evolve in the UK than the US (Lee, 1985).

Growth of chain hotel demand in the 1980s encouraged some companies to trade up (Pannell Kerr Forster Associates, 1990). For example Crest and Swallow both upgraded their properties and added a number of leisure facilities. Another strategy which allowed trading up was to offer higher specification bedrooms within a particular hotel. Executive rooms came to prominence in the 1980s as did the club floor, a segmentation concept reputedly stolen from the airlines (Mooney and Penn, 1985). This shift left the lower priced sector under-served, and in recent years this gap has been partly filled through new build properties.

The UK hotel industry is becoming increasingly concentrated, with publicly quoted companies increasing their share of UK rooms from 18.7 to 23.5 percent between 1986 and 1990 (Connell, 1992). The top ten companies are particularly strong in the middle and upper levels of the market and in major locations where demand is high (Kleinwort Benson Securities, 1991). Most larger hotels are chain managed and competition between them has become more intense (Pannell Kerr Forster Associates, 1990). The result has been a recognition of the need to offer a more recognizable and consistent hotel experience (Tarrant, 1989).

The conditions favourable to branding have thus materialized. Companies have become large, with national distribution of properties and the need for differentiation between groups has increased (Connell, 1992). Additionally, Research has shown that hotel users hold a positive view on the provision of branded hotels

(Tarrant, 1989). It can be seen that hotel branding reflect the purchasing behavior of the hotel guest as well as it created the expectation. Therefore, it is important for each international hotel chain to create its strong hotel brands. At the same time, it is much more important to maintain the standards of the brands as it promise the leverage of each hotel services and expectation of customers perceived. So, in the next section, it shows the explanation of brand standards, purposes of brand standards, and the formation of the brand standards in order to define its mutual understanding.

2.4.1 Brand Standards

As a brand represents a set of promises. It implies trust, consistency, and a defined set of expectations (Davis, 2000). The strongest brands in the world own a positioning in the consumer's mind that is unique to that brand and can universally be articulated by almost everyone (Franzen and Bouwman, 2001; Hoyer and Brown, 1990). In fact, it is not difficult for a hotel chain to achieve some market recognition by placing the same name across all of its hotels. However, one problem of hotel branding lies in being able to offer a customer an experience which can be recognized time and time again across a number of hotels (Connell, 1992).

While technology makes products similar, it is the standards of service quality that differentiates one service business from the others (Denburg & Kleiner, 1993). The importance of standardized service quality is well recognized in the hospitality industry, since hotels cannot survive the intense competition without satisfying their customers with quality service (Narangajavana & Hu, 2008). To achieve high service quality, a company needs to understand its customers' expectations (Briggsa, Sutherland, & Drummond, 2007).

[. . .] a brand is a mechanism for achieving competitive advantage for firms, through differentiation (purpose). The attributes that differentiate a brand provide the customer with satisfaction and benefits for which they are willing to pay (mechanism) (Wood, 2000, p. 66).

It is Wood (2000) who has examined the operation of brands, and underlined that some definitions are too focused on the product, some on the value added benefits to consumers. Additionally, Wood (2000) also noted that the value added concept has become too confused. However, value added and profit is past measures of brand success and Wood (2000, p. 667) looks rather to 'brand value' – which focuses on future growth.

It has been widely given in much contemporary academic discussion about brand management that brand managers must ensure their brands remain consistent in order to secure and sustain customer loyalty (Lockshin, 2002; McCarthy and Perreault, 1987; Payne, 2007 et al.). In manufacture industry, the principle idea is that attributes of a product should not fluctuate so that on each separate occasion it is consumed the benefits to the customer remain exactly the same. Thus, the assumption of total quality management (TQM) (Reeves and Bednar, 1994) is that the consumer will receive precisely the same benefit whenever they consume a product.

On the other hand, in the service industry, the attributes of service could be fluctuate depending on several factors. Therefore, service providers must also make sure that the service quality is consistent. Without this, the image which was developed after long and strenuous effort can be easily wiped out (Allan, et al., 1993). McDonald's (fast food restaurant) and Marriott (hotel service) are notable examples of consistency in their performance, which helps them greatly in their image building (brand reputation and brand value). Some American firms such as Delta Airlines, Hertz Rental Car Agency, and Federal Express are also known for their consistence in quality through improving the service quality, and establishing the image of the improved quality in the customer's mind.

However, the very nature of the hotel business can work against the notion of brand consistency. For example, it is impossible to achieve total consistency in the behavior of service personnel, although some companies achieve considerable success in this respect. Secondly, hotel users will also experience differences in the behaviour of other customers (Connell, 1992).

Therefore, in order to archeive the consistency performance of service quality and service standards, many hotel - especially international brands has develop the brand standards for the certain level of performance in all hotel properties under

the same brand name. According to Keller (2003), the process of building a brand requires to follow four consecutive steps:

- 1) building brand awareness;
- 2) creating brand meanings through imagery and brand performances;
- 3) building brand responses through brand feelings and judgments
- 4) building relationships between the brand and its customers.

The hotel brand standards is the manual that provide information on the policies and standards that guide the hotel operation, normally positioned at the reference desk or at the manager so that all hotel associates can achieve a desired level of quality, consistency, and continuity in service to hotel guests (Easley, 1985). Childers (1978) has also define the standards of one brand name as “a policy that defines the reference service procedure available at a particular service brand, it must be based upon the goals and objectives of that organization.”

The Purpose of Brand Standards

The purposes of the hotel brand standards is obviously similar to the other business brand standadrds. Actually, the reasons for developing such brand standards are;

- 1) hotel brand standards establish the standards of services;
- 2) hotel brand standards assist in training the new staff members;
- 3) hotel brand standards establish levels of service to the different targeted customers, it also including the limitations of service;
- 4) establishes priorities of service; and
- 5) describes practical procedures that answer practical questions.

1) Establishing standards of services: The first reason to develop a written brand standards is to establish the standards of service. The Standards are a means of measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the service performance. Standards define the level of achievement that it is reasonable to expect at any given time. In short, a brand standards establishes the standards of all service aspects for the hotel personnels in a particular hotel brand name (Childers, 1978)

A written brand standards changes the indication of service from an art into something that is measurable. Standards of service, once established and agreed to by the international hotel management in a particular hotel brand, can become a basis for evaluating the work of individual hotel associates, or the quality of a particular product, facility, amenity, food & beverage, and other services. It is the Easley's (1985) opinion that there must be uniform and consistent standards throughout one international hotel brand name in even different hotel property.

2) Training new staff members: A second reason for the development of a brand standards is to develop a document that will be useful in the training of new staff members. It has been suggested that the new hotel staff, however, needs to have guidance, and must know the priorities of the hotel for which he or she works for. The guest dissatisfaction can be avoided if every employee has a clear understanding of brand standards or service policies.

Under the one brand, staffs of the particular international hotel chains have a propensity to be shaped, and senior associates or the management who formulated brand standards simply passed on their knowledge to their latest associates. Nonetheless, even the majority of a hotel personnel may be new to the organization. In that condition, oral tradition is not good enough, and a hotel brand standards must be developed as a training instrument.

3) Establish the levels and limitation of service to the customers: A third reason for a brand standards is to establish levels of service to the customers, including the limits of the services offered. It is important that all of the staff members in a department comply with the policy, so that a repeat customer will know what and how much assistance to expect especially in the non-luxurious hotel.

4) Priorities of service: The fourth objective of a brand standards is to establish priorities of service. It may become more common to extend special privileges to primary customer because of the increasing demand for the service, and a shortage of manpower and resources to meet this demand. In addition, there is a royalty, loyalty, as well as VIP customer for hotel employees to identify the right

priority for the service. This is the tool in assisting to the beyond expectation service scheme.

5) Procedures manual: Finally, a hotel brand standards makes it possible to collect in one place all of the special procedures that an employee may need. Examples are emergency procedures, procedures for opening or closing a desk for the day, how to charge out additional service fee, and what to do if an incident happens. This essential information can be included in the hotel brand standards or attached to it. If located in a convenient place, it is easy to review.

The Formation of Brand Standards

The significant of brand standards is clearly be concerned in the consistency management in international hotel chains. Almost all international hotel chains applies brand standards using SERVQUAL (Service Quality - basic or adapt) & TQM (Total Quality Management)-based as the most extensive formation (Olsen and Murthy, 1994).

Service Quality - Service quality in the hotel industry has been examined in a number of studies (Chang et al., 2002; Sargeant & Mohamad, 1999; Tsang & Qu, 2000) and there are a number of models that conceptualize the construct of service quality (e.g. Gronroos, 2001; Bienstock, Mentzer, & Bird, 1997; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Garvin, 1987). More recently researchers are concerned with the management of services (Rowley & Richardson, 2000) whilst others focus on why best practice does not work (Lockyer & Scholarios, 2004). Some consider measurement and the use of SERVQUAL in hotels in Northern Ireland (Gabbie & O'Neill, 1997), whilst Chang et al. (2002) consider its use in Korean hotels. Chu (2002) uses SERVQUAL and the regression models and finds similarity between both approaches (Briggsa, Sutherland, & Drummond, 2007).

The essentials of service quality are rationalized as an enhancement in customer loyalty, increase in market share, higher returns to investors, reduction in costs, lowering vulnerability to price competition, and the establishment of a competitive edge (Knutson, 1988; Haksever, Render, Russell, & Murdick, 2000;

Wuest, 2001). When service quality is mentioned, the dimensions (reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding and knowing the customer and tangibles) proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) come to mind. Grönroos (1993) stated that service quality was developed based on the confirmation/disconfirmation concept in the perceived service quality model introduced in 1982.

As part of this notion, expectations are viewed as desires or wants of consumers (and not predictions of what will be provided). Subjects respond to a series of scales which measure their expectations of a particular company on a wide array of specific service characteristics (Parasuraman *et al.* 1986; 1988). Subsequently, they have been asked to record their perceptions of that company's performance on those same characteristics. When perceived performance ratings are lower than expectations, this is a sign of poor quality; the reverse suggests good quality (Lovelock, 1991).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) developed a multiple-item scale (SERVQUAL) a scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality, was proposed (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985, 1988, 1991) for measuring service quality and simplified the ten dimensions of service quality to five dimensions; being: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy and Tangibles. In the succeeding studies, SERVQUAL, used the 7-point Likert scale, which is regarded as a generic service quality measurement tool for service industries (Lovelock, 2001), measures customer expectations and perceptions with 22 items in five dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Reliability is defined as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Responsiveness is defined as willingness to help customers and provision of prompt service. Assurance is defined as the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. Empathy is defined as caring and individualized attention to customers. Tangibles are physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel. Despite the critiques on its validity (Carmen, 1990; Teas, 1993, 1994), SERVQUAL has been widely applied and well accepted in various service industries (Brady, Cronin, & Brand, 2002; Cronin & Taylor, 1992 & 1994; Hoffman & Bateson, 1997).

In addition, in 1991, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1991) made further evaluations and improvements to SERVQUAL to apply it to different types of

service industries. They (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994) also pointed out that the SERVPERF proposed by Cronin and Taylor (1994) is a reflection of the consumer's long-term mentality on the service qualities in the industry.

In the context of hospitality management, the measurement of service quality was derived from the concept and studies of service quality in general business. A number of studies applied or modified the SERVQUAL instrument to measure service quality in the hospitality industry. LODGSERV, a modified instrument of SERVQUAL, was developed to measure hotel guests' expectations and experience of service quality (Knutson, Stevens, Wulaert, Patton, & Yokoyama, 1991). HOLSERV, an extension of the SERVQUAL scale, was introduced to the hospitality industry in 1999 (Mei, Dean, & White, 1999). Ekinici and Riley (1999) proposed the application of the Q-sort technique in the context of hotel service quality evaluation to validate the dimensions of the established models of service quality. Using the same approach of SERVQUAL, the Lodging Quality Index (LQI) was developed to measure customers' perception of service performance (Getty & Getty, 2003).

Yuksel, Popi, and Cihan (2003) discussed the lodging service quality on the island of Crete using the modified SERVQUAL. The result of the study suggested to British authorities that consumers place more value on the intangible service qualities than the tangible. Moreover, the factor most valued by the consumers when choosing hotel lodging is the location of the hotel, followed by the hotel facilities, Service quality, Consumption prices, Hotel reputation, Exterior appearance, and Hotel security. As a result, it can be certain that when customers receive services, they place emphasis on the service qualities provided by the proprietors (Hsieh, Lin, & Lin, 2008). Additionally, Ting (2003) has also applied PZB to remind the hotel proprietors that gaps exist between employee and the customer expectations of service quality and the actual performance perceived, which provide hotel proprietors a guide for improvements.

Furthermore, Garvin (1988) defined perceived quality as the subjective perception of quality through indirect measures of quality comparison. The notion of the model explains that perceived service quality is the result of comparing a consumer's real experience with his/her expectation of the service (Narangajavana &

Hu, 2008). Based on the theory of perceived service quality, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) proposed their 'conceptual gap' model of service quality and explained that perception of service quality is a comparison of consumers' expectations with actual service performance and quality evaluation involves evaluation of both process and outcome of service delivery.

TQM - In 1991, the International Quality Study (ISQ) examined 945 management practices in more than 580 companies; countries covered included Canada, Germany, Japan and the United States. In each of the participating countries, the ISQ covered four industries — automobiles, computers, banking and health care (Krygier, 1993).

Overall, the survey found that differences in quality practices from country to country are narrowing and will likely continue to do so. Managers in the three major economies of the Asia Pacific, Europe and North America evidently see the same basic quality challenges and are implementing or planning similar quality-related strategies and practices (Krygier, 1993). In addition, the majority of respondents expected quality performance as a criterion for senior management compensation to rise over the next three years (Yearout, 1992). There are an examination covered in three continents. However, in Asia Pacific aspect, many Japanese firms began quality-improvement programmes in the early 1950s and reaped the rewards in the 1970s. Then the TQM is taking hold elsewhere in the region (Hsieh, et al., 2008).

Since the mid-1980s a variety of innovations including customer care, total quality management (TQM) and more recently business process re-engineering (BPR) have been introduced within financial services. These are broadly what we mean by quality initiatives; however, there is no one agreed definition of each (Knights and McCabe, 1996).

Quality initiatives may involve a wide range of management innovations (Crosby, 1979). Some include specific human resource management components such as team building, some are driven by hard techniques such as statistical process control (SPC). Others emphasize the point of contact with external customers such as customer satisfaction surveys. The empowerment of employees is a mainstay of quality initiatives as achieved through quality circles or quality improvement teams.

Quality initiatives then include a diverse array of elements (Knights and McCabe, 1996).

Nonetheless, they share an overall objective which is the pursuit of competitive advantage through delivering products and services that fulfill customers' expectations (Wilkinson and Willmott, 1995). Whatever the name or content, quality initiatives pose a challenge to existing management styles, organizational cultures and structures within financial services. So, for example, traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic approaches are threatened by the delayering of management, the emphasis on teamworking and the devolving of responsibility to staff (Knights and McCabe, 1996).

2.5 Consistency of Brand Standards

Consistency was seen as being almost as important as focused positioning in successful services brands (Chernatony, 2003). In a service business, further than the tangibilizing, service marketers have to also ensure that the service quality is consistent. Without this, the image which was developed after long and strenuous effort can be easily wiped out (Allan et al., 1993). As many others have observed (e.g. Lovelock et al., 1999) services marketing presents the challenge of variable quality arising from dependency on staff behavior and consumer/staff interactions. Chernatony (2003) noted in his research that it was mentioned by eight consultants, and is summarized by an advertising consultant: The single most important and most difficult factor is achieving some kind of consistency in the experience that consumers have of the brand. Following by the other two consultants both argued that consistency could be encouraged through systems (Chernatony, 2003).

Consistency plays two significant roles in international hotel chains. The first pertains to demand; the second pertains to outcomes (Knott, Corredoira, & Kimberly, 2008). With respect to demand, consistency is valued by customers because in general, individuals (including decision makers in firms) are risk-averse. What this means is that individuals prefer a known service of somewhat lower quality over an unknown service with a somewhat higher potential quality (Mathews, 2000).

Accordingly, offering consistent (or known) quality is in many cases more important than having higher quality. Although consistency within a unit over time is important, consistency becomes even more important (and more difficult to achieve) across units.

With respect to outcomes, consistency in operations is a bedrock principle of total quality management—a process of continuous measurable improvement that focuses attention and corrective efforts on deviations from a predictable process. The more consistent the process, the easier it is to identify and correct deviations (Knott, Corredoira, & Kimberly, 2008).

In the hotel operation, it is significantly important for the hotel management to have an effective control system to ensure that the measures of brand standards are understood by the employees and accepted for implementation (IACA, n.d.; Mathews, 2000). Hotels operated under the international chains may be delegated to different authorities and functions, depending on the size and operation of individual hotels. However, inconsistencies in the standard of service or practices could have an adverse impact on the reputation of the hotel (IACA, n.d.).

Consistency in service quality is paramount to maintaining the 'tangibilized positioning' (Lovelock, 1991, p. 31). Once a positive image is created in the customer's mind, maintenance of that image is crucial to the hotel business's success. Delivery of consistent quality differentiates one hotel's offering from that of a competitor's offerings (Ekinici and Riley, 1999). Meeting or exceeding the target customer's service quality expectations is the success key in hotel business competition. Expectations are formed through experiential and sensational learning, service advertising, hotel branding and other communications (Cambridge International College, n.d.). The customers choose a hotel based on their expectations after receiving the service, and they compare the perceived service with the expected service (Tian-Cole and Crompton, 2003; Teas, 1993). If the perceived service falls below the expected service, customers lose interest in the hotel and maybe its brand. If the perceived service meets or exceeds their expectations, they are apt to use the provider again, and build 'brand loyalty' (Robledo, 2001).

Brand Standards Key Elements

2.5.1 Product Specification

It has been widely stated among academics (Charters, 2009; Beverland, 2005a; de Chernatony and Macdonald, 2003; Berry, 2000; et al.,) that brand manager must ensure their brand standards to remain consistent in order to secure and sustain customer loyalty. The foundation principle is that the product attributes should not fluctuate. Consequently, on each separate occasion, the consumed benefits to the customer remain exactly the same.

Indeed, problems of consistency are not limited to the role of people within the hotel, but many are also found in the condition of the physical product. Slattery (1991) identifies these problems and a summary is given below.

(1) The physical goods that make up the internal specification of the hotel brand are regularly updated and eventually replaced by new products by the manufacturer.

(2) The internal specification cannot be changed quickly and discretely across a whole portfolio of hotels. Refurbishment tends to take place on a rolling program basis leaving some hotels looking distinctly different to others.

(3) The pattern of demand for individual hotels within a given brand is not consistent with other hotels within the brand chain. Some hotels, for example, experience higher levels of demand for certain services and facilities than others and some hotels within a branded chain sell services at different prices to suit local market conditions.

(4) Achieving complete consistency in the external appearance of a hotel is difficult. Even newly built units in the budget hotel sector are subject to local planning constraints, working against consistency. In situations where chains have grown through acquisition, the likelihood of external consistency is reduced further.

Therefore, not surprisingly, considerable differences are found in levels of consistency offered by international hotel chains (Connell, 1992). Some do not offer a consistent name across their hotel chains and even introduce their extended brand name into the market (Wirtz and Johnston, 2003). While others international hotel chains operating at the opposite extreme, they offer the same brand names and a highly

consistent product and services. Some even offer a consistent price. However, most hotel chains decide on a position somewhere in between, especially those which have grown through acquisition rather than being newly built (Slattery, 1991).

Some general discussions can be made about product specific in hotel business that significantly influenced in quality hotel brands operation. First, hotel is a service product some mentioned that its in people industry (Charters, 2009). Therefore, it is subject to a series of variables such as location conditions, weather conditions and other external influences such as political and economics. Critically, and unlike other business, hotel product required a huge investment and the maintainace of its consistency is varies.

Second, as suggested above, hotel business has extensive symbolic significance, which adds value to the product (Charters, 2009; Ekinici, and Riley, 1999; Hofstede, 2001). Much of this symbolic meaning arises from various attempts to the brand creation and quality categorized in the hotel business (Ulin, 1996; Unwin, 1996). For instance, a customer selects one hotel brand with an expectation to get a certain level of product, amenities, facilities as well as it might include the decoration and the feeling of the facilities provided.

Third, there are undoubtedly some high-involvement consumers who actively seek the distinctions in product quality offered by international hotel chains. Actually, the fact that the consumers may always demand high quality, but without foregoing quality they also find pleasure in obtaining variation, innovation and difference (Charters, 2009). Indeed, research does suggest that innovation and interest are one of the core dimensions of quality for keen consumers (Charters and Pettigrew, 2007). Interest in the product may therefore be an attribute of hotel brands that succeed consistency for many consumers, particularly the most highly involved (Charters, 2009). In addition, Connell, (1992) and Charters (2009) concluded and emphasized in his study that physical or product specific consistency is playing an important role to hotel branding.

2.5.2 Service Process

“A service is any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything” (Kotler,

1990, p. 455). Services differ from products in many ways: they are intangible, perishable, lack consistency, and need participation of a service recipient to obtain the service (Reddy, Buskirk, and Kaicker, 1993). These unique characteristics create the special challenges to the service providers. Therefore, the service providers need to be creative not only in developing new procedure of services but also in promoting, pricing, and distributing these services consistently (Reddy, Buskirk, and Kaicker, 1993).

Beverland (2005b), discussed the production of the luxury brands (both manufacturer and service brand) and suggested that stylistic consistency is a core value in such a brand. As well as the consistency of service process in product delivery may be the key in this case rather than the product itself. Another way of expressing this may be to say that customers distinguish changing brand attributes, but expect the same level of brand quality. In each case, however, customer expectations are the key (Charters, 2009). It is not consistent content, but a consistency of quality and the ability to deliver up to and beyond expectations that is crucial for the brand (Berry, 2000). This is reflected across the range of the services and products with an aesthetic impact. The international hotel brand must deliver consistent quality, at the same time as the attributes of the brand vary in the light of the external constraints of interpretation (Charters, 2009).

In service business especially in hotel, the involvement or interaction is also noted as significantly influencing consumer perception of a service brand. Evidence shows that excellent service interaction of customers creates are also willing to pay premium prices for the service business they perceive as good quality. (Charters, 2009). As a result, the service process consistency may actually be an important factor for international hotel operation. It roles the continual sameness in the way that consumers are able to anticipate the brand from their own symbolic or previous brand experience (Hoyer and Brown , 1990; Holt, 2002; Schroeder and Salzer-Morling, 2006).

2.5.3 People Factor

Tourists concerns on the service quality elements delivered by the hotel staff (Suki, 2012). In the services marketing literatures (e.g. De Chernatony, 2002;

Berry, 2000; De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riely, 1999; Muller, 1998; Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995), a few authors have suggested new approaches to build a strong brand in the service sector. They recognize and emphasize the importance of employees during their interactions with customers and their ability to purify the brand values (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1998; Bitner et al., 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1988) in order to create a specific meaning to the brands.

The employees must be imbued with the desired image of the service and play their appropriate roles in the brand promises (De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riely, 1999). Most authors (retrieved from Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010) focus on service branding agrees that employees' attitude, belief, value, and behavioral style reflect the brand. As most service brands are about the delivery of promises through personal interactions, successful service branding models would not only stress an external orientation, as evident in consumer goods branding but rather try to find a balance between internal and external perspectives (De Chernatony et al., 2003; De Chernatony and Harris, 2000; Schneider and Bowen, 1993).

The staff of hotels or service business in different working positions or levels may unavoidably have frequent and direct contact with hotel guests, in particular those long staying and frequent customers (Schlesinger and Zornitsky, 1991; Sergeant and Frenkel, 2000). While the hotel personnel are expected to provide a professional and courteous service, they should be prohibited from providing unauthorized or illegal services to the hotel guests such as recommending an escort service, or buying concert tickets for a particular guest. Therefore it has been recommended by ICAC - Independent Commission Against Corruption (n.d) that the hotel management should issue clear guidelines and instruction to staff, requiring them to refer all special requests from the guests to the senior staff for guidance.

Further, from the study of Choi and Kim (2011), it shows that hotel staffs are also likely to often compare differences between themselves and other staff on the basis of their membership being different between supervisor groups. In addition, involving themselves either consciously or unconsciously into being a member of certain particular groups that are controlled by a specific supervisor, they will often be motivated by ensuring that this supervisor could be a source of getting positive identity that fits well with their social ideal identity (Brown, et al., 2002). Staff trust in

their supervisor is likely to embody-shared values or norms and it makes staff recognize that their roles and goals are inter-twined with their supervisor (Podsakoff, et al., 1990).

2.5.4 Governance

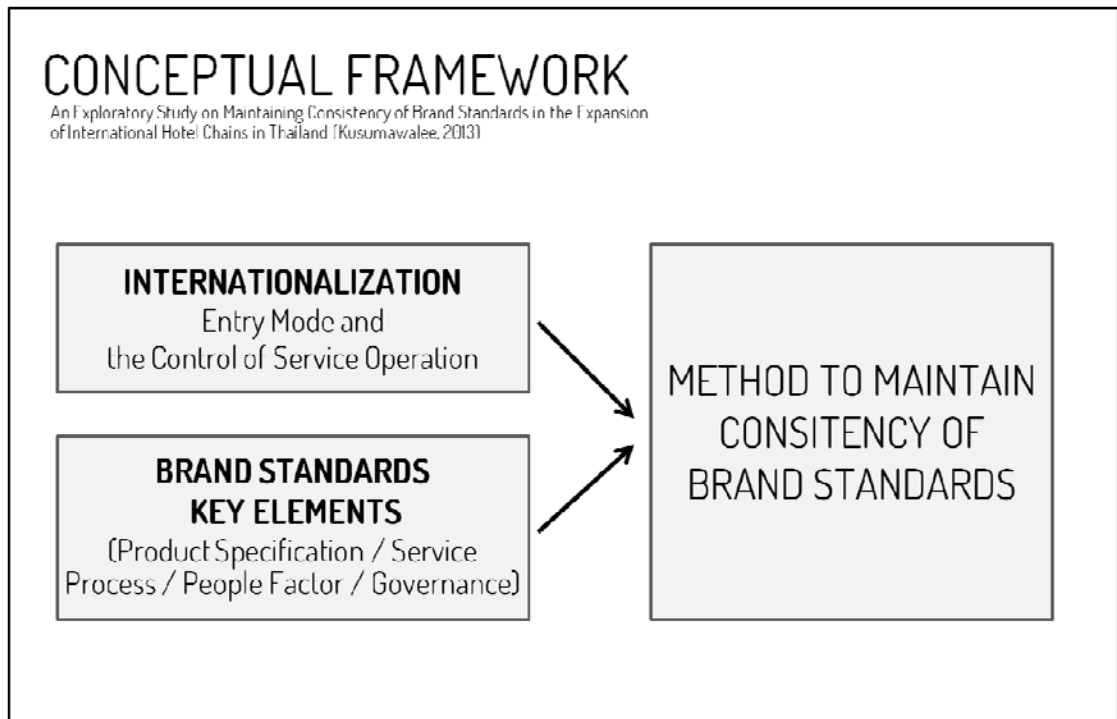
The management of the international hotel chain should publicize the staff policies, brand standards and other guidelines, particularly to those in relation to the ethical standards (IACA, n.a.). To ensure all hotels act in accordance with the given policies and guidelines and to endorse the good practices among associates, the management could hire a group auditor to check on compliance, conduct periodic reviews for individual hotels' performance, arrange regular workshop/sessions to provide a forum for the staff to share experiences, and delegate or centralize functions as appropriate (IACA, n.d.).

Audits Functions - Where resources permit, it is advisable for hotels to engage an internal auditor to perform the audit function. Berry *et al.* (1991) suggested a service audit to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the international hotel chains in the customer expectations of the quality. After the audit, the auditor should report directly to the hotel's senior management or board of directors (Briggsa, Sutherland and Drummond, 2007). The hotels may also employ independent third parties such as a mystery shopper or a person who is not known to the hotel staff to use the hotel services as guests and require them to report their observations to the management (Chu, 2002). Aside from conducting occasionally acquiescence audit checks, hotels should conduct revenue audits on specific functions regularly (IACA, n.d.).

Customer Feedback - It is advisable for hotels to collect and analyze customer feedback using customer satisfaction survey or suggestion forms (IACA, n.d.). The customer feedback has to cover the evaluation in various areas, such as catering services, food quality, concierge services (e.g. transportation arrangement, tour/shopping information). In addition to information on areas for improvement, the

feedback might also reveal the existence of malpractice (Clark, Rajaratnam and Smith, 1996).

2.6 Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is exploratory research which aims to explore the management of the consistency of brand standard in the international hotel chains in Thailand. Further, the purpose of the study is to explore the differences of business entry mode to the level of the maintenance of brand standard consistency in daily operation in international hotel chains in Thailand.

This chapter presents in details how the research is conducted in order to fulfill the research questions including research design; study area and criteria; sample selection; sample size; research instruments; data collection; data analysis; validity and reliability assessment; research ethic; and limitation of research methodology.

3.1 Research Design

This research paper attempts to investigate on brand standard consistency management of international hotel chains which operated in Thailand. It implements the exploratory study on hotel strategic management. As a result, the research is characterized to acquire insight information from the managements, representatives, or the executives from international hotel chains both from cluster or corporate office and the hotel property. In order to achieve the requisite information, qualitative approach has been adopted to facilitate significant data from the elite person within the time as planned.

The qualitative research method is used in the research due to it can be defined as research that is undertaken using an unstructured research approach with a small number of carefully selected individuals to produce non-quantifiable insights into behaviour, motivations and attitudes, according to Wilson (2006). The qualitative approach is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individual or groups

ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). It is a less structured and more flexible approach to research involving carefully selected sample of respondents.

The process of qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2007). Also, the final written report of qualitative research has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of investigation carry a way of looking at the research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation (adapted from Creswell, 2007).

There are three main areas where qualitative research is commonly used. However, for this research phenomena, an exploratory research, new product development and creative development research, was adopted. According to Wilson (2006), exploratory research is one of the main areas of qualitative research which should be used when one wishes to increase its understanding perceptions of a particular field and or the decision making process. By large, exploratory studies aim to develop an initial understanding of a phenomenon under investigation (Sarantakos, 2005). They are frequently used to define concepts, possibly develop a hypothesis, refine questions, and provide a platform for further investigation (Babbie 1979; Hartmann and Hedblom, 1979).

As clearly declared in the first chapter, the overall aim for this research seeks to contribute to and to expand the existing method on brand standards consistency management of international hotel chains in Thailand. The objective of this research is primarily to make a clear understanding of business entry modes to the level of method in consistency management as well as the understanding of brand standards from the perspective of the representative from international hotel chains in Thailand.

With these aims in mind, it was decided that an exploratory qualitative research approach was appropriate to obtain in-depth information about brand standard consistency management of international hotel chains in Thailand. The data that is produced from this type of research is not quantifiable and not statistically valid. It is concerned with understanding things rather than measuring them, focusing on

obtaining deeper and more penetrating insights into topics (Wilson, 2006). Therefore, in order to enable this research on capturing the specific views of the individual participants as well as to facilitate the exploration of complexities, which are beyond the scope of more controlled approaches such as questionnaire surveys (Gillham, 2000), Mason, Augustyn and Seakhoa-King (2009) mentioned that exploratory research are increasingly recommended, specifically in relation to new research themes or when addressing an existing issue from a new perspective.

3.2 Selection of the Study area and Criteria

As this research aimed to investigate the method used by international hotel chains in maintaining their consistency of brand standards when the number of hotel property increased. Therefore, the carefully selection of representatives of international hotel chains for semi-structured interview will be conduct based on following criteria;

- 1) The representative is from international hotel chain
- 2) The international hotel chain has expand from its home country
- 3) The international hotel chain has expand into or out from Thailand
- 4) The international hotel chain has its property in Thailand
- 5) The representative is the official representative from international hotel chains

Therefore, the target international hotel chains in Thailand would be included the following; Accor Group, Marriott International, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, Hilton Hotels, InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), Tune Hotels, Hyatt, Mandarin Oriental Hotels and Resorts, Swissôtel Hotels & Resorts, Millennium & Copthorne Hotels, Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, Dusit Thani Hotels & Resorts, ONYX Hospitality Group, Six Senses Resorts & Spa, Banyan Group, Anantara Hotels & Resorts and Centara Hotels & Resorts.

3.2.1 Sampling Approach

For this research, purposive sampling is used. It is described as a random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest (Guarte and Barrios, 2006). The samples for this research are corporate office representatives, representatives from managements and executives who are currently working with any brand standards consistency management or maintaining the operation as brand standards in the international hotel chains in Thailand.

Purposive sampling is employed for this research because the sample size are responsible for managing operations following the hotel brand standards as well as well-understood the significant of entry modes towards operation and method on maintaining consistency of brand standards among different hotel properties under the same international hotel brand. Further, the sample sizes have the expertise in the areas that is relevant to this research. The scale that they are accountable for is at least at the overall property management basis or beyond. Therefore, they are able to provide an overall view regarding method used by international hotel chains in Thailand in maintaining their consistency of brand standards.

In a qualitative study, there is no definitive answer to how many in-depth interviews should be conducted, but quality which should be the essential determinant of the total number (Oppenheim, 1992). Therefore, this research cannot be generalized from a quantitative perspective.

To meet the objectives of this research, the interviews have been conducted until a point of 'saturation' has been gained from ten international hotel brands under nine international hotel chains. The point of saturation means that it is apparent that no new information could be obtained by conducting further interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), and Boyd (2001) added that a number of respondents ranging from two to ten are sufficient to reach saturation.

The sampling began with the search for the list of hotel managements and executives of international hotel chains in Thailand. Initially, the name and contact information for managements and executives of international hotel chains were search via the Internet by convenience sampling. This attempt gradually failed and the exact participant for each international hotel chains in Thailand suitable for this research

were unable to be found simply from the Internet, as many international hotel chains in Thailand have a distinctive organizational chart, which are confidential.

Nonetheless, information of the contact person for hotels managed by international hotel chains such as the General Managers and the Human Resource Department were obtained. Emails were sent to various hotels under the management of international hotel chains in Thailand, to General Managers or the Human Resources Department to inform them of the intent of this research. Subsequently the assistance to find the point of contact was requested, as it is only possible to locate the respondents for this interview via the internal database of international hotel chains.

The sampling frame has been listed according to the number of the population of interest international hotel chains in Thailand. As of 2013, retrieved from the hotel websites, without the criterion of entry mode, there are 208 international hotel properties under the international hotel chains. The researcher selects the individual for the inclusion in the research. The data of international hotel chains in Thailand identified at the beginning of the process formed the base for the sampling frame from which respondents were invited for their participation.

3.3 Data Collection Sources and Method

In order to have a clear understanding on the research question, an exploratory qualitative approach using in-depth interview has been adopted. The qualitative case study data collection will be applicable for this research. The target population for this study would be reliable representatives from all international hotel chains listed above. This research focus on international hotel chains because they are successful representatives from hotel industry that has been operated or expand their business worldwide including Thailand. Moreover, the exact total number of hotels in Thailand cannot be specifically identified.

This study adopted semi-structured interview with the prospect interviewees who are top management (GM), or the management of head office / regional office / and cluster office. The procedure of data collection will be the following;

- 1) Carefully list the name and contact details of prospect international hotel chains from the selection criteria as mentioned above.

- 2) Send an invitation letter with the brief explanation of research project as well as guideline interview questions. The letter could be sent in form of Emails and/or letters stating the summary and the purpose of this study would be distributed to the international hotel chains respective offices in Thailand and also targeted participants to invite potential interviewees to participate in the research.

- 3) Make an appointment with replied participants.

- 4) Individual conducting semi-structure interview (face to face) according to the interview guideline. There would be a general set of agenda of topics to be covered in each interview and the interviews last approximately one hour. All interviews were be tape recorded, and were conducted in respect to participant's convenience place and time.

- 5) After the interview, participants would be sent a copy of the transcribed interview for a verification signature. Interviewees would be kept in close contact and also for the result of the research.

- 6) With respect to privacy and confidentiality, validation and privacy of interviewees would be kept confidential upon agreement. Recorded interviews would be transcribed and then, sent to participant for their verification signature, in which after the research is done, all materials would be destroyed after finishing the research project.

3.3.1 Data Collection

The data collection was conducted during the period of April 2013 to May 2013; with the aim to gather information meet the research objectives.

An invitation for participation was sent to all international hotel chains in Thailand, that was listed in the preliminary study, through emails and letters stating the summary and the purpose of this study in order to invite potential respondents to participate in the research. Also, the confidentiality of the respondents was stated as the issue studied is considered as confidential information. After the invitation was sent, follow up telephone calls were made to the interviewees or their assistant to schedule the interview dates, time and location.

Accessibility was still a key issue after the preliminary study. Some hotels have denied the participation. Some others replied denied due to various reasons such as unavailable schedule. There were a number of international hotel chains that does not reply to the invitation.

Even though the interview requests were granted, in some cases, it was complicated and took substantial time to gain access to the international hotel chains' representatives. Sometimes, when the date and time of the interview in confirmed, interviewees requested to postpone the meeting. Still, there were positive responses from 10 international hotel brands from 9 international hotel chains where respondents proved to be appropriate for the research (Appendix B). These representatives hold the responsibility of managing consistency of brand standards not only the properties in Thailand but some are supervise the hotel abroad such as Myanmar, and United Arab Emirates. The contact information of the respondents were requested so that the researcher could keep good relations with the respondents after the interviews to further investigate issues that arises during the research process.

At the beginning of the interview, the confidentiality of the response was assured to each respondent and the permission to record the interview was established. At first, most of the respondents were slightly uncomfortable because they were being recorded. Eventually, however, the rapport between the interviewer and interviewee were built. The interviews were conducted according to the guideline that was prepared in the preliminary stage (Appendix A), and the average length of the interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. There were no preliminary test of the interview questions in this research but when the researcher had amendments or additional questions, past respondents were eventually asked the additional questions through emails or telephone calls.

3.3.2 Interview Design

The technique chosen for data collection was semi-structured face-to-face in-depth interviewing. Face-to-face in-depth interviewing method was selected because it is used to develop a deeper understanding of the subject and it allows the interviewer to respond to individual comments with extensive probing (Wilson, 2006). This flexibility of probing distinguish this interview approach from other questionnaire

type interviews. The interview is semi-structured as a completely un-structured interview has the risk of not eliciting the topics or themes more closely related to the research questions under consideration (Rabionet, 2011).

For that reason, the formation of the interview guideline and questions began with attention being paid to its consistency between the study's research objectives. A topic list outlined the broad agenda of issues to be explored and does not consist of predetermined questions (Appendix A). The process resulted in the formulation of five areas to be discussed. This includes the understanding of hotel brand standards, business entry mode and the level of the control of operation, and the discussion on consistency management of international hotel chains in Thailand.

The location for the interview was a place wherever is convenient for the respondents including various hotel lobbies or the respondents' offices. This not only develop a favorable and convenient condition for the respondents, it gives the respondents confidence and a sense of security, reduce nervousness, and provide the room to build rapport with the respondents during the interview process. Additionally, it also provides the research the opportunity to access additional contents such as files or brochures.

The length of the interview last from 60 to 90 minutes approximately. All interviews were tape recorded, enabling the conversation to flow, eye contact to be maintained, interaction to be occurred and rapport to be built. The recordings were then transcribed and sent to the participants for their verification to further unsure a mutual understanding of the areas in this research.

3.4 Data Analysis

Before the data analysis, the ten interview records has been transcribed and merged with note-recording. The interviews were conducted in both Thai and English according to the convenience and preference of the respondent. However, all the trascription has been made and translated into English and it has been proved by the research participants. Therefore, the transcription and caption of words and phrases was convenient for this research. Nonetheless, the research had to repeatedly review

the interview transcription during the process of data analysis. This process took from April to June 2013. For confidentiality purposes, the respondents and their organizations are coded as the respondent 1 to 10 with the organization are coded as INT Chain 1 to 9 (Appendix B) in the findings and in the subsequent discussions.

Thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the data. It is regarded as an effective technique when trying to identify related themes and patterns, to discover relationships among the themes and patterns, and to develop explanations for these relationships (Walsh, 2003). Thematic analysis as a process is used for encoding qualitative information where the encoding requires an explicit code. A 'theme' being a pattern uncovered from the information, which, at a minimum, describes and organizes the observations and, at a maximum can interpret aspects of phenomena (Boyatzis, 1998).

The research received full cooperation from the respondents. Content analysis was carried out to analyze the core structure of the materials, in which the themes or structures that were identified would be used in conjunction with the data that is identified after the thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews.

3.5 Methodology Limitations

This research is essentially exploratory research paper. Consequently, the qualitative method is the best way to gain the insight data (Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, the nature of research intends to collect data from the elite person who is in the position of high executive of regional office or cluster office.

Therefore, there are some limitations. First of all, the limitation of accessibility to international hotel chains representative applies as to how many interviewees are possible. This is because the topic that is to be interviewed is considered to be confidential to each international hotel chains and is their factor for success in their business strategies and service excellent. Therefore, the accessibility to the key person who is able to provide the significant information according to the research questions is also another limitation.

A part from that, the research selects to approach only hotels that located management chain head quarter, head of regional office, or cluster office in Thailand according to the budget limitation and travel limitation. Moreover, the interview, by nature, required in-depth discussion and a significant amount of time from the respondents. Many international hotel chains' representatives have an engaging travel schedule to countries that they are responsible for or even important meeting. It is difficult and is a long process to arrange a meeting with the respondents.

A greater number of interviewees would increase the depth of understanding of brand standards consistency management in the operation of international hotel chains, however, due to the accessibility the total number of interviewees for this research is limited. In a qualitative study, there is no definitive answer to how many in-depth interviews should be conducted, but quality which should be the essential determinant of the total number (Oppenheim, 1992). The research should continue interviewing until a point of 'saturation' has been gained, meaning that it is apparent that no new information could be obtained by conducting further interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). According to Boyd (2001), a number of respondents ranging from two to ten are sufficient to reach saturation.

Furthermore, there is a lack of previous academic research concerning consistency of service operation or the method in maintaining brand standards consistency especially in the hotel industry. This limits the researcher in identifying and exploring the research methods and design, which was used before.

3.6 Content Validity and Reliability

To ensure the research validity, an extensive review of the hospitality literatures will be conducted to find the significant variables regarding to the hotel internationalization system and the consistency maintenance of hotel services, which were subsequently appraised by scholars and expertise in hotel management.

Besides, the reliability of the research, this investigation would be conducted with the elite person from regional office or cluster office of each

international hotel. Moreover, the interview will also be conducted with high executive or general manager of the paradigm hotel unit in order to cross verify the information.

3.7 Research Ethic

Before beginning the data collection process, all research documents are submitted to the committee of research ethics (social science). After the all document has been approved by the Ethical Committee of Mahidol University, the researcher will conduct semi-structure interview. In this study, an implication of research ethics concerns how to approach the target population in order to collect the data. Further, participants will be informed about some details of research participation. The process concerns with the anonymity of participants. They will be assured that all the information will be treated confidentially and only used for educational purposes. During the semi-structured interview, all of the answers will be audio recording and notes. On the other hand, there is no record of participants' name or address will be kept. Information that would make it possible to identify participant will never be including in any sort of report.

Moreover, the research is not subjected to any individual disclosure therefore it is included as part of the overall results in the research report. The participants are free to withdraw from answering the interview anytime if they feel uncomfortable to answer because it is certified that the respondent has full autonomy to choose their participation in the survey. When the research is completed, all the records including participant's information sheet, informed consent form, and audio records as well as transcriptions will be destroyed immediately after the research is done. In addition, the participant is not response for any expense for participating in this research.

3.8 Research Schedule

This study scheduled has been done within 6 months. The procedure of the study designed with detailed as the following;

Procedure Detail	Time (Month)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Formulate proposal	■					
Recruit / Invite Participants and Respondents		■				
Conducting semi-structure interviews			■	■		
Data Analysis				■	■	
Preparation Full Report						■

3.9 Summary

The research methodology and the strategy adopted for this study was discussed. The research employed an exploratory research strategy, using a qualitative approach as the most appropriate for meeting research objectives and answering the research questions. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to examine in-depth understanding of the method for maintaining consistency of brand standards of the international hotel chains. Transcribed records of the interviews were constructed for a thematic analysis of the data collected, in the effort to reorganize the qualitative data into findings. The findings from the research are reported in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the data collection in order to achieve the objectives of the study. The findings of data collection are based on the 10 semi-structured, face to face interviews which were collected from the 10 different representatives of 10 different international hotel brand names under 9 international hotel chains in Thailand. There are hotels, resorts and corporate office in Bangkok, Pattaya, Hua-Hin, and Cha Am. However, some of the representative supervises the brand operation in Chiang Mai, Myanmar, Asia Pacific, and Dubai in United Arab Emirates.

The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the data. The results of the findings are presented in three themes;

- The first theme displays the factors of entry mode selection, difficulties and limitation from the influence of entry mode and the control in operation. Moreover, it also portrays the methodologies used by international hotel chains in order to cope with those difficulties and limitations.

- The second theme represents the understanding towards hotel brand standards, meaning and role, the importance, the application of brand standards in daily operation, as well as the control of implementation. This theme also shows the compassionate of brand standards key elements from the practitioners' perspective.

- The third theme shows the investigation of cause and effect of the inconsistency of brand standards. Further, it explains the methodologies that were used by international hotel chains in order to maintain and enhance the consistency of brand standards according to the key elements; product specific, service process, people factor, and governance. This section also explains the key practice in maintaining consistency of brand standards in daily operation.

4.1 Entry Modes & Control of Operation

4.1.1 Factor of Entry Mode Selection

The findings suggested that there are various entry mode selections from different hotel brands. Most of the respondents mentioned equity based management contract and wholly owned subsidiary as the main internationalization model. Though, some of the respondent mentioned franchise system as the mode of expansion and the only respondent talked about internationalization using only wholly owned subsidiary.

Seeing from the vision of the corporate office, the respondent 7 mentioned that *“the selection of either adopting the management contract or wholly owned is depended on the different agreement and factors”*. In this case, it also was mentioned by other respondents regarding approach of the property owner or the hotel brand, property specification, location, return on investment and, as important as, law and regulations. The respondent 1 declared that;

“Different country uses different laws which might not allow 100 per cent foreign investment. As a result, with limitation, the hotel adopted the partnership model using management contract (joint venture) to expand the business. However, in some case, the hotel also manages the building that already existed, with the condition that the building meets our product requirements or specification”.

The respondent 1 also illustrated the effect from law and regulation to the entry mode selection as

“According to Thai law, we do the wholly owned subsidiary in Bangkok’s property thus the brand is able to hold only the majority shares (not all) and, at the same time, manage the operation. However, we do manage some hotel under our brand without holding any share in some other country as well”.

In term of wholly owned property, it also was mentioned by the respondent 5. As the owner of the hotel held different businesses including

construction and property development, therefore, it was foreseeing of the benefit gained from this entry mode selection.

The finding found, interestingly, that majority of international hotel chains in Thailand adopted equity-based management contract (joint venture) as the entry mode. The respondent 2 mentioned that

“X hotel, nowadays, using only management contract and wholly owned subsidiary as an entry mode. Similar to other major American chains, there is no longer franchising system since it takes the highest risk in the brand destruction”.

Although the majority of the respondent has accepted that equity-based management contract held the lowest risk to the brand destruction and created the power to customer experience management. It can be found a great number of similarity and a few differences in management details among the responds of many international hotel chains. It has been emphasized through the explanation of the equity-based management contact as the following;

“The management contract style allows the hotel brand to bring the know-how and system for example sales & marketing system, GDS, revenue management, and HR (training) and employees will be contracted by the property owner” (Respondent 4)

“The X hotel is using management contact as an entry mode. So, the building was owned by the investor (or owner) but the management and service will be run by the hotel brand. This makes the clear separation in term of management and allows the property run smoothly according to the standards of the brands” (Respondent 8)

“For the management contract, the hotel brand provides people, knowledge, network, and brand value to the property. However, the operating system will be managed on behalf of the property owner using the X hotel’s brand standards” (Respondent 9)

Interestingly, the research found that the only respondent from one of the biggest international hotel chains mentioned that all property under this hotel brands

are franchising property. It was mentioned that, with this entry mode the system allows final decision making with the property owner. Consequently, the management style and limitation will varies according to the owner of the property. To illustrate some franchising hotel, the respondent 2 has talked about other added hotel brand with franchising entry mode and management as the following;

“The X hotel is the only hotel that currently held the highest number of franchising branches in the same time, using the brand standards to operate. The brand will manage only the appearance not guests experience. That is, hotel has the full rights on property physical manifestation but not in operation, so the building will look the same but the food served may be not”.

It is not only the independent decision of either the brand or the owner that select the entry mode. But both of the stakeholders have to approach each other for the agreement. None of the respondent refused that the hotel has been managed in the way that either the owners preferred or the preference of the hotel brand. Thus, in selecting the entry mode, stakeholders will choice each other according to the factors mentioned in the beginning or the further such as direction, vision, or management style.

4.1.2 Difficulties and Limitations in Operation

From the interviews, the research has found difficulties and limitations of entry modes toward hotel operation. It found the franchising entry mode was the only undoubtedly declared serious difficulties and limitations in hotel operations. Similar to the respondent 2 that mentioned the highest risk in brand destruction, the respondent 6 emphasized that;

“As the final decision making is at the owner, there are definitely some effects from the franchise to the daily operation. The owner is normally not willing to pay extra expenditure while it is always an expectation of high return. Sometimes, the brand may need the renovation or refurbishment for standard specification while the

owner preferred to have low investment or cost, as a result, there is a need of argument discussion.

In addition, the limitation of franchising system is the adaption in what existing in operation. The operating facilities may not be totally provided. However, staff has to provide services at the standardized from the brand even with the limitation of product or facility assistance”.

For wholly-owned subsidiary, even the direct contact with the owner would be the benefit in term of time and process. However, this entry mode required a huge investment in both hotel construction and management. Therefore, the ROI's (return on investment) expectation of the owner will also high. Subsequently, there will be a goal for employee and it potential to be one of the major causes of workplace stress.

Surprisingly, in the finding of the difficulties and limitations towards the management contract entry mode, it was mostly replied as none negative impact or any limitation to the control of operation. As an example from the corporate office point of view, the respondent 7 mentioned that;

“In the level of operation, the X hotel has found no negative effect from equity-based management contract entry mode. Since the general manager (GM) is the person from our brand. So, GM has his/her responsibility as a caretaker for all operating performance and other details in order to follow the brand standards of our hotel”.

Further, the respondent 3 stated about managing the hotel under management contract entry mode that *“it is a commitment on delivering both profit and occupancy, as long as those factor are delivered in line, there will be no problem”*. Similar to the respondent 8, it was mentioned that;

“Truly, I found no effect in the management. It is because of Brand Standards. The brand standards play an important role to the management foundation. Therefore, GM is responsible to operate or

run the property according to the brand standards. Consequently, GM has to be well understood in management patterns according to the set of brand standards and that makes managing the property has no effect at all from the entry mode”

In addition, the respondent 2 has raised an interesting issue regarding agreement of management contract. It has been mentioned that “*management contract has its limitation on agreement, especially in the revenue agreement*”. Even a number of respondents agreed that there are clear separation in management and decision making for management contract entry mode however the respondent 2 found the correlation in decision making between hotel brand and owner as exemplified below;

“...in some part, there is the co-decision between hotel and owner. For example, the employment of expatriate, due to the higher benefit for the expatriate, the owner will allow only some important position or the position that the local people cannot perform. So, some of the budget in this part will be cut out”

The respondent 1 mentioned the effects from the management contract on none equity-bases entry mode as “*without holding shares, it affects the level of decision making. With the alteration in financial investment, hotel has to make the compromise agreement while keeping the systematic working behavior*”.

4.1.3 Resolutions

Even the finding found no serious negative effects from the entry mode towards hotel operation especially in equity-based management contract. It can be observed that many of international hotel chains are rely on the management of the general manager (GM) as well as the brand standards. The respondent 7 has mentioned the significant of the general manager as “*GM is our key resource in remote property. GM will ensure that the hotel operation will be run according to the brand standards*”. Further the respondent 8 has explained the role of general manager as the following;

“GM has full responsibility in operating and running the property as well as standardizing service performance according to the brand standards. Therefore, the well-understanding in management patterns and brand standards is definitely important.

The operating expenses will also be took care by general manager. A part from that, GM has to closely working with department heads in order to supervision the hotel budget. In hotel operation, the planning of the annual budget is also extremely important. The budget plan will facilitate and foresee the management while some of the expenses on CAPEX which cannot be plan will affect to the cash flow. All these financial information has to be report to both corporate office and owner.”

For the management contract entry mode, the clear financial information report helps hotel operator reduce difficulties in management and agreement with the owner, while the operating performance is important for the hotel brand. The respondent 3 has stated that *“In common, the owner relies on the management team and will not much get involve in operation”*. However, some of international hotel chain has commented that it is important to make a clear agreement on the balancing of the financial revenue. The respondent 2 declared that *“The operating agreement is as important as financial agreement. In normal practice, owner controls revenue and budget while brand controls operating system and structure”*.

The respondent 1 has emphasized the role of brand in order to cope with effects from equity-based management contract entry mode as;

“As a hotel brand, it is important to focus on the operating strategies. However, it is equally important to make a clear communication with the owner or investor in order to minimize the difficulties in product investment including renovation and refurbishment”

Similar to the respondent 3, it has been mentioned that “*management has to balance the profit and lost as well as the benefit of four main stakeholders - owner, organization, management, and employee*”.

For the wholly-owned subsidiary, the respondent accepted that there is a high pressure to the employee commitment compare to other entry mode. Using this entry mode is benefited from the close relationship with business owner, for that reason, the hotel management has to control the work flexibility and more frequently approach and contact with both owner and employee. The respondent 5 talked about the workplace flexibility and approach and mentioned that;

“We have to find the way to go to the future, as our brand is executing mostly wholly-owned subsidiary, the management team has to retain good employees while communicating operation issues, problem, difficulties, and limitations with CEO. It will not only help our property but also strengthen the brand as a whole”

For franchising property, the nature of the business differentiates the management style. The property owner has the full rights on the decision making in managing the property. As a result, it creates the differences of limitation in the different properties under the different owner. However, it can be observed that financial expenditure is the same limitation to the management. The respondent 6 mentioned that “*to handle the smooth operation, it is important for GM to create the compassionate understanding of brand standards to the owner*”. However, it also been declared that “*in most property, owner relies on the decision making of general manager in operation and problem solution as long as it does not involve the great amount of expenditure*”.

Table 4.1: The entry mode selection, and the relationship of difficulties & limitation and effect management in hotel operation

		ENTRY MODE SELECTION	DIFFICULTIES AND LIMITATIONS	THE RESOLUTION
Franchise System	Vision of Organization & Management Style	High risk in brand destruction	GM creates compassionate understanding of brand standards	
	Agreement and Law & Regulation	Owner not happy to pay more expenditure	Use minimum amount of expenditure	
	Decision Making Power (Business Ownership)	Final Decision making is at owner	Clear split decision making responsibility	
Wholly-Owned Subsidiary	Staff facilities (Product/ Facility Assistance)	Staff adaptation	Staff adaptation	
	Vision of Organization & Management Style	High Investment	Frequent communication with both owner and staff	
	Law & Regulation	High employee stress	Work flexibility strategy	
	Management benefit from the ownership	None negative effect	GM runs the operation according to brand standards	
Management Contract	Vision of Organization & Management Style	Level of Decision Making	Clear communication between brand and owner	
	Agreement and Law & Regulation	Final Decision making is at owner	Clear agreement on level of decision making	
	Decision Making Power	Agreement (Revenue agreement)	Clear financial information	
	Lower risk in brand destruction		Clear agreement (balancing financial revenue)	
	Power in customer experience management			

4.2 Brand Standards

4.2.1 Meaning and Role of Brand Standards

From the interview, 'brand standards' means the set of standards or requirement for achieving the same or similar service of operation for the same hotel brand name. For example, respondent 1 mentioned that "*Brand Standards make our hotel be the same in all properties anywhere in the world*" It has also been mentioned by most of the respondents that brand standards are the framework or guideline for hotel operation which is flexible. Respondent 2 mentioned that "*New-blood hotel perceived brand standards as the freedom within the framework*" while respondent 9 stated that;

"Brand Standards is the service framework that hotel use to deliver the certain level or pattern of service, it helps hotel in the same brand name able to deliver the same experience. This framework focuses on the result not the process. The result is customer satisfaction. It means that the process can be flexible as long as it does not perform below standards"

Most of the respondents accepted that brand standards set the requirements, service policy, or service procedure for one hotel brand name to ensure that hotel guests will get the same or similar service experience in every visit. However, it is important to blend the brand standards into service environment. Some of the respondents talked about a customer expectation that has been created by the brand standards. Respondent 3 mentioned that "*brand standards will help customer perceived or expected what to be received from the Hotel*" furthermore the respondent 5 also mentioned that "*brand standards create customer expectation and positioned the brand in the market*". The respondent 3 and 8 pointed out that brand standards set the hotel character and tone. "*Brand standards will set the reflection in service ambience, decoration, products, and amenities that provided in all properties under the same brand name*" was mentioned by respondent 8.

In the management side, few respondents mentioned that brand standards create the power of the brand and the respondent 8 stated *“Brand Standards are the foundation of hotel operation. It sets the direction of management. It is the criterion for decision making and managing the property”*. However, the respondent 1 was the only respondent who mentioned about brand standards in human-ware as *“Brand Standards groom all associates with the same culture using core values of the organization”*.

4.2.2 The Importance of Brand Standards

The majority of the respondents mentioned the significance of the brand standards towards hotel operation. Although some of the respondents did not mention the importance of brand standards, they also did not deny. The respondent 2 said that *“Brand Standards is the judge towards survival of the business”*. The respondent 8 also emphasized the significance of the brand standards for international hotel chains as *“It is significantly important in hotel operation especially in hotel with different properties sharing the same brand name”*.

Some of the respondents talked about the importance of brand standards in customer expectation as the following examples;

“It is all about the expectation. Guest stayed in one of our hotels and impressed with the service. Yet, it’s rarely found the guest repeating return to the same destination. They are seeking for the new location or always change the location, but with their impression of the brand they will always return to the brand even in a different destination because they expect to get the same standard of service.

Therefore, Brand standards create an expectation before guest arrival, guarantee that there will be no negative surprise during stay and ensure that the hotel is value for price paid” (Respondent 6)

Further from the expectation, respondent 7 also mentioned that *“brand standards create the physical attributes to identify the hotel service”*. This is also similar to the respondent 3 as well as respondent 9 who mentioned;

“Brand Standards’ is important for any brand. It identifies, differentiates, and categorizes the hotel within and among each hotel brand name. It also allows hotel to deliver the consistency service”.

Besides, there are a few respondents stated the importance of brand standards toward customer loyalty. And only the respondent 1 mentioned brand standards in human resources.

4.2.3 Application of Brand Standards

In applying the hotel brand standards from the corporate point of view, brand standards mean the same for each brand. Therefore, it has been designed into the core program as mentioned by respondent 1 that;

“It has been designed to be a core program. It is a compulsory course for everyone under our brand. Employees have to attend this training session to learn all core values ... They will learn from the first day of orientation and it will be re-trained everyday ...Therefore, it is the implication of core values or brand standards in every second of operation”.

From the interview, almost all of respondents applied brand standards in their daily operation. For example, respondent 2 mentioned that *“we actually implement brand standards in our daily operation”*. Like the respondent 3 who seriously stated that *“It is a daily implication. We use brand standards everyday of our operation”*. Similar to the respondent 4 who identified that *“We do everything according to the brand standards. We apply it in our daily operation. However it is customized and personalized service to the guest”*.

In daily application of brand standards, most of international hotel chains are using the similar tools which are 1) breaking or branch it down into a form of sub-brand standards, and 2) training and supervision from departmental supervisor.

Some of the respondents have selected SOP or Standard Operating Procedure to divide brand standards into sub-brand standards. The respondent 3

mentioned that *“We have SOP in every local property. So, it is the brand standards from headquarter and we apply it into SOP in every local property”*. The respondent 5 also mentioned regarding this brand standard branching strategy that *“We break it down. We break brand standards into sub-standards then it will be broken into the daily routine. After that, we use training as an implication tool”*. Similar to respondent 8 who mentioned;

“It will be transformed or branch into the practical manual called ‘AOP’ or X hotel Operating Procedure. The AOP will be applied in each department using training as a tool. Then, the staff will use or apply AOP in daily operation”.

Although many respondents have used the brand standards branching technique, the respondent 9 focused on training and supervision as a mention;

“First of all, there is a process of employee training according to the brand standards. Then educate employees about responsibility and what they have to do. Also, we have the school of hospitality for employee training and service delivery. This is not only the HR department but also the department trainer to train all employees.

Apart from that, there is a supervisory system to monitor service performance in operation”.

However the respondent 6 is the only respondent that utilized the brand standards as a solution guideline for daily operation. The respondent has used the central brand standards from the corporate office as a broad guideline. It is mentioned in the interview that *“Brand Standards for our property are used for problem solving. If the operation does not run smoothly, or there is any problem occurs, we will look at the brand standards to see the solution”*.

On the other hand, the respondent 2 was the only respondent who illustrated the dissimilar recommendation towards issue on the application of brand standards. It has been mentioned that;

“Some of international hotel chains allow property to write their owned brand standards which it is exceptionally dangerous because every standards of service will be depended on the decision making of GM. Subsequently, brand standards will no longer be a standard among brands. It will, as well, no longer be the identical promise of every property under the brand. So, guests will not be able to expect anything from the brand”.

4.2.4 The control of Implementation

A few of the respondents has raise about the control of implementation of brand standards in different hotel property under the same brand name. The respondent 7 hired the professional GM (General Manager) to monitor the implementation of brand standards. It has been mentioned in the interview that *“GM will be the person who makes sure that the property is performing according to the rules or brand standards”*. Similar to some other respondents who applied this monitoring technique, however the senior member from the human resources or training department as well as some selected department head are executed. The respondent 1 explained the various techniques used in control of implementation of brand standards as the following statement;

“At each hotel property, each department, we assign HR, training, and division department head which have the whole responsibility in monitoring the staff performance. The performance monitor score is part of employees’ KPI (Key Performance Index) which affect to the promotion and bonus. So, every employee takes part in PMS (Performance Monitor Score) and not be able to ignore the responsibility due to it is a part of self-evaluation. At the same time, it increases the hotel’s performance score as well as the increasing of service charge.

Therefore, it is whole system linked to each other. It also links employee and reward with guest satisfaction. Apart from a bonus, the monthly paid service charge is another motivation factor. It deducts every 10 per cent of money spent from a guest. Consequently, employees can see the very quick result; good service equal more guests, more guests equal more service charge.”

4.2.5 Brand Standards' Key Elements

It has been mentioned by the respondent 8 that “*Brand standards are the foundation and it is the principle, it is the standards and standard has no compromise*”. However, the interviews showed different attributes that create brand standards and it also reflected to the key elements for maintaining consistency.

The respondent 3 separated the key elements in maintaining consistency of brand standards into product and people determinant which it has been emphasized on the equal significant. However, it was mentioned that “*product can be upgrade or change for the reason of improvement while people need the refreshment for the standardizing or better service*”.

The interview showed the similarity understanding towards the term product as “*The physical attributes such as bed rooms, amenities, decorations, furniture, consumer products such as food and beverage. It is a controllable determinant; however it can be fluctuated depending on limitation of resources such as funding*”. Therefore, hotel products in the understanding of hotelier referred to tangible or physical goods that constitute one hotel. Some of the respondents also mentioned specification of the physical attributes as product, it was called product specification.

Further, the key significant element in managing consistency of brand standards includes ‘People’. The conclusion from the interview showed similarity of this term as “*The personals work in an individual hotel, resort, or other part of the hotel business such as corporate office or cluster. The people determinant is the most prominent factor as it can easily be influenced by attitude, emotion, interactions, personal issues, and environments*”. To amplify the common understanding, all of the respondents mentioned people as the outstanding factor and being a key concern towards the application of brand standards in the different perspective. For example, respondent 8 emphasized that “*people is the only factor that be able to perform in order to achieve the maximum benefit of the brand standards*”.

From other perspective, the respondent 6 has mentioned the process in service as one of the significant element. It also be drawn that the refreshment of training was mentioned as a technique to archive the X hotel’s service style. In addition, it was interestingly mentioned by the respondent 5 that;

“It is the hotel has to prior identify what the hotel wanted to be ... the application of brand standards to human has to concern the human interaction due to employees are not robots, so the service is interacting with personal touch not the robotic service”.

As many of international hotel chains in Thailand has mention service process as one of the key element in maintaining consistency. It has been conclude to the common understanding as “The interaction of hotel personals and guests for enhancing hotel products. It is the principle guideline for hotel operation and it is measureable”. However, it can be seen that the definition of process included only the service aspect such as check-in process, food serving process, or cleaning process.

Whilst, the process in hotel business is not only in service process but the respondent 10 mentioned that *“safety and security considered as one of the important issue that hotel has to proceed consistently”*. Some of international hotel chains noted it in one of the brand standards. However, in case when brand standards are not inclusive the safety and security, international hotel chains in Thailand raise it as the key issue to create consistent standard by referring the international standards. It has been easily observed that the entire respondent mentioned safety and security is the most serious concern with strict implementation in all international hotel chains.

It has been mentioned that safety and security was positioned as the highest strict standards that all hotel staff has to aware. It has been mentioned by the respondent 3 that *“safety and security needs a serious implementation and cannot be compromised”*. Respondent 9 was also emphasized that *“it is extremely important and it is the standards that we have to keep it standardized everywhere in the world”*. The respondent 10 was also interestingly stated that *“it is as important as the survival of the hotel; it is the only factor that can shut the hotel down within one night”*.

The conformity shown that, every international hotel chains utilize the safety and security audits as the key methodology enhancing consistency. The respondent 2 has mentioned that *“clear audit function shaped the effectiveness of the safety and security prevention in the hotel business”*. All of international hotel chains mentioned the execution of both internal and external auditors to carry out the safety & security audit. Respondent 3 mentioned *“self-audit is the foundation, we have to*

make sure that every day of our operation has been run smoothly based on the stability of controllable safety factor". Internal audit usually run through both managements of the hotel or auditors from corporate office. However, the respondent 7 pointed out about external audit that *"in the hotel business, it is important to execute international standards of safety and security; so, we use external agency to handle the international standards audit"*. Similar to most of respondents, it has been cleared identified that safety and security needs a certification from international organization in order to confirm the safety standards of the hotel.

There are different international standards that used as a hotel safety reference as mentioned by respondent 1 that *"a part from our hotel's standards, ISO: 14001 as well as GMP are also executing as a standard for safety and security"*. Similar to the respondent 10 *"the food hygiene is our other international standards that we seriously implement in our daily foods and beverages service"*.

Further, the risk prevention is one of the other concerns. Most of the hotel sets it as a goal or achievement plan for annual appraisal. Besides, there are a lot of investment yearly for consistency management in safety and security. The respondent 4 has declared that *"there is big investments in risk prevention; the action plan or prevention plan has been settled and keep frequent practice"*. A part from that it has also been mentioned *"the emergency response plan is the other effective tool that ensures our team and customer that we can handle all unexpected emergency situations"*.

It can be observed that most of international hotel emphasize on the prevention and safety audit rather than safety training. However, the respondent 6 mentioned that *"safety training is important and generate significant benefit to both staff and customers; therefore, we try to usually do the safety training for any forthcoming situations"*

Though, it can be observed that, few respondents mentioned on the crisis management and crisis plan. Respondent 6 mentioned that *"there is a crisis management team. The team was formed to cope with unexpected crisis circumstance"*. Surprisingly, only respondent 9 mentioned that *"the hotel has no formal written crisis management plan but using the hotel principles which contains; the protection of hotel asset, hotel guest, and employees as a guideline"*.

The additional element for maintaining consistency is governance. It has been defined by a number of respondents as “*the reliable system for measure and balance the accountability and efficiency of the hotel operation, it can be made through internal and external audit*”. A majority of respondent mentioned the significant of governance system as the technique for a particular hotel to balance its consistency in service. Further the standardized evaluation system can be compared with the hotel – under the same brand, globally.

Besides, there are more factors that have been mentioned by many of respondents such as funds, process of operation, and attitude. In term of funding, the respondent 4 talked about financial support in purchasing which affect directly to the product quality consistency and stock. The process of maintenance which affect to the newly appearance of products, furniture, and other facilities has also been mentioned. Similar to the respondent 9, the understanding towards service training and service demonstration was also been emphasized. It was mentioned that those process has directly impact on real-operation moment or the moment-of-truth. A part from that, the attitude of employee including personal problem was also mentioned as a caused of inconsistency.

Table 4.2: The understanding of brand standards

UNDERSTANDING OF BRAND STANDARDS	
Meaning of Brand Standards	The set of standards or requirements for achieving the same or similar service of operation for the same hotel brand name.
Role of Brand Standards	Setting requirements, service policies, or procedure to ensure the sameness of service experience as well as creating hotel character and tone
Importance of Brand Standards	It is important for hotels that share the same brand name as it identifies and differentiates the hotel's service from others. It also creates customer expectation and loyalty. It is, also, the judgment to the survival of the business.
Application of Brand Standards	<i>Corporate Level :</i> Using Core Program - a compulsory training course and re-training schedule
	<i>Property Level:</i> (1) Branching into sub-brand standards - some may apply into SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) (2) Supervision from department supervisor (3) Using brand standards as a solution guideline or principle guideline
	<i>Monitor the implementation :</i> Using people (professional GM, HR, Trainer, and department head)
Control of Implementation	<i>Evaluate the implementation :</i> Using tools (KPI - Key Performance Index and PMS - Performance Monitor Score)
	<i>Motivate the implementation :</i> Using rewards (bonus and monthly paid service charge)
	<i>Product :</i> The physical attributes such as room, furniture or food and beverage. It is controllable, however it can be fluctuated depending on limitation of resources such as funding
Brand Standards' Key Elements	<i>Process :</i> The interaction of hotel personnel and guest for enhancing hotel products. It is the principle guideline for hotel operation and it is measurable (mostly are not include safety & security standards)
	<i>People :</i> The personnel work in the hotel. It is the most prominent factor as it can easily be influenced by attitude, emotion, personal issues, and environments
	<i>Governance :</i> The measurement and balance system on accountability and efficiency of hotel operation

4.3 Consistency of Brand Standards

4.3.1 The Inconsistency Factor

From the interview, the research found the factors that cause inconsistency of brand standards in different international hotel chains is varies. It can be observed that when the elements of the hotel changed, the answer of the respondent tend to change according to the environmental variance. However, the answers mentioned can be classified into 3 categories; resources limitation, service process, and people factor.

In term of resources limitation, there is a few respondent mentioned the significant on it. Most of the respondent mentioned the hotel resources, supplies or products in the way of controllable determinant. It was also commented that the schedule maintenance program will prolong the durable and make it consistent. To emphasize this, the respondent 6 said that *“For hotel, hardware is a secondary factor that causing the inconsistency as it is controllable”*. Similar to the respondent 9, it was mentioned that *“product standard has to be consistence and it is less flexible, this factor is not difficult to make it consistent”*.

However, there are still other resources limitations has been raised and mentioned by a number of respondents included the location limitation, supply limitation, property specification and landscape limitation, culture differentiation, and financial limitation. For location limitation, it has been mentioned by a few respondents as it affected to the product specification. As well, the limitation on the specification of property and landscape also cause inconsistency as the property might unable to handle some specification of brand standards.

In addition, respondent 7 stated that *“financial limitation considered as an important factor as it is the support element for the whole operation system of one hotel”*. With the limitation of the finance sponsorship, a particular hotel will hold its difficulties in renovating or refurbishing the physical attributes. This limitation might cause from crisis, the low profit margin, or even the decision making from the property owner.

Besides, the process of training and re-training has been mentioned as the focus positioning in inconsistency factor by a number of respondents. Respondent 1 declared that *“training the employee is important, but more importantly is the*

coaching from the supervisors or seniors". It can be observed that most international hotel perceived training as the foundation of understanding. However, they are more emphasized on the re-training from the department. The respondent 4, interestingly, mentioned that *"inconsistency can easily occur when the department has none followed up program, especially when OJT (on-the-job training) is not really implementing"*. Respondent 6 is another similarly emphasized the training factor as *"the insufficient and discontinuous training is the root of inconsistency problem"*.

The other factor that has been mentioned by one of the respondent is culture differentiation. This factor related communication as well as workplace systematic. The communication in the individual hotel and a hotel with its corporate office was also considered as the factor that causes inconsistency. The respondent 6 mentioned *"organization communication can both creating the positive and negative impact to the consistency of brand standards"*. In fact, communication covered all working area in the hotel business; however, it has been ignored by a number of hotels. Therefore, both hotel employees and customer can be incorrect recognized the hotel brand and its standards whenever the communication problem occurs.

Regarding the communication problem, it has been raised and mentioned by a number of respondents about the inexperience of management is one of the key root causes to the communication problem. Respondent 2 has raised that *"inexperience manager will not be able to deliver the service as inscribed in the brand standards or even communicate it through his/her employees"*. Further, respondent 2 also, interestingly, mentioned that;

"The main factor that causes inconsistency of service is communication both staff to staff and staff to guests. The effective internal communication smoothing service flow while external communication creates understanding"

During the service of a particular hotel, the customer traffic can also be the cause of the inconsistency of brand standards. The respondent 8 has emphasized that *"we have to be well-prepared and manage the traffic of customer as it uncontrollable but with high traffic, it is the easiest moment for the inconsistency occurs"*. It is also

regarding the manpower of a particular hotel. Some of the respondents mentioned manpower shortage as the other cause of inconsistency. The insufficient of manpower has been emphasized by the respondent 8 as *“it is what hotel has to aware of. When the traffic is raise, demand and supply - in term of service, is unequal but the customer expectation never lessen”*. Nonetheless, the respondent 3 has raised an interesting concern that

“... Even product is controllable, but the equipment breakdown is uncontrollable. The lack in maintenance and employee careless is also the major concern in order to make the product consistent”

The issue that was mostly talked about was the people factor. Almost all the respondent has mentioned this factor as the pivot cause of inconsistency. The respondent 1 declared that *“type of people is important, starting from the recruitment and selection; it is not only selecting the employee but also the attitude of them”*. Similar to respondent 8, the emotion of employee was mentioned as one of the key factor in causing inconsistency. Therefore, many of international hotel chains focus on recruiting the people that reach hotel standards, not only in qualification but also in attitude and emotion.

Further, many of respondents also mentioned the turnover of employee that cause inconsistency of brand standards. Respondent 3 mentioned that;

“It is not only the turnover, but the growing of employee to higher position is also a cause of inconsistency. When one position was changed, there will be a replacement and the performance of new comer might not consistent. However, we have to grow our people anyway but it has to be careful on recruiting new employee”

The respondent 5 was also similarly mentioned the issue regarding new employee as *“new trainee or employee can cause human error. For example, solving problem with wrong solution, or delivering the service with fluctuated from the brand standards”*. However, as the human industry, the respondent 9 mentioned the interesting issue regarding new employee as *“even with service standards, people*

needs interacting, so we have to be flexible and coach new comer. This will not only help inconsistency reduction but also help team building”.

Table 4.3: The relationship of cause and effect of inconsistency of brand standards

INCONSISTENCY CAUSE & EFFECT	CAUSE	PROBLEM	NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCE
Resources Limitation	Financial Limitation	Unable to do renovation or refurbishment	
	Property and Landscape Limitation	Unable to handle some of brand standards	
	Supply Limitation	Unable to produce some of brand standards	
Service Process	Incomplete training (orientation)	Staff do not pay attention to the importance of brand standards	
	Lack of Re-training	Staff do not perform service according to brand standards	
	Communication problem	Staff ignore the importance of brand standards	
	High Customer Traffic	Brand standards incorrect realization to both staff and customers	
	Careless maintenance	Unable to provide full procedure of service	
People	Staff Turnover	Equipment Breakdown	
	Staff Attitude & Perception	Service pattern and flow are fluctuated	
	Inexperience Management	Deliver off brand services	
		Unable to maintain service as brand standards	

4.3.2 Consistency Management in Brand Standards' Key Elements

This part of finding shows the thematic analysis from the interviews for the methodologies of international hotel chains in keeping its consistency of brand standards. It summarized the main findings of the issues under the four key elements of brand standards. Additionally, it also portrays the tools and the purpose of the each method enhancing consistency of brand standards in detail.

4.3.2.1 Product Specification Consistency

It can be seen that all of the respondents do not put much commitment in the maintaining the product specific consistency. Due to the majority of the respondent mentioned '*it is the controllable determinant*'. It can be seen from the respond of the respondent 10 that "*it is, really, not the difficult determinant, it is controllable, and it is changeable, however depending on the financial support*". The finding also shown that in order to cope with financial support, many hotels set the same practice which is prioritize the product refurbishment. As declared by the respondent 10;

"The hotel will find out the products, facilities, or amenities that mostly effect guest revisit behavior and enhancing guest satisfaction, and it will be the first thing that we will do investment in changing or upgrading process. For others, we will do only touch up from our in-house engineering"

Interestingly, the majority of the respondents talked about product specification control during pre-opening process. Most of the international hotel chains have this specification to ensure the consistency of physical attributes of all the hotel property under the same specific brand. The similarity of data collected also showed that all international hotel chains controlled the specification of all products since the establishment of the building. As mentioned by the respondent 5;

"In pre-opening, we have the template of our specification for all the properties. Our pre-opening team will check every details of the new hotel according to our template ... we have our customized bed and other specifications that will make our property the same anywhere in the world"

Respondent 2 also added some details regarding the set up of product specific during the establishment of the hotel that;

“We do have specification of products and concept that required for one brand; however it is a need of local atmosphere so our hotels blend those destination cultures in our product specific such as in the decoration, furniture, or even the aroma of in-room amenities”

Despite respondent 2 is the only respondent that mentioned product uniqueness. The concept of freedom within framework applied in this specification. The use of local touch has been executed; the 80 percent of the product attributes followed the international specification while 20 percent are local combination.

However, it can be observed that hotels, nowadays, are not newly build but a number of the properties has been renovated from the old-building or the former local hotel. In case of brand took over the property from previous owner, the substantial renovation has to be carried out. As stated by the respondent 6 that *“The hotel, like this property, has been taken over from the local ... So, we do the checklist and year plan preventive maintenance to prolong the products”*.

Further, during the operation, almost all respondents utilize the schedule checklist to maintain the hotel facilities and furniture. There are the common practice for yearly, monthly, and daily product checklist by supervisors and managers. As responds listed below, it shows the information of methodologies – the schedule check programs, used by international hotel chains in maintaining product specification consistency.

“We keep our product up-to-date; keep changing for the competitive advantage. So, there is a daily update and all the products have to be checked daily by the team of supervisors in order to make sure that everything is at the prompt-serving status” (Respondent 1)

“Manager on duty (MOD) is the person responsible for daily product checklist. It is, of course, cannot be checked in all rooms and areas. But the random checklist is good enough to maintain the performance

of our people in carry out our products at the highest-quality positioned during daily operation” (Respondent 4)

“It is the KPI that helps. Staff take care their own area of responsibility with the supervision of managers who carry the standard checklist. ... Preventive maintenance is also the tool that help us maintain our newly look products. It is the daily, monthly, and yearly checklist. After that, it also be reported in the management meeting” (Respondent 8)

“Our supervisors are the key person in maintaining the product specific consistency. Our property has 380 bedrooms ... so the supervisor will check the basic facilities, check the breakage, and make sure that we can deliver those rooms as good as written in the brand standards” (Respondent 9)

Regarding the schedule check program, the respondent 8 also emphasized the role of general manager in maintaining consistency of brand standards. It has been declared that;

“GM has to carry out the daily checklist to oversee the overall hotel service performance and aspects. GM has to check, supervise, and correct all area that not in line with the brand standards”

The additional methodology for maintaining consistency of product specification that was mentioned by some of the respondents is the management of the resources limitation. As products are influenced by the resources allowance – it means that if there is a resource available, product could be made to reach the consistent level as well as able to be upgraded. The respondent 6 mentioned that *“if the owner allowed extra expenditure, we can upgrade our product frequently. On the other hand, if resources such as money or supply are limited, the product can be fluctuated”*. Further, the respondent 10 mentioned the management of resources limitation as *“we have to plan the product maintenance program, if the resources are limited - we have to set the priority which our core product and guest preference is the foremost concern”*. Like other respondents, it has been suggested that;

“GM is the key person of the management company (hotel brand). Creating the compassionate understanding regarding hotel brand standards to the owner or decision maker helps GM runs the property in line with the brand standards”

Creating brand awareness to the property owner and top executive are also mentioned by some of the respondent. It is the methodology for a hotel brand company to maintain the consistent of brand among owner, board or executive committee. It helps managements and owner run the property in line with brand standards. As respondent 4 stated that; *“management and owner always involve in setting service direction, so if there is the awareness on brand standards, it will helps the brand in maintaining service consistency of the property”*.

4.3.2.2 Service Process Consistency

The finding shows clear similarity in the service process that it is the enrichment towards hotel products. As mentioned by the respondent 10 *“process is the combination service from people and technology. In hotel business, it is impossible to individually use one of them to enrich customer satisfaction”*. The finding also clearly shows that international hotel chains in Thailand are executing various tools and methods for maintaining consistency of brand standards. However, it can be observed that almost all international hotel chains execute the training and re-training as a main tool to maintain the excellence service process.

The daily training program, one of the general practices for hotel – has been used for both new intake and current hotel staff for reviewing and emphasizing the brand standards. The respondent 9 stated that *“training is the foremost key practitioner for maintaining the consistency of brand standards”*. The respondent 10 also emphasized the significant of training programs in maintaining consistency as;

“Our hotels are using ‘Brand Service Training Program’ for enhancing the understanding of brand standards to our people. Starting from the beginning of orientation and continuing with the series of trainings for

cultivating our brand philosophy to all employees. With this profoundly understanding, we believed that all services will be consistent”

In addition, the majority of the international hotel chains in Thailand emphasized the significant of training and re-training process as following examples;

“The service sequence is our program for training. It is a continuous program, the courses has been designed to be more essential in every extra classes. We utilized it for service advancement and people development. We believed that trained employees will be improved their service capability and will be able to coach their team”
(Respondent 1)

“Service delivering is the most important attribute in successful hotel business; we use this quote to emphasize our people for delivering the best service performance. It is the awareness that the hotel has to raise during first training (orientation). As well, the re-training and daily briefing is the key practice. Overall, training process will remind the service excellence realization for our employees” (Respondent 4)

“The effective training helps us delivering the perfect product. It is the emphasizing to our people of what we commit. Therefore, apart from the schedule training, the re-training program in service process and safety prevention is important for our brand standards consistency”
(Respondent 5)

“For training, we exercise our service performance frequently. The demonstration illustrates employees to serve and solve. The training called ‘On Brand Walk’. It is the imagination of service process in every touch point and how we can perform better. We use the real sequence of service, role play, and practice to show our excellence examples. After that, our people can perform as an example shown”
(Respondent 10)

It can be easily observed that few respondent mentioned the daily briefing enrich the performance in daily operation. The respondent 6 talked about

daily briefing as *“training is used in form of SOP however the frequent daily briefing or talking with the team helps in term of consistency of service process. It also creates relationship and decrease working gap between supervisor and operation staff”*.

While the training has been emphasized by a majority of international hotel chains in Thailand, there is also the measurement of service process using management check and guest satisfaction index (GSI) as mentioned by respondent 4 *“the evaluation of service has been done through comment from the guests and department supervisors”*, similar to the respondent 5 *“management check is the measurement of our service performance and the efficiency of training program, it links and reflects to each other”*. The respondent 8 also declared regarding the process consistency management as;

“To make the service process run ordinarily, we need to apply two programs; the first one is preventive maintenance program and the second one is service check program ... service is undoubtedly linked with product, so we have to check both attributes carefully in order to maintain their consistent performance”

The management check program is the program for a team of hotel managers to check the service performance of employees in each department. The management will be assigned to hold the title called ‘MOD’ or Manager on Duty. Then MOD will be the person who uses any of services in hotel as a guest. The respondent 10 mentioned that *“MODs pretend themselves to be a guest; they use any service as guest will experience then check the quality and report to the team of managers”*. This program aimed not only to check the daily quality of service, but also to create better work coordination among departments. The respondent 10 also mentioned the effectiveness of MOD check program as *“it depends on the judgment and the report of each MOD, so even this program cannot 100 percent relied due to variable factors but at least it reflects some of our property performance”*.

Apart from that, GSI (Guest Satisfaction Index) is the other methodology that was mentioned by the majority of respondents. The respondent 3 raised that *“listening to the customers creates long-term relationship and sustains the*

business ... it helps hotel to assess to the level of satisfaction and we can evaluate the consistency of brand standards". Similar to the respondent 8, it has been mentioned that *"guest comments will tell us the area of improvement and it is valuable"*. Guest comment also help hotel to assess the level of service performance as mentioned by respondent 3 that *"it is the scoring of our daily service performance, it shows how good we are daily in servicing our guest and it helps us to improve it in the next day"*.

Some of the international hotels apply service process as a principle guideline of service and adjust it to be an indicator for performance appraisal. The respondent 2 has mentioned that *"to make the process of service consistent, we use standard operating procedure as an input, output is service performance consequently there is a service appraisal according to the input"*. The performance appraisal is a tool for hotel to assess the level of service performance and the achievement of the employee through the period of time. The frame of service process evaluation or performance appraisal using in almost all international hotels is SOP or Standards Operating Procedure. The respondent 10 has mentioned that *"we use SOP in helping flow of service; brand standards show what we have to achieve but SOP show step to achieve brand standards"*.

4.3.2.3 People Factor Consistency

There is no argument among respondents that people is the most difficult factor to maintain the consistency. As an example, respondent 3 pointed out that *"it is the most concern element and it is the biggest issue for all hotels to make it consistent"*. Similar to the respondent 5 *"it is the worldwide problem for all hotel operators, every hotel manager has to deal with this people inconsistency and it really effects the operation"*. Further, respondent 10 has stated *"it is the most fluctuated factor in operating hotel and it is difficult to make it consistent"*.

People have been involved by many uncontrolled environments like emotion, personal issue, or workplace stress. Therefore, almost all respondents accepted that people development is not enough. As mentioned by respondent 6 *"hotel manager will never be able to cope with people's problem due to it will be changed daily and individually depending on many uncontrolled reasons"*.

Therefore, it can be easily observed that hotels nowadays are focusing on the recruitment and selection process. As mentioned by the respondent 1 “*maintaining consistency in people starts from recruiting and selection of those people*”. Similar to the majority of the respondents, selecting the right attitude employee is the suggestion in dealing with people consistency. Respondent 6 mentioned that “*it is a necessity for hotel to find the right person to join the team*”. The respondent 7 also support that “*if we find out that a person who is not fit with the team, it is an urgent responsibility for HR to switch that person before service is fluctuated*”. The replied from the respondent 9 also emphasized that “*hiring people who wants to join the organization matters. They have to buy in the organization philosophy, vision, mission and our culture. Of course basic skill is required - however, we preferred a person with good attitude*”. As a result, the recruitment, nowadays, pay less attention to skills and knowledge as believed that it can be built while people’s attitude cannot.

The majority of respondents mentioned the significant on the process of recruitment and selection. Respondent 7 stated that “*selecting the right candidate is the important process. Not only is the knowledge and skills but also attitude. It is the foremost concern*”. Other respondent also declared that hiring the right person considerably helps the hotel cope with brand consistency management. As brand has its character and some of applicant might not match the character of the brand and deliver inconsistent service. Even there is no clear process of recruitment and selection shown in this finding but the respondent 3 has raised an interesting issue as;

“Hotel has to focus on an effective recruitment process. Each hotel has its brand character, therefore, it cannot be told that which way is the best practice for selecting a new team. Hotel, nowadays, has to identified itself and creates its unique recruitment process to find the right attitude person to join the team”

It is particularly interesting that many of the respondents utilized the motivation and organization loyalty as the staff retention strategy. “*It is*

psychology, we have to ensure that staff love the organization and it will reflect on their work” was mentioned by the respondent 2.

There are some common practice in utilizing motivation and organization loyalty; creating career growth, and offering financial stability. Some hotels execute the career growth as mentioned by respondent 10 *“from the research, hoteliers are demanding to have growing career path, if they do not see the career advancement, their service are observable to be ineffective”*.

Some other hotels are using financial stability to create organization loyalty as mentioned by respondent 5 that *“apart from educating the team member, motivating them through financial benefit is a tools to retain our people. As they are our valuable asset, so this is one of the vital investments for hotel”*. However, a few hotels are using personal development and team empowerment as a tool. It has been stated by respondent 5 that *“by empowering our people, it creates self-value and individual important, so it reflect positively in daily operation and it helps in terms of employee retention”*.

4.3.2.4 The Governance

One of the common practices for international hotel chains in Thailand for maintaining its consistency of brand standards is the governance. The system, normally, has been set up from the corporate office from a particular hotel brand in order to evaluate the performance of service operation according to the brand standards. It also set up to balance the management of the hotel in term of accounting and scoring the hotel operation for the decision making on continuing contract.

Most of the respondents mentioned audit as a common methodology for maintaining consistency of the brand standards. However, it can be distinguished that mystery shopper is the only audit function that has been mentioned from all international hotel chains in Thailand. Respondent 5 mentioned that *“mystery shopping is very effective; we use it to evaluate the standards of service for all service area including people, product, and other facilities”*. As same as respondent 9 *“audit has been executed as a consistency maintaining tool to cover all area of service, it evaluates and shows what we need to correct for staying in line with brand standards”*.

Further from mystery shopping, brand audit or corporate audit was also executed by international hotel chains in Thailand as the internal audit. It has been mentioned by respondent 4 that *“it creates two benefits; first the evaluation on daily basis, second the creation of relationship among management and staff”*. Some of respondents also mentioned the usage of the audit and supervise system between middle-line management and operation staff in order to maintain the consistency of brand standards. *“The supervision is not purposed for evaluating staff but it aims to revision the brand standards and create positive workplace atmosphere”*.

The two levels of audits – brand audit and external audit, have its different in term of practice. Firstly, the brand audit has it similarity responded data as it has been executed by the corporate audit team. This type of audit will be shortly notice to the hotel for the preparation. Secondly, the mystery shopping is undoubtedly be executed by the external auditor or the third-party audit company. This auditor will have no involvements in brand operation; however, they are the professional and reliable company. Thus type of audit will not be notice to the hotel – the hotel will never be prepared for this type of audit.

Also, there are a number of respondents mentioned on product audit which there are both from internal and external auditors. Respondent 3 has declared the product audit function that;

“The third party auditors help us in safety and balance check while our brand auditors will focus on product and service of the hotel. The overall audit for room will be made every 3 years and 6 years for furniture refurbishment. However, there is frequent product audit from brand during the daily operation for maintaining all products at the standardized level”

Table 4.4 : The methodology on maintaining consistency of brand standards

KEY ELEMENTS	METHOD ENHANCING CONSISTENCY	PERFORMER	TOOL	PURPOSE
PRODUCT SPECIFICATION	Setting the Product Specification	Brand Corporate Office	Checklist for pre-opening team	Make sure that physical attributes of hotel specified as brand standards
	Schedule Check Program (yearly/ monthly/ daily)	Supervisor and Manager or GM	Schedule product checklist	Check, supervise, correct all the off-brand area
	Management of resource limitation	General manager and Owner	Creates compassionate understanding of brand standards	Run the property in line with brand standards
	Training and Re-Training	Training Department (HR)	Training program	Brand standards review and emphasize
SERVICE PROCESS	Daily Briefing	Department trainer	Effective communication	Bring better work coordination and improve daily service performance
	Management Check	Hotel Manager (team)	MOD (Function: Use, Check, Report)	
	GSI (Guest Satisfaction Index)	Hotel Guests	Guest Questionnaire, Guest Comment, and Complain	Assess the level of satisfaction
	Performance Appraisal	Human Resources Department	SOP (Standards Operating Procedure)	Assess the level of service performance
	Recruitment & Selection	Human Resources & Department Head	Effective recruitment process	Select the right candidate (Knowledge, Skill, & Attitude)
PEOPLE FACTOR	Motivation	Human Resources Department	Financial Stability and Career Growth	Employees retention and lower risk in service fluctuation from human factor
	Organization loyalty	Human Resources Department	Personal Development and Team Empowerment	
GOVERNANCE	Brand (Corporate) Audit	Corporate Audit Team	Short notice audit	Evaluate the standard of service according to brand standards
	External Audit	Third-party Audit Company	Mystery shopping	

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research aims to study a new issue therefore the exploratory research is adopted to investigate the phenomenon. The purpose of the study is aimed to make a clear understanding on the methodologies for maintaining consistency of brand standards of the different hotel properties under the international hotel chains in Thailand and to make a conclusion according to the evidence. Thus, this chapter presents the discussion of the findings and the conclusion of the study relating to the entry mode of internationalization system, the understanding of brand standards and key elements for brand standards consistency management. It summarizes the main finding and the conclusion of the following issues;

- Factor for selecting the entry mode for internationalization
- Difficulties and limitation of entry mode in control of operation
- Understanding of the 'brand standards' in hotel
- The inconsistency cause and effect
- Method of maintaining consistency of brand standards key elements

Lastly, the paper finalizes with the contribution, implications, and the recommendations for the future studies.

5.1 Discussion

The hotel business has its challenge in tangiblizing the intangible hotel experience. As it has been recommended, it is important for one hotel to create the strong brand name for representing the hotel service experiences and appears to the customer's tangible characteristics of a touchable product (Berry, 1986; Levitt, 1981). Therefore, customers can easier visualize and understand the intangibility side of the hotel services using the strong brand name (Berry, 2000; Bharadwaj et al., 1993).

However, the common practice for the growing business strategy is expanding or internationalizing (de Chernatony et al., 2001). Thus, hotel business considered in a human industry and selling service as the main product, therefore, the expansion is risky to the failure of customers' satisfaction and loyalty. The key failure in hotel business expansion is the inconsistency from the hotelier who is considered as the key component in delivering the main product of the hotel business.

Therefore, it is necessary for the hotel business to conduct the exploratory research as it examines facts and contribute more understanding of new issues or phenomenon for the development of a preliminary idea (Neuman, 2006). Thus, this exploratory research will better visualized the similarity and different understanding on the methodologies for maintaining consistency of brand standards among the different hotel properties under the international hotel chains in Thailand.

5.1.1 Entry mode and Control of Operation

With respect to the respond of the main research objective, the business expansion strategies (internationalization and entry mode) and the effect to the control of operation has been studied. It shows the significant relationship with the control of the implementation of brand standards. Therefore, the first objective was developed to investigate the impact of business entry mode towards to level of control of operation and the management of it difficulties and limitations.

5.1.1.1 Factor of entry mode selection

In relation to the recommendation of entry mode and the internationalization strategy, service firm has been recommend to follow either existing clients when they internationalized or look actively for new markets (Erramilli & Rao, 1990). Further, the financial attractiveness is also the factor that interests the service firm's investor to internationalize. In comparison with the findings, there is some further insight information regarding to this issue as well as the issues that have not been raised in the previous studies. The similarities from the current study and the differentiation comparing with the previous studies have been shown as the following;

In terms of similarity, it would appear that both the Thai international hotel chains investigated here and those examined in the previous studies

are essentially similar in the area of law & regulations and ownership model. The main concern in selecting the entry mode for internationalization is still the law permission from the destination country. Further, the ownership which related to the level of decision making is the other concern of the internationalization model selection. There is a clear identification from both finding and previous studies that level of control and decision making is important as it determines risks and returns, degree of interaction, degree of intangibility of service type, and ultimately performance of the hotel in a foreign market (Javalgi & Martin, 2007). Those similarities have been shown in all entry modes; franchise system, wholly-own subsidiary, and joint venture (management contract).

Further, the selection of entry mode in the internationalization of service firms that was also mentioned in the previous studies included the market access and the opportunity for business growth. The finding from international hotel chains in Thailand also similarly mentioned on this issue. As the destination has to be examined prior the internationalization, the proper approach of entry mode is a significant key in finding business collaboration and opportunity to grow in the new destination. It has been illustrated that *“if one hotel can find the strong partner since the beginning of entering the new destination, the particular hotel brand has a strong chance to grow in the market as well as this might help in growing its chains”* (respondent 1).

The finding in the previous studies mention risk of service firms in internationalized itself abroad however, the finding from Thai international hotel chains shown further insight information. Ekeledo and Sivakumar (1998), et al., mentioned that selecting an appropriate foreign entry mode can have significant and far reaching consequences on a firm’s performance and survival. The investigation from Thai international hotel chains also confirmed that appropriate selection of entry mode helps in management as well as lower risk in brand destruction.

In terms of further investigation, the international hotel in Thailand mentioned the vision of the organization and management style is one of the significant concerns in selecting the entry mode as it reflects to the future management. For example, if the owner wanted to have a high involvement in the operation, it suggested selecting the wholly-owned subsidiary as an entry mode.

Consequently, the benefit from the management style is the following selecting criteria in adopting an entry mode. The finding from international hotel chains in Thailand illustrated this criterion as the consequent benefit or impact from the entry mode. The franchising has it full rights on controlling the physical evidence while the owner hold the final positioned on decision making.

That is also another criterion that some of the hotel brands avoid internationalizing in a specific entry mode. As a franchising model - commonly accepted, has it higher risk in hotel brands destruction. Therefore, some of the hotel companies avoid using this mode to entry the new markets as it always fluctuate.

However, from other entry mode such as management contract, the hotel brand has benefit on managing customer experience and control the consistent of brand standards. Therefore, it has been mentioned by a number of respondents that international hotel chains in Thailand are also using this management benefit from entry mode as a selection criterion as well.

The resource-based theory or the source of competitive advantage is the criteria for selecting entry mode that have been mentioned in the previous studies. However, it has not been mentioned from the current finding of international hotel chains in Thailand.

Table 5.1: Comparison of factors for selecting the entry mode in Thailand and previous studies

Criteria	Previous Studies	Findings (Thailand)
FACTORS FOR SELECTING THE ENTRY MODE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core notion of strategic management (firm resources and external opportunities) • Agreement and Law & Regulation • Decision Making Power (Business Ownership) • The Degree of Control in Operation to achieve strategic goal • Market Access and Opportunity for Business Growth • Financial Attractiveness • Sources of Competitive Advantage (resource-based) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision of Organization & Management Style • Agreement and Law & Regulation • Decision Making Power (Business Ownership) • The Advantages from Management Style • Risk in hotel brand destruction • Power in customer experience management

5.1.1.2 Difficulties and Limitations

There are the clear similarity from both the investigation from Thai international hotel chains and previous studies that different entry mode contains different difficulties and limitations.

Regarding the franchise system entry mode, even Litteljohn and Slattery (1993) has mentioned that franchising allows quick access to new market and rapidly growth globally compared to other entry mode. However, the underlying assumption from the findings and previous studies confirmed that franchising held the higher risk in brand destruction. As the model of hotel business are complexity and the franchise management system has its limitation especially in decision making power and financial sponsorship. Consequently, it has been declared that expanding the hotel using franchise system is holding the higher risk in hotel brand destruction.

Further, Williams (1999) mentioned in his study that *“The common view of the demand for franchise market entry mode is that the most capable entrepreneurs start independent businesses, whereas less qualified entrepreneurs become franchisees”*. Similar to the findings from international hotel chains in Thailand that the owners that operated the hotel using franchise business are likely not willing to pay high expenditure in creating the complete service experience for a luxury brand. It also been confirmed that the mostly owner that adopted franchising system as an entry mode less focus on facilitating both employees and customers with full service equipment, they are mostly focus on the financial return and profit margin.

Regarding the wholly-own subsidiary, it is the basic entry mode to exporting business abroad. Pennings et al. (1994) and Barkema and Vermeulen (1998) mentioned that FDI (or wholly owned) has its benefit in local control, full profit retention, and longer survival rates to the hotel compare to other alliance entry mode. However, it is accepted in both previous studies and finding from the international hotel chains in Thailand that wholly-own subsidiary is costly and risky from both business failure risk and political risk. Nonetheless, the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand portrayed that one of the difficulties from this entry mode is employee stress. The workplace stress is higher due to the expectation on financial return and close-relationship with owner.

Regarding the management contract – equity-based joint venture by granting management contact, the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand has evidently dissimilarity from the previous studies. It has been declared that there are no negative impacts, difficulty or any limitation from the management contract's entry mode while the previous studies mentioned the difficulties in level of decision making regarding the percentage of share hold. The finding from international hotel chains in Thailand explained the significant of agreements between property owner and brand which can help in deduction the management argument during the operation which also similarly mentioned in the previous studies regarding the negotiation in the agreement of management contract.

5.1.1.3 The Resolutions of Difficulties and Limitations

Even it has not been clearly mentioned in the literature regarding the management of the impacts or difficulties of entry mode towards the control in operation, the finding from the international hotel chains in Thailand has clearly identified those methods.

The finding showed that GM is the key person to deal with the difficulties and effects from entry mode. Apart from that the clear agreement and contract with property owner prior the operation is also the key practice to deal the forthcoming risk in hotel operation. There are also the suggestions from a number of respondents that communication is also play a significant role in successful hotel operation. The management of the hotel brand must communicate the vital and value of brand standards to not only the owner but also the entire hotel staff. This will create the compassionate understanding of the brand standards and help in improving efficiency in daily operation.

Finally, the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand emphasized that clear report for both financial and operation performance is the recommended practice for hotel to manage the effects from entry modes.

Table 5.2: Comparison of difficulties and limitations of adopted entry mode to hotel operation in Thailand and previous studies

ENTRY MODE	PREVIOUS STUDIES	FINDINGS (THAILAND)	RESOLUTION (THAILAND)
Franchise System	High risk in brand destruction	High risk in brand destruction	GM creates compassionate understanding of brand standards
	Demanded from less qualified entrepreneurs	Owner not happy to pay more expenditure	Use minimum amount of expenditure
	High Investment (Costly)	Final Decision making is at owner	Clear split decision making responsibility
Wholly-Owned	Risky in term of business failure and Political Risk	Staff facilities (Product/ Facility Assistance)	Staff adaptation
	Level of Decision Making regarding the percentage of share hold	High Investment	Frequent communication with both owner and staff
Management Contract	Agreement negotiation between hotel operator and management company	High employee stress	Work flexibility strategy
		None negative effect	GM runs the operation according to brand standards
		Level of Decision Making	Clear communication between brand and owner
		Final Decision making is at owner	Clear agreement on level of decision making
		Agreement (Revenue agreement)	Clear financial information
			Clear agreement (balancing financial revenue)

5.1.2 The understanding of Brand Standards

After the studied of the consistency management in service firm, the term brand standards have been cited as the minimum requirements for service operator to achieve. However, in other business, especially in manufacturing, standards can be referred to sameness of outcome products. However, hotel industry was considered differently. Due to customers are always seeking for new hotel experience while expecting at the standardized service guaranteed. As a result, the definition and practice of brand standards in the aspect of hotel business will definitely different. So, the second objective was developed to find out the scope and understanding towards the term 'brand standards' and the key elements of brand standards.

5.1.2.1 Common understanding and importance

The finding confirmed the definition of the brand standards in term of overall content of the brand standard especially in term of purpose. Brand standards are written in order to be a guideline in hotel operation. It has been purposed for achieving the sameness of a desire level of quality, consistency, and continuity in service. Or else, brand standards create the value of the consistency of service, so in any different experience for staying in a particular hotel brand, hotel guest still get the standardized level of service.

However, it can be seen that the previous studies mentioned the placement of the brand standards at the reference desk or at the manager while the investigation from international hotel chains in Thailand has the different practice. It has been mentioned by a number of respondents that hotel has to cultivate the brand standards into the entire employees. Therefore, the book of brand standards will not only be placed at the manager but also will be publicized to the hoteliers.

In terms of role, brand standards established the same practice for a hotel operator in order to operate one hotel under the brand in the same direction as well as offering the same or similar products, services, and experiences. Therefore, in both previous studies and the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand are similarly confirmed that brand standards established the image of a hotel and ensured that those images will be delivered exactly the same in every property anywhere in the world inform of standardized service experiences.

Further, the finding also investigated on the importance of hotel brand standards and compare with the previous studies. The finding from the international hotel chains in Thailand still emphasized on the sameness of the service operation. Apart from that it also was mentioned on the identification of each hotel characters. Most of the respondents also mentioned it's significant on the competitive advantage as well as customer loyalty. Finally the findings concluded its importance as a judgment towards survival of the hotel business. Similar to the previous studies, it has been mentioned that brand standards have its significant on secure and sustain customer loyalty, establish image of the brand quality and protecting the brand image.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the main functions of brand standards are (1) identify and different the hotel services or creating an expectation towards hotel brand, (2) Protecting the brand image with the sameness of service at the level of brand promise, and (3) sustain the competitive level of the hotel by creating the customer loyalty and repeating guests.

5.1.2.2 Application of brand standards

The finding from this investigation also showed the practical perspective of how international hotel chains in Thailand implements their brand standards in to daily operation. Even in the literature review section has not been mentioned this issue from the previous studies. It is believable that this finding will help to better understanding on the practical of the brand standards implementation.

The findings showed the methodologies in apply brand standards into daily operation with two main levels. The first level that has been mentioned was the corporate level. This level is the supervision on the implementation of the brand standards in different hotel property under one hotel brand. It has been suggested that corporate office used core program in training the people to deliver consistent service quality as written in the brand standards. This core program included the compulsory training courses – orientation, monthly training program, specialist training, human resources development training, talent training, and the re-training schedule as an example.

The following level is the operation level or it has been mentioned as the property level. This level played a significant role in applying brand

standards into the daily operation. The properties are practically branch the brand standards into the sub-brand standards to match with each departments' responsibilities. As it has been declared that brand standards are the expectation of the goal of achievement however branching it into sub-brand standards or it might be called SOP (Standards Operating Procedure) is the practice of achievement. Therefore, it is a common practice for a majority of international hotel chains in Thailand. Supervision from department supervisor is also a practice that makes operation achieve consistent level.

However, some of the international hotel chains in Thailand also applied brand standards as a solution guideline or principle guideline. Therefore the general operation will be done based on sub-brand standards or SOP, while the special handling such as special guests, or any problem occurs in the hotel, the reference from brand standards will be used to cope with the problem, difficulty, or special operation.

5.1.2.3 Control of implementation of brand standards

In term of controlling the implementation of brand standards, the international hotel chains in Thailand executed three steps of common practice. The first one is the monitoring the implementation, the second is evaluating the implementation, and the third practice is the motivating the implementation.

These three practices in control of implementation of brand standards are done linked with each other. It has been mentioned that none of these individual tools can be success in working alone. The monitoring helps in term of daily operation, while the evaluation systems help in scoring and avoid bias in workplace and finally, the motivation is a tool for employee to work effectively without feeling as to be forced.

Table 5.3: The comparison of the understanding of brand standards in hotel (Thailand) and previous studies

CRITERIA	FINDINGS (THAILAND)	PREVIOUS STUDIES
Meaning	The set of standards or requirements for achieving the same or similar service of operation for the same hotel brand name.	The manual provides information on the policies and standards that guide the hotel operation, normally positioned at the reference desk or at the manager, so that all hotel associates can achieve a desire level of quality, consistency, and continuity in service to hotel guests
Role	Setting requirements, service policies, or procedure to ensure the sameness of service experience as well as creating hotel character and tone	Setting the certain level of service performance in all hotel properties under the same brand name
Importance	It is important for hotels that share the same brand name as it identifies and differentiates the hotel's service from others. It also creates customer expectation and loyalty. It is, also, the judgment to the survival of the business.	(1) Brand standards secure and sustain customer loyalty (2) Establishing image of brand quality in the customer's mind (3) Protecting the brand image the has been developed from the destruction
Application of Brand Standards	Brand standards has been applied in 2 levels; (1) Corporate Level : Using Core Program (2) Property Level: Using SOP, Supervisory system, and use as a principle guideline for problem resolution	N/A
Control of Implementation	To control the implementation of brand standards, there are the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Motivation system using different tools	N/A

5.1.2.4 Brand standards key elements

This section presents the comparison of the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand and the previous studies on the key elements of hotel brand standards. The key elements of hotel brand standards consist of product, process, people, and governance. These four elements have been developed from service elements and previous studies of the consistency management of the brand. So, following is the comparison of the understanding of brand standards from the finding of the international hotel chains in Thailand and the previous studies.

PRODUCT: In term of product, the similarity showed the general understanding of product as physical attributes or physical goods in hotel. The finding and the previous studies also confirmed that this element should not be fluctuated. Therefore, it confirmed that product element is the controllable determinant that hotel has to keep it most consistent. However, it has been mentioned from both international hotel chains in Thailand and previous studies that the product determinant has been influenced by many variables such as funding, location condition, or external influences.

PROCESS: In term of process, the similar understanding showed that it is the interaction or performance among two parties – hotel employees and hotel guests. The basic characteristic of service has been cited as an intangible, perishable, lack consistency, and need participation. The finding from international hotel chains in Thailand also confirmed that process is an elements that enhancing product of one hotel. Further, both previous studies and current finding from international hotel in Thailand does not been mentioned the process of safety & security – it can easily observed that definition of process covered only the hotel service procedure.

PEOPLE: In term of people, the common understanding from both previous studies and current finding from international hotel chains in Thailand defined people as the personals work in a particular hotel. It has also been confirmed the significant in the hotel operation as well as in the communication and delivering the brand promise. People was mentioned as the most prominent factor and can easily be influenced in the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand,

However, the previous studies does mentioned only the significant role in creating the specific meaning of the hotel brand.

GOVERNANCE: In term of governance, the finding from the international hotel chains in Thailand has not detailing define the term however it has clearly identified in the previous studies. Governance is the tools for hotel to measure and scoring the performance of hotel operation. The similarity showed the common understanding as functions of the governance included audit of financial account, service operation performance, and conduct periodic review. Further, it has been mentioned that governance is one of the key practice for enhancing consistency of hotel operation according to the brand standards.

Table 5.3: The comparison of the understanding of brand standards in hotel (Thailand) and previous studies (cont.)

FINDINGS (THAILAND)	PREVIOUS STUDIES
<p><i>Product:</i> The physical attributes such as room, furniture or food and beverage. It is controllable, however it can be fluctuated depending on limitation of resources such as funding</p> <p><i>Process:</i> The interaction of hotel personnel and guest for enhancing hotel products. It is the principle guideline for hotel operation and it is measureable (mostly are not include safety & security standards)</p> <p><i>People:</i> The personals work in the hotel. It is the most prominent factor as it can easily be influenced by attitude, emotion, personal issues, and environments</p>	<p><i>Product:</i> The physical goods that make up the internal specification of the hotel brand. It should not fluctuate. So, in separate occasion, the consumed benefits to the customer remain exactly the same. However, products are subjected to a series of variables such as location conditions, weather conditions and other external influences. It also an element that required a huge investment.</p> <p><i>Process:</i> Any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Service is intangible, perishable, lack consistency, and need participation of a service recipient to obtain the service.</p> <p><i>People:</i> A person who works in the hotel. It has been suggested the importance of employees (people) during their interaction with their customers and their ability to purify the brand value as they are the key in building the strong service brand and create the specific meaning of the brands.</p>
<p><i>Governance</i> : The measurement and balance system on accountability and efficiency of hotel operation</p>	<p><i>Governance:</i> A tool for hotel to ensure that all hotels act accordance with the given policies and guidelines and to endorse to good practices among associates. Hiring auditors to check on compliance, and conduct periodic review for individual hotel's performance is the common practice.</p>

5.1.3 The Inconsistency Cause and Effect

Regarding the cause and effect of inconsistency, by the nature of the hotel business, it has been influenced by a number of inconsistency problems however there are three major causes that has been declared and mentioned in the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand.

Firstly, the resources limitation, the major problem cause inconsistency is financial limitation. It is the consequence from other influences such as decision making and ownership. This problem affected to the further investment or schedule renovation or refurbishment of the hotel. Apart from that, some hotel – especially the taken over property has its limitation on property specification and landscape limitation. This problem is somewhat difficult to make it exact specified, therefore hotel has to be flexible on this problem. There is also problem on supply limitation which hotel needs a high flexibility on the management.

Secondly, the service process, mostly inconsistency problems are occurred during the service. Due to the nature of hotel business, it needs an involvement and interaction, therefore, during the processing of service, the fluctuation can happens and it can cause inconsistency. The inconsistency problem that almost all international hotel chains in Thailand mentioned was the training for both incomplete orientation and lack of re-training.

Further the communication problem was also raised as the major cause of inconsistency. Communication was not mentioned only for internal but also external as well as interaction of staff and guest that also was raised as a cause of inconsistency. Further problem such as high customer traffic as well as careless maintenance was also declared from a number of international hotel chains as a cause of inconsistency in service that impact to other service elements such as product.

Thirdly, the people, as a human industry – people were also mentioned as a cause of inconsistency. This major cause contained some significant problems including staff turnover, staff attitude & perception, as well as inexperience management. Turnover ratio in hotel business is as high as the ratio of the industry's growth. When an employee resigned or leaved the property, there are a number of difficulties come following. The hotel has to recruit, train, and groom new member and it is unexpected that new staff will be able to perform equally or better than the

previous employee. Further, the fluctuation in daily operation will definitely occur as a consequence from the turnover.

Further, attitude and perception is one of the challenges of international hotel chains investigated here in Thailand. It has been mentioned that attitude cannot be changed from an individual, therefore a hotel focuses on the recruitment process to avoid this inconsistency cause.

Finally, the inexperienced management is also a cause of inconsistency as the professionalism of management affects the whole operation of a particular hotel. However, this problem is rarely found in management contract property as a hotel has been managed by the professional management company while the franchising and wholly-owned subsidiary has faces this problem in some property especially the one that got high involvement from the property owner.

5.1.4 The Maintaining Consistency of Brand Standards Key Elements

This section presents the discussion and conclusion of the key findings from international hotel chains in Thailand on the method of enhancing consistency of the key elements of hotel brand standards. The discussion has been summarized from the finding of international hotel chains in Thailand and the theory from the previous studies. The key elements of hotel brand standards – product, process, people, and governance are used as the topics of discussion and have been shown following;

5.1.4.1 Product Specification

Connell (1992) and Charter (2009) has summarized and emphasized in their study that physical or product specification consistency is playing an important role to the hotel branding. As it is an attribute of hotel brands that succeed consistency for many consumers, particularly the most highly involved. The hotel has to focus on making the most consistent to the operating of product. For example, it has been mentioned that hotel recognized the significant of product consistency. Therefore in every visit, in even on another corner of the world, if the guest stay at the same hotel brand, the signature bed or the special designed amenities has to be prepared for the exactly the same hotel experience.

Further, by the investigation of Charter and Pettigrew (2007), it has been suggested that innovation and interest are one of the core dimensions of quality for keen consumers. Even the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand has not mentioned that, but it emphasized on the brand standards. Therefore, it can be concluded that the international hotel chains in Thailand do not focus on the offering the innovation of product attribute. On the other hand, they focus on the delivering standardized product to the customer and to run the property in line with the brand standards. However, the finding showed that some of international hotel chains in Thailand are also mixed the local ambience with the products of the hotel in order to create the new experience the local touch.

5.1.4.2 Service Process

Beverland (2005b) suggested that stylistic consistency is a core value in the production of the luxury brand. As well as the consistency of service process in product delivery maybe the key in this case rather than the product itself. Therefore, the training program (orientation, departmental training, corporate training, and on-the-job training) is the most emphasized practice in entire international hotel chains in Thailand. In addition, the evaluation program e.g. management check or annual appraisal are also essentially be implemented to ensure the consistency of brand standards in service operation.

It has been cited by Charters (2009) that the involvement in service business significantly influencing consumer perception of a service brand. It also been emphasized in the finding from the international hotel chains in Thailand regarding the SOP for executing as a tool to maintain the consistency of service process. As the brand standards have been written in form of the policy or guideline, therefore it is a need to transform those guidelines and policies to the 'how to' manual, which called SOP. Therefore, it ensured the international hotel chains that every touch point of the service process, hotelier will be able to deliver the involvement that influencing the impressive of the customers.

Finally, generally conclusion for the service process, Hoyer and Brown (1990), Holt (2002), Schroeder and Salzer-Morling (2006), et al., have mentioned the significant criteria for the service process in hotel business as it has to

role the continual sameness in the way that consumer able to anticipate the brand from their own symbolic or previous experiences. Similar to the practice in international hotel chains, to achieving that statement the hotel emphasized on the effective training program as well as the assessment of evaluation.

5.1.4.3 People Factor

The previous studies from Zeithaml and Bitner (1998) and Parasuraman, et al. (1988) et al., has mentioned the people in service sector as the attribute that building the strong brand name. It also been emphasized the importance of employees during the interactions. Identical to the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand, it has also been emphasized the importance of people factor in service operation. However, as people have been involved in all service touch point and delivering the entire services and products of a particular hotel. Therefore, hotels are focusing on the knowledge, skill, and attitude of the employees for the development.

Further, a number of scholars (retrieved from Kimpakorn and Tacquer, 2010) have mentioned that employees are influenced by attitude, belief, value, and behavioral style – and it reflects the hotel brand. Therefore, it can be easily observed that the international hotel chains in Thailand also emphasized on the attitude, belief, value, and behavioral style of the employees. By executing the effective recruitment and selection process, international hotel chains pay more significant on the attitude of the candidate compare to the knowledge and skills. It has been mentioned that skills and knowledge is the qualification that a person can be learnt and taught. Though, the attitude of a person cannot be change. Therefore, even without the clear strategic plan on recruitment and selection process, but the experienced managers, human resources members, as well as departmental supervisors are the key judge on the selection of the new hotel employee.

Finally, in term of maintaining consistency, international hotel chains in Thailand also executed the method on retaining the hotel employees. It has been clearly identified that retaining an effective employee is the retaining of the most value asset of the hotel operation. Therefore, the motivation through financial stability and career growth is the key practice. Additionally, the creating of the organization

loyalty is one of the common practices among international hotel chains in Thailand. It is the use of personal development and team empowerment for motivating an effective work performance among hotel staff.

5.1.4.4 Governance

The IACA (n.d.) has clearly identified the significant of the operation of international hotel chains or the multi-national service firms. The declaration showed the significant role of governance as it is the process of checking on the compliance, conducting the periodic review for the hotel performance, arranging the workshop or training session, as well as centralizing the appropriate functions in hotel operation. Similar to the investigation from international hotel chains in Thailand, the hotel execute the process of governance in balancing and checking the effectiveness of hotel operation.

The main functions of the governance divided into two dimensions. The first dimension is the brand audit or corporate audit. It is the audit function that evaluates the hotel performance according to the brand standards. Generally, this type of audit will focus on the service process and will shortly notify the hotel property for the preparation. Secondly, the external audit, it is, in common, executing the mystery shopping method. This type of audit will not be notifying the hotel property. The arena of audit mostly included service of the hotel, quality and consistency of product, as well as the overall safety and security of the hotel.

5.2 Overall Conclusion of the Research

In conclusion, as mentioned in the section 1.4, there are three objectives for this exploratory research. Therefore, an overall conclusion of this research will be drawn around each research objective.

5.2.1 First research objective

The first research objective concerns the investigation of the difficulties and limitations of business entry mode towards to level of control of operation and the

management of the difficulties and limitations. The attempt of this research is to gain an understanding of the nature of relationship between the business entry mode and the management of daily operation. From the discussion in section 5.1.1, there is a strong evidence to conclude that there are difficulties and limitations as well as the impact from entry mode to the control of operation.

It can be easily observed that in selecting the entry mode, the previous studies and the findings from international hotel chains in Thailand has the similar concerns and practices. Regarding law and regulation of each destination country, the agreement and vision of the organization are major criteria in selecting entry mode for internationalization.

Regarding the difficulties and limitations, the previous studies and the finding from the international hotel chains in Thailand showed the similarity as discussed in the table 5.2. However, the current finding from the context of international hotel chains in Thailand showed further information regarding the resolution of each difficulties and limitations.

In conclusion, the study has clearly showed the understanding from the investigation regarding difficulties and limitations of entry mode to the control of consistency of brand standards. As a result, this research would recommend the equity-based management contract for selecting as an entry mode in order to deal with the management of the consistency of brand standards. As it allowed professional collaboration and high intensity in governance system while franchising system and wholly-owned has too high intensity on the decision making from the owner. So, the brand standards can be fluctuated if the major limitation is at the owner. However, the advantage of internationalization from other entry modes also existing but from the evidence, it might not well fit with the management of brand consistency.

5.2.2 Second research objective

The second research objective concerns the find out of the scope and understanding towards the term ‘brand standards’ and the key elements of brand standards. This research attempted to compare the understanding of brand standards from the previous studies and the evidence from international hotel chains in Thailand. The finding of the term will help in the comprehension of brand standards consistency

management. Due to the brand standards theory has been develop from the manufacturing industry which is different from the service industry. Therefore, the discussion in the section 5.1.2 showed the comparison of the understanding of brand standards from the current finding and the previous studies.

The research found that in term of meaning, role, and importance of the brand standards, both previous studies and findings from international hotel chains in Thailand has similarly agreed on the significant of brand standards towards the brand and the successful of the hotel operation. The research showed and confirmed the common understanding on definition that brand standards ensure the sameness of the hotel service, create and protect the brand as well as it helps in business competition.

For the further investigation, the finding from international hotel chains in Thailand also found the application and control of implementation of brand standards in order to maintain its consistency. Apart from that, the table 5.3 (continue) also showed the comparison of the understanding of the brand standards' key elements from the current finding and previous studies. The comparison showed a number of similarities. As a result, it confirmed the definition of the key elements of brand standards and also linked to the investigation on the methodologies enhancing those elements.

5.2.3 Third research objective

The third research objective concerns the methodologies used by international hotel chains in maintaining consistency of brand standards among different hotel properties. The discussion in the section 5.1.4 showed the methodologies with the detailing descriptions on practice of method enhancing consistency of brand standards under the four key elements – product specification, service process, people factor, and governance.

Regarding the product specification, the key methodology is the setting of specification and the schedule check program. General Manager and the property owner are the significant performers the influence the consistent of the hotel products. Further, the sponsorship from resources such as funding is also important in maintaining the consistency of physical products. The technique that has been raised from the finding is creating the compassionate understanding to the management or

the owner of the property. Therefore, those decision makers can realize the vital of investment on running the physical attributes of the hotel in-line with the brand standards.

Regarding the service process, the summarized from the research confirmed the significant of the training program in order to manage the consistency of hotel service operation. It has been divided into 3 major programs; the orientation, the re-training program, and the daily briefing or on-the-job training. Those training program increase the capability in delivering service standards as well as the performance on purify the hotel brand using service. Besides, the assessment of the service performance has also been noted. The 3 keys methods on performance evaluation included management check by MOD, guest satisfaction index (GSI), and performance appraisal. Those tools are executed and evaluated by main stakeholders of the success of the hotel business e.g. management team, hotel guests, and employees.

Regarding the people factor, the research found the emphasized on the attitude of people rather than the knowledge and skills. The focus of the method enhancing consistency in people is the process of effective recruitment and selection. There is no confirmation from the finding about the detailing methodologies, however, it has been mentioned by a number of international hotel chains that the interviews from the experienced human resources and department supervisor is the criteria in selecting the new employees. Further, in order to retain the skilled and optimistic employees as well as reduce the fluctuation of service from turnover, the international hotel chains in Thailand executed the retention programs. By using the financial stability, career growth and personal development, hotel believed that it can motivate the more effective work performance and retain the good staff.

Regarding the governance, the international hotel chains executed the audit system as the governance. There are 2 types of audit; brand audit or corporate audit and the external audit. These two audit functions are mainly aimed for evaluating the overall performance of the operation according to the brand standards. It also helped in the maintaining consistency of the hotel. Further, it has been identified that brand audit will mostly focus on the service operation of a hotel which each property will be shortly notified. On the other hand, the external audit will check the overall context of

the hotel including safety and security. This type of audit will not be notified to the property – surprise audit, it normally be called ‘a mystery shopping’.

5.3 Implications of the Research

The findings of this study guide us to the certain conclusions, which have implications in understanding of how international hotel chains in Thailand maintaining their consistency of service according to the promised in the brand standards. The result and conclusion from this research brings some benefit to the managements of international hotel chains, hotel business entrepreneur, and SMEs entrepreneur in service sector, academicians, as well as government or public organizations.

According to the Innovation College (2012), after the initiation of the ASEAN Economic Community or AEC in 2015, the workers or skilled labors from other countries, such as Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, will travel to Thailand for work. On the other hand, the entrepreneur and workers from Thailand can also travel and expanding the business to other countries. Therefore, it will not only create the career opportunity but also create the business growth and opportunity for internationalization. As a result, when the AEC is completely active, there will be more service firms spread from different countries to the new destination. However, service business has its nature of lacking of consistency. So, the finding from this study will contribute the better understanding from the experienced practitioners from international hotel chains in Thailand for the preparation practice of the entrepreneur who willing to expand the service business to other countries.

Regarding to the contribution of this research, the study can be applied to the restaurant, spa, and other type of accommodation business or hospitality business for developing program in maintaining its consistency of brand standards and the selection of the entry mode for internationalization. Moreover, SMEs entrepreneur, academicians, and government or public organization might gain some beneficiaries and advantages from the study in the arena of brand standards consistency management in the daily operation. The result of this research study can be applied to

the design of educational or work training courses in order to develop the effectiveness of the daily operation in order to achieve the consistency in service.

Furthermore, the research could be helpful to the international hotel chains for comparing the distributions of the research study with the current practice or methodologies used to maintain consistency and develop the better program for maintaining consistency.

Even the overall finding from the international hotel chains in Thailand are principally similar to the previous studies, there are some differences in specific details. Therefore, it implies that both knowledge from previous studies and current research can be used as a guideline for developing core program for maintaining consistency of hotel brand standards. However, the research would recommend that the awareness of these differences might be crucial for both hotel owner and the hotel management company (the hotel brand – as the practitioners).

5.4 Contributions of the Research

The research has been developed to respond the issue on the circumstance that when the service firm has extended its property, the quality of products and services seemed to be inconsistent. As an exploratory research, this thesis provides insight into practices of international hotel chains in Thailand on the methodologies used in maintaining their consistency of brand standards in order to keep their sameness or similarity of products and services in different hotel properties. This research also address the entry mode of internationalization as well as studied its difficulties and limitations in order to portray choices and recommendation model for service firm's expansion and linked with the control of operation.

In the context of industrial practice, for hotel owner and foreign hotel management companies (as the practitioners) who intend to utilize the business model to internationalization the service firm, this research would provide significant guideline on the key provisions in the management consistency of brand standards, and the choice recommendation of entry mode selection.

In term of key provisions in the design and implementation of the brand standards and the management of its consistency, this research updated and extended earlier research upon the key provisions and the details which have been identified by the international hotel chains in Thailand. For the current operated or internationalized hotels or service firms, this research contributed the significant practice for developing and increasing the performance to maintain the consistency of service standards. The research illustrated the role and working relationship of GM, hotel managers, hotel owner, and the employees in maintaining and enhancing the consistency of brand standards, and also identified the key issues in the consistent operation of the international hotel chains.

Finally, this research filled the research gap, as there are no previous studies concerning the method enhancing consistency of brand standards and the cause and effect of inconsistency of the hotel operation. Additionally, this research also extended the existing knowledge on the control methods in operation of the international hotel chains, and the key issues in the consistency of brand standards in daily operation of the international hotel chains in Thailand.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Firstly, this research study is an exploratory research which achieved insight information from the international hotel chains in Thailand. It was aimed to investigate the facts in order to contribute more understanding of the new issues or phenomenon in the development of a preliminary idea for an assessment of methodologies on the maintaining consistency of hotel brand standards. Therefore, future researches might consider including other factors which may affect and influence the consistency of brand standards or the internationalization model to bring a greater depth of the study.

Secondly, due to the limitation of time length, this research applies the qualitative research approach using semi-structured interview. The application of mix-method is an interesting alternative to be conducted in order to crosscheck the results of the research. Therefore, future studies should take these issues into consideration

including length of time, mix-method application as well as other different resources of information such as higher-positioned executives, cluster or regional office of the international hotel chains or customers. Further, the future research would be suggested to conduct in other service business such as restaurant, travel agency, or spa in order to contribute the significant practice on maintaining consistency of service in other context. It would, as well as, help the industry to hold the complete studies on the methodologies in maintaining consistency of brand standards in service firms.

It also, could be helpful to improve the results of the study in a part of finding result differences of the brand standards consistency management and the entry mode selection via criterion including customer loyalty, service marketing, hotelier competency, and hotel classification by level of services.

Regarding the entry mode and internationalization theory, the future research would be recommend to extend the in-depth investigations in this issue such as the effect, limitations and other difficulties of entry mode to the operation of the service firm and the resolution of the practitioners comparing with international hotel chains company. A part from that, in term of analysis, the future investigation may use the different data analysis in order to find other dimension of the issue.

Finally, this study has been conducted under the academic purpose and limited with resources and time. Therefore, the hotel entrepreneurs, hotel management companionship (brand), or an audit company could use the results as a guideline to design further research in different or similar context in order to contribute the further information on the methodologies in maintaining consistency of the brand standards.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

TSD2013.07
HOTEL /CLUSTER



GRADUATED CENTER
MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

MASTER THESIS

Entitled

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE MAINTAINING CONSISTENCY OF BRAND
STANDARDS IN THE EXPANSION OF INTERNATIONAL HOTEL CHAINS IN
THAILAND

Length: 60 - 90 Minutes
Record: Tape Recorded
Venue: TBA - At interviewee's convenient place
Time: TBA - At interviewee's convenient time
Interviewee: TBA
Position: TBA

RECOGNITION
MARK / LOGO

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION (5 - 10 Minutes)

- Introductions: Name, Background, etc.
- Welcome: Nature of Discussion, Rights and Ethical issues
- Explanations: Research Area, Scope and Objectives
- Reasons: Reason of coming and selection criteria

PART 2 - HOTEL BRAND STANDARDS (10 - 15 Minutes)

- What are hotel brand standards and its role of important?
- How organization applies brand standards in its daily operation?
- How to measure the quality of service according to brand standards?
- Does the hotel brand need to be consistent? And why?

PART 3 - ENTRY MODE AND CONTROL OF OPERATION (10 - 15 Minutes)

- How the adopted entry mode affect to the control of operation?
- How the hotel copes with effects in operation from adopted entry mode?

PART 4 - CONSISTENCY MANAGEMENT (30 - 40 Minutes)

- Does the hotel unit working with regional office in order to make sure that service quality in hotel is consistent? And how?
- What are the tools used to maintain the consistency of brand standard?
- What is the factor that inconsistency of Brand Standards could occur?
- How the hotel manages product specification consistency?
- How the hotel manages process (service process) consistency?
- How the hotel manages people factor for service consistency?
- How the hotel manages safety and security consistency?
- Which criteria used in measure the consistency of brand standards?
- Does the hotel have procedure on brand standards consistency audit or any further governance system? And how?

PART 5 - SUMMARY (5 - 10 Minutes)


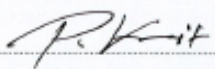
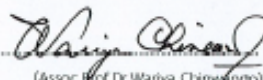
- Does consistency of brand standards play important role to the brands (reputation), loyalty and business successful of international hotel chains? And how?
- Summarize the overall procedures and tools used in maintaining consistency of international hotel chains?
- Check with participants whether he/she wants to remain anonymous
- Check to see if anything was left unsaid that is important
- Thank for participation
- If participant would like to see final thesis paper or summary of the research, be sure to take note of participant contact details

APPENDIX B
LIST OF INTERVIEWEES AND APPOINTMENT DETAILS

No.	Code of Hotel Chain & Brand	Respondent	Interview Date and Time (hrs.)
1.	INT Chain 01 Brand 01	Area Director of Training	01 April 2013 11.00
2.	INT Chain 02 Brand 01	Regional Director of Training	03 April 2013 07.30
3.	INT Chain 03 Brand 01	EAM	04 April 2013 14.45
4.	INT Chain 04 Brand 01	General Manager	05 April 2013 15.00
5.	INT Chain 05 Brand 01	EAM i/c Food & Beverage	08 April 2013 11.00
6.	INT Chain 06 Brand 01	Room Division Manager	09 April 2013 13.00
7.	INT Chain 07 Brand 01	Group Operations Manager - Quality and Brand Standards	11 April 2013 14.30
8.	INT Chain 08 Brand 01	General Manager	12 April 2013 14.30
9.	INT Chain 04 Brand 02	General Manager	13 April 2013 15.00
10.	INT Chain 09 Brand 01	Talent Development and Culture Director	18 April 2013 13.00

APPENDIX C LIST OF DOCUMENTS

1. Documentary Proof of The Committee For Research Ethics

	
COA.No.	2013/076.2003
Documentary Proof of The Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences)	
Title of Project:	An Exploratory Study on the Maintaining Consistency of Brand Standards in the Expansion of International Hotel Chains in Thailand
Principal Investigator:	Mr. Krid Kusumawalee
Name of Institution:	International College, Mahidol University
Approval includes:	1) MU-SSIRB Submission form version received date 15 March 2013 2) Participant Information sheet version 15 March 2013 3) Informed Consent form version date 31 January 2013 4) In-depth Interview Guideline received date 31 January 2013
The Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences) is in full compliance with International Guidelines of Human Research Protection such as Declaration of Helsinki, The Belmont Report, CIOMS Guidelines and the International Conference on Harmonization in Good Clinical Practice (ICH-GCP)	
Date of Approval:	20 March 2013
Date of Expiration:	19 March 2014
Signature of Chairman:	 (Assoc. Prof. Pichet Kalamkasatt)
Signature of Head of the Institute:	 (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Wariya Chinwongso) Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Office of The Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mahidol University Phuttamonthon 4 Rd., Salaya, Phuttamonthon District, Nakhon Pathom 73170. Tel.(662) 441 9080 Fax:(662) 441 9081	

2. Participant Information Sheet (Thai Version)


เอกสารชี้แจงผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัย (สำหรับการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก)
(Participant Information Sheet)

คำชี้แจง	
<p>ใบเอกสารนี้อาจมีความที่ทันสมัยหรือไม่เข้าใจโปรดสอบถามหัวหน้าโครงการวิจัย หรือผู้แทนให้ข้อมูลอธิบายจนกว่าจะเข้าใจ ท่านจะได้รับเอกสารนี้ 1 ฉบับ นำกลับไปอ่านที่บ้านเพื่อปรึกษากับญาติพี่น้อง เพื่อนสนิทของท่าน หรือผู้ที่มีหน้าที่การปรึกษา เพื่อช่วยในการตัดสินใจเข้าร่วมการวิจัย</p>	
ชื่อโครงการ	การศึกษารายสัปดาห์เรื่องวิถีการในการรักษาความสามัคคีในมาตรฐานของ แนวนโยบายของชาวต่างชาติ โรงแรมท่าราชดีในประเทศไทย
ชื่อผู้วิจัย	นายฤกษ์ ฤกษ์ภาวดี
สถานที่ทำงาน	ศูนย์วิจัยจิตศึกษา วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล
หมายเลขโทรศัพท์	089-654 8584
สถานที่วิจัย	ศรีวิโรจน์โรงแรมนานาชาติในประเทศไทย
ผู้ให้ทุน	ไม่มี

ข้อมูลโครงการวิจัยโดยย่อ	
<p>โครงการวิจัยนี้ทำขึ้นเพื่อศึกษาและสรุปสาระสำคัญของวิถีการ ในการดำรงคุณภาพของงานบริการให้สัมพันธ์ภายใต้มาตรฐานของตราสินค้า หรือ Brand Standard เกี่ยวกับของศรีวิโรจน์โรงแรมนานาชาติ</p> <p>ประโยชน์ที่คาดว่าจะได้รับจากการวิจัยนี้คือ ทำให้เข้าใจถึงกระบวนการในการดำรงไว้ซึ่งความสามัคคีของงานบริการในศรีวิโรจน์โรงแรมนานาชาติในปัจจุบัน ซึ่งมีการขยายตัวอย่างต่อเนื่อง แต่ยังมีผู้สนใจศึกษาระบบการบริการของตัว และการรับมือกับความไม่สามัคคีของงานบริการที่เกิดขึ้นในเชิงวิชาการ ไม่มากนัก อีกทั้งยังช่วยให้สามารถเข้าใจถึงมุมมองการบริหารงานบริการในเชิงธุรกิจ ซึ่งอาจจะช่วยเติมเต็มให้กับมุมมองการศึกษาด้านบริหารงานบริการตามเชิงวิชาการ ตลอดจนสามารถเข้าใจถึงกระบวนการในการดำรงไว้ซึ่งความสามัคคีของงานบริการในศรีวิโรจน์โรงแรมนานาชาติ ซึ่งเป็นประโยชน์ต่อผู้ที่ต้องการศึกษาต่อ หรือนักวิชาการที่ต้องการค้นคว้าในมุมมองอื่นต่อไป</p>	

ท่านได้รับเชิญให้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยนี้เพราะ	ท่านเป็นผู้มีประสบการณ์ในการทำงาน ด้านการบริหารจัดการการรักษาความสามัคคีในงานบริการในศรีวิโรจน์โรงแรมนานาชาติ ทั้งการทำงานในระดับสำนักงานภาคพื้น และหรือสถานประกอบการ พร้อมทั้งเป็นตัวแทนของเมืองไทย ทย กษ ทย หรือ โรงแรมนานาชาติ
จำนวนผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยทั้งสิ้น	10 คน
ระยะเวลาที่จะทำวิจัยทั้งสิ้น	7 เดือน (เดือนตุลาคม 2555 ถึงเดือนมิถุนายน 2556)

หากท่านตัดสินใจเข้าร่วมการวิจัยแล้ว จะมีขั้นตอนการวิจัยดังต่อไปนี้	
<p>ผู้วิจัยจะขอสัมภาษณ์ท่าน ในประเด็นเกี่ยวกับ กระบวนการในการดำรงไว้ซึ่งความสามัคคีของงานบริการในศรีวิโรจน์โรงแรมนานาชาติ โดยใช้เวลาในการสัมภาษณ์ประมาณ 60 นาที ซึ่งมีคำถามทั้งหมด 16 ข้อ แบ่งคำถามออกเป็น 5 ส่วน ดังนี้</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ส่วนที่ 1 บทนำ และชี้แจงก่อนการสัมภาษณ์</p>	



วิทยาลัยศึกษาศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล
 วิทยาลัยนานาชาติ มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล
 วิทยาลัยการ มห. 55500 2015/076/2003
 วันที่ 7 มิถุนายน 2556

Participant Information sheet version 15 March 2013

<p>ส่วนที่ 2 Hotel Brand Standards ส่วนที่ 3 Entry mode and Control of Operation ส่วนที่ 4 Consistency management ส่วนที่ 5 บทสรุป</p>

<p>ข้อมูลที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการปกป้องสิทธิผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัย</p>
<p>ข้อมูลที่ได้จากการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก ผู้วิจัยจะขออนุญาตบันทึกเสียงและถ่ายภาพ และจะดำเนินการทำรายงานข้อมูลตลอดจนข้อมูลอื่นๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้องทั้งหมดทั้งทันทีภายหลังเสร็จสิ้นการวิจัย</p>
<p>ความเสี่ยงที่อาจเกิดขึ้นเมื่อเข้าร่วมการวิจัย ท่านอาจรู้สึกอึดอัด หรืออาจรู้สึกไม่สบายใจอยู่บ้างกับบางคำถาม ท่านมีสิทธิ์ที่จะไม่ตอบคำถามเหล่านั้นได้ รวมถึงท่านมีสิทธิ์ถอนตัวออกจากโครงการนี้เมื่อใดก็ได้ โดยไม่ต้องแจ้งให้ทราบล่วงหน้า และการไม่เข้าร่วมวิจัยหรือขอถอนตัวออกจากโครงการวิจัยนี้ จะไม่มีผลกระทบใดๆ ต่อท่านแต่อย่างใด</p>
<p>ข้อมูลส่วนตัวของท่านจะถูกเก็บรักษาไว้ ไม่มีผลต่อต่อสาธารณะเป็นรายบุคคล และไม่มีมีการแสดงชื่อหรือที่อยู่ของท่านแต่อย่างใด แต่จะรายงานผลการวิจัยเป็นข้อมูลส่วนรวม ผู้ที่มีสิทธิ์เข้าถึงข้อมูลของท่านจะมีเฉพาะผู้ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการวิจัยนี้ คือ นักวิจัย หรืออาจมีคณะบุคคลบางกลุ่มเข้ามาตรวจสอบได้ความถูกต้อง เช่น ผู้ให้ทุนวิจัย สถาบัน หรือองค์กรของรัฐที่มีหน้าที่ตรวจสอบ คณะกรรมการจริยธรรมฯ เป็นต้น</p>
<p>การวิจัยครั้งนี้ท่านจะไม่ได้รับค่าตอบแทนและไม่เสียค่าใช้จ่ายใดๆ ทั้งสิ้น</p>
<p>หากมีข้อมูลเพิ่มเติมทั้งด้านประโยชน์และโทษที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการวิจัยนี้ ผู้วิจัยจะแจ้งให้ทราบโดยรวดเร็วไม่มีผิดนั้ง</p>

<p>หากท่านมีข้อสงสัยที่จะสอบถามเกี่ยวข้องกับกรวิจัย ท่านสามารถติดต่อไปยังผู้วิจัย นาคกฤต กุศลวณิช เบอร์โทรศัพท์ 089-654 8584 ได้ตลอดเวลา</p>
<p>โครงการ วิจัยนี้ ได้รับการพิจารณารับรองจากคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมการวิจัยในคน สาขาสังคมศาสตร์ ซึ่งมีสำนักงานอยู่ที่คณะสังคมศาสตร์และมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล ถนนพุทธมณฑล สาย 4 ตำบลศาลายา อำเภอพุทธมณฑล จังหวัดนครปฐม 73170 หมายเลข โทรศัพท์ 0 2441 9180 โทรสาร 0 2441 9181 หากท่านได้รับการปฏิบัติไม่ตรงตามที่ระบุไว้ ท่านสามารถติดต่อกับประธานคณะกรรมการจริยธรรมฯ หรือผู้แทน ได้ตามสถานที่และหมายเลขโทรศัพท์ข้างต้น</p>

<p>ข้าพเจ้าได้อ่านรายละเอียดในเอกสารชี้แจงผู้เข้าร่วมการวิจัยนี้ ครบถ้วนแล้ว</p>
<p>ลงชื่อ _____ ผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัย (_____) วันที่ _____</p>



4. Research Participant Invitation Letter

4.1 Paper Based Invitation Letter



Graduated Center,
Mahidol University International College
12th Fl. Sathorn City Tower, 175
South Sathorn Rd. Thung Mahamek,
Sathorn, Bangkok, 10120 -Thailand

Date 22/03/2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

As being a student in the Master of Management in Tourism and Hospitality Management at Mahidol University International College, I am currently conducting a research entitled “An Exploratory Study on the Maintaining Consistency of Brand Standards in the Expansion of International Hotel Chains in Thailand” under the supervision of Dr. Veerades Panvisavas, Director of the Master of Management Program. I am writing this letter with the purpose of inviting you to participate in this research study.

Manifestly, you are considered as a key professional in the area of an international hotel chain with direct implications on the business expansion strategies, business development, and/or brand standard consistency management in Thailand. Therefore, your kind acceptance to participate in this research would greatly contribute to the prospective to the methodologies of consistency management in brand standards

of international hotel chains when expand the hotel properties in and out from the home country. I wholeheartedly expect that this research might help better understanding of the above mentioned issue among the industry practitioners and scholars.

In terms of privacy and confidentiality purposes, all participants would be sent a copy of the transcribed interview for verification. All audio records and notes derived from the answers of the interviews would be eliminated and no record of your name or address will be kept after the research is done. If you or your organization prefers to remain anonymous, any information that would make it possible to identify you will never be included in any sort of report.

For more information regarding the research including a brief data of the research project, the interview procedure and your rights as a participant, please kindly see the attached Participant Information Sheet for further reference.

The research interviews would be conducted from 25 March to 30 April 2013. If you are willing to take part, please reply to this email with any preferred dates or times to contact you. If you have any queries about the research, please call Mr. Krid Kusumawalee (Kim Him) on +66 8 9654 8584 (mobile) at your most convenience.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Warmest regards,

Mr. Krid Kusumawalee (Kim Him)

Research Student - Master Degree

Master of Management in Tourism and Hospitality Management

Graduated Center, Mahidol University International College

Mobile: 0 8 9654 8584, Email: kusumawalee.k@gmail.com

Attachments;

- Participant Information Sheet

- Form for Informed and Voluntary Consent to Participate in Research

- Interview Questions Guideline

4.2 Electronic Based Invitation Letter (E-Mail)

To: recipients@internationalhotel.chains
From: kusumawalee.k@gmail.com
Title: Invitation to participate in the research study

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Krid Kusumawalee. I am a student in the Master of Management in Tourism and Hospitality Management at Mahidol University International College. I am currently conducting a research entitled “AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE MAINTAINING CONSISTENCY OF BRAND STANDARDS IN THE EXPANSION OF INTERNATIONAL HOTEL CHAINS IN THAILAND” under the supervision of Dr. Veerades Panvisavas, Director of the Master of Management Program. I am writing this e-mail with the purpose of inviting you to participate in this research study.

Manifestly, you are considered as a key professional in the area of an international hotel chain with direct implications on the business expansion strategies, business development, and/or brand standard consistency management in Thailand. Therefore, your kind acceptance to participate in this research would greatly contribute to the prospective to the methodologies of consistency management in brand standards of international hotel chains when expand the hotel properties in and out from the home country. I wholeheartedly expect that this research might help better understanding of the above mentioned issue among the industry practitioners and scholars.

The research interviews would be conducted during 25 March to 30 April 2013. If you are willing to take part, please reply to this email with any preferred dates or times to contact you. If you have any queries about the research, please call Mr. Krid Kusumawalee (Kim Him) on +66 8 9654 8584 (mobile) at your most convenience.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Warmest regards,

Mr. Krid Kusumawalee (Kim Him)

Research Student - Master Degree

Master of Management in Tourism and Hospitality Management

Graduated Center, Mahidol University International College

Mobile: 0 8 9654 8584, Email: kusumawalee.k@gmail.com

BIOGRAPHY

NAME	Mr. Krid Kusumawalee
DATE OF BIRTH	28 March 1988
PLACE OF BIRTH	Phatthalung
INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED	Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, 2009 Faculty of Management Science (Bachelor of Art in Aviation Business Management - 1st Honor Graduated) Mahidol University, 2013 International College Travel Industry Management (Master of Management in Tourism and Hospitality Management)
SCHOLARSHIP RECEIVED	None
HOME ADDRESS	19 Ditin Rd., Muang District, Phatthalung, Thailand, 93000 E-mail: kusumawalee.k@gmail.com