

ผลกระทบจากการปฏิบัติตามแนวการใช้ชีวิตวิถีใหม่: กรณีศึกษาจากรธุรกิจ โรงแรมในภูเก็ต ประเทศไทย

Impacts of the Implementation of “New Normal” Practices: A Case Study of The Hotel Business in Phuket, Thailand

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Abstract

COVID-19 has significant impacts on economic activities and human lives globally. To avoid the risk of infections, safety, hygiene, and cleanliness become major concerns during the pandemic. All businesses were required to adopt a new strategic response to manage this new shift. In this regard, a new concept of living called “New Normal” was introduced and widely adopted as a new norm in both daily life and business operations. High-touch industries such as hospitality, aviation, and transportation were forced to encounter this situation along with having the decline of consumption rates. To maintain the business position and gain the trust and confidence of potential customers, various measures have been implemented to assure the survival of the industry. New Normal practices have caused many challenges and changes in business operations. Currently, most articles or studies present only a dimension that illustrates the impacts of

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COVID-19 on an industry, but there is not many that uncover the impacts of the implementation of new normal practices encountered by the hotel industry. This article aims to study the current implementations of new normal practices in the hotel industry in Phuket and investigate their impact. Moreover, the article also provides suggestions to eliminate the burdens that hotels experience.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Implementation, New Normal, Hotels, Phuket*

บทคัดย่อ

การแพร่ระบาดของเชื้อไวรัสโควิด-19 ได้ส่งผลกระทบต่อทั่วโลกทั้งด้านเศรษฐกิจและการดำเนินชีวิตทั่วไปของมนุษย์ ความสะอาดและสุขลักษณะที่ดีกลายเป็นปัจจัยหลักที่ทุกภาคส่วนให้ความสำคัญ จึงมีการวางแผนด้านต่าง ๆ เพื่อรองรับการเปลี่ยนแปลงที่เกิดขึ้น รูปแบบการใช้ชีวิตวิถีใหม่ ถูกนำมาใช้ในชีวิตประจำวันและการดำเนินธุรกิจ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในธุรกิจการบริการ เช่น ธุรกิจโรงแรม ธุรกิจการบิน และธุรกิจการคมนาคม ซึ่งได้รับผลกระทบอย่างมาก เนื่องจากมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างบุคคลที่ค่อนข้างสูง ส่งผลให้ความต้องการใช้บริการในธุรกิจดังกล่าวลดลงกระทบต่อความน่าเชื่อถือของกลุ่มลูกค้าและความอยู่รอดของธุรกิจ การหามาตรการต่าง ๆ มาปรับใช้เพื่อแก้ไขปัญหา สร้างความท้าทายอย่างมากให้แก่ภาคธุรกิจ โดยข้อมูลต่าง ๆ ที่ถูกนำเสนอแสดงให้เห็นแค่ผลกระทบของการแพร่ระบาดของเชื้อไวรัสโควิด-19 ต่อธุรกิจการบริการ แต่น้อยมากที่จะกล่าวถึงผลกระทบที่ธุรกิจการบริการต้องเผชิญหรือปรับตัวในการใช้ชีวิตวิถีใหม่ ดังนั้นบทความฉบับนี้ได้จัดทำขึ้นโดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) แสดงให้เห็นถึงมาตรการต่าง ๆ ที่ธุรกิจการบริการในจังหวัดภูเก็ตกำลังดำเนินการอยู่ในปัจจุบัน 2) ผลกระทบที่ธุรกิจการบริการต้องเผชิญหรือปรับตัวในการใช้ชีวิตวิถีใหม่ และ 3) ข้อเสนอแนะเพื่อลดผลกระทบต่อการปรับตัวตามรูปแบบการใช้ชีวิตวิถีใหม่

คำสำคัญ: *โควิด-19 การปฏิบัติ การใช้ชีวิตวิถีใหม่ โรงแรม ภูเก็ต*

Introduction

Coronavirus or later called “COVID-19”, was initially found in Wuhan, China. According to a report produced by the World Health Organization in January, 2020, it revealed that at the end of December, 2019, the World Health Organization office in China reported that there was a total of 44 cases of patients with unknown causes. Later on, further information presented that the outbreak is associated with exposures in one seafood market in Wuhan City. Moreover, the virus was quickly spread to all over the world. The pandemic significantly impacts the world economic, socio-cultural, and political system. Thailand is also no exception, there were a total of 143,280 cases reported at the time of this paper (Department of Disease Control, 2020). Numerous

measures were implemented to stop the *spread of the virus in the nation such as; social distancing, travel and mobility bans, community lockdowns, stay at home campaigns, self- or mandatory-quarantine, curbs on crowding* (Sigala, 2020).

Tourism industry used to be one of the biggest markets in the world until getting the impact of the pandemic of COVID-19. According to the study done by Ugur and Akbiyik (2020), the result shows that the tourism sector is very sensitive to getting affected or frustrated by global crises. It could say that the tourism sector was the very first sector affected by this crisis, and it might be the very last sector to be recovered. In Thailand, the first case was reported on January 13, 2020, the patient, who was diagnosed with COVID-19, was a Chinese tourist visiting Thailand (World Health Organization, 2020). Since then, the number of cases was rapidly increased as presented in the graph below;

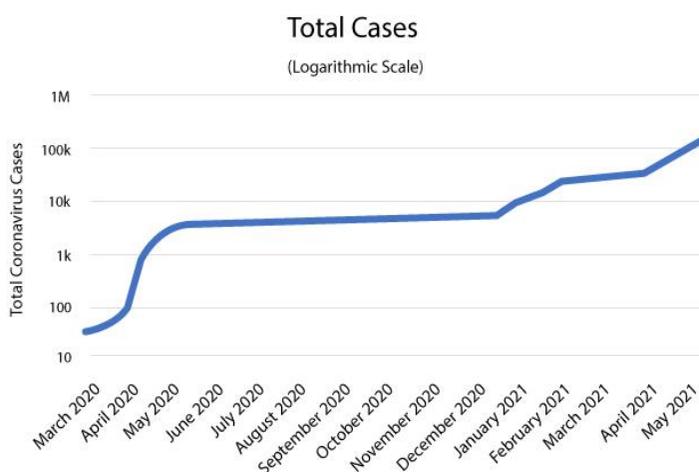


Figure 1 Daily new cases in Thailand

Source: Worldometer (2020)

Currently, most articles or studies present only a dimension which illustrates the impacts of COVID-19 on the industry, but there is not much of them that uncovered the impacts of the implementation of New Normal practices that the hotels requisitely need to carry to bring back the traveler's confidence. Therefore, this article will reveal the current implementations of New Normal practices used and investigate the impact of implementation of New Normal practices in the hotel industry in Phuket that they are encountering. Moreover, it will provide suggestions to eliminate the burdens that hotels must be experienced.

Essential of Hotel industry in Thailand and Phuket

Tourism is an essential sector of the global economy. In 2019, this sector accounted for 10.3 % of global GDP and created about 330 million jobs globally (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019). It has been recognized as one of the economic activities which has high potential to become the world's largest industry (Marzuki, 2012). According to the report produced by World Travel and Tourism Council (2019), it further revealed that this sector could generate 8.9 trillion US dollars globally and the growth of travel and tourism GDP was equivalent to 3.5% which was higher than overall economic growth. With this reason, it makes this sector have high significance on the world's economy.



Figure 2 Travel and tourism GDP in 2019

Source: World Travel and Tourism Council (2019)

In Thailand, tourism was included under the 20-year national strategy (A.D. 2018 - A.D. 2037) which aims to promote the growth and development of the nation (National Economic and Social Development Council, 2019). With this regard, tourism has been considered as a key significant driver of the national economy. In 2017, the tourism sector could generate more than 2.78 trillion baht, moreover, within the same year, the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, which measures the factors and policies which contribute a country to become a viable place to invest within the travel and tourism sector, ranked Thailand as number 34 out of 136 countries on its ranking (World Economic Forum, 2017). This can reflect the capabilities of the nation to increase efficiency and competitiveness of the industry.

After Bangkok, Phuket is the second destination in Thailand with the heavy number of travelers visiting throughout the year. Phuket has been recognized as a beach destination where the tourists can experience sea, sand, and sun, or it can be called 3S tourism. The study done by Marzuki (2012) revealed that tourism has brought tremendous development to Phuket since 1980. Big investments supported by both government and private sectors could turn Phuket into a famous tourist destination. Hotels and infrastructures were developed on the destination which aimed to accommodate and facilitate tourists and the growth of tourism. Consequently, Phuket becomes a paradise on the earth for the travelers, and it also becomes a significant economic promoter. As the picture below is produced by Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Prince of Songkla University (2019), it presents the economic structure and gross regional and provincial product chains in Phuket in 2019. The data revealed that 84% of total revenue generated in the region was devoted by accommodation and food service activities 46%, followed by transportation and storage 19% and other tourism-related activities 19%. With this structure, it can imply that the tourism industry is a major dominant source of the regional income and developments. The industry does not only generate revenue, but it also provides lots of benefits such as employment, development of infrastructure, etc. (UNCTAD, 2020).

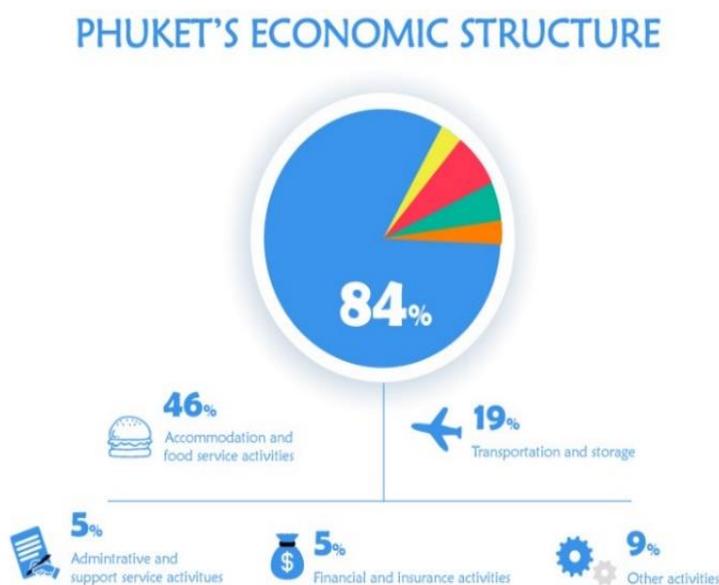


Figure 3 Phuket's economic structure

Source: Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Prince of Songkla University (2019)

Impacts of COVID-19 on Hotel Industry in Thailand

Much more than other industries, the pandemic negatively impacted the hotel industry. The results have been raised by travel bans and events' cancellations, it caused the hotel occupancy substantially dropped and deteriorated across the country. Moreover, because of international travel restrictions, domestic travelers seem to be only one hope and a nutrient for the industry, with this regard, Thai's government has launched several domestic travelling campaigns which aim to encourage people to travel within the nation. However, the number of domestic travelers was not sufficient enough for the entire market. Therefore, this circumstance caused significant dropping in the value of the tourism's contribution to the nation's GDP in 2020.

Interest over time

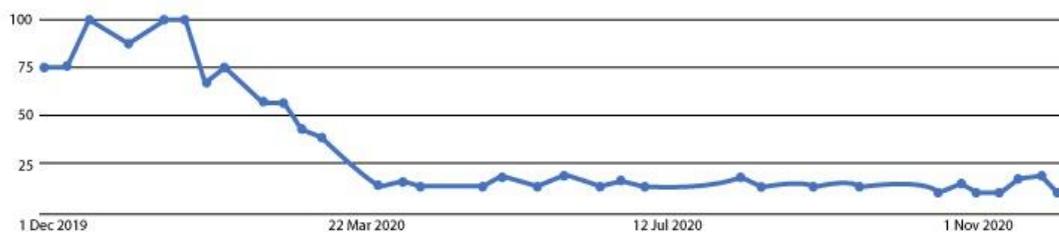


Figure 4 Total value of the tourism's contribution to GDP in Thailand

Source: Prachachat (2020)

Apart from tourist's demand, the hotels are encountering other challenges to survive in this circumstance. After review all relevant articles and researches, key impacts on the industry were identified as "5Ds" as shown as the following:

Decrease in demand and occupancy level

Another result of COVID-19 apart from unsafe in life, it affected various aspects of economic activities, especially the high-touch industry, it has been significantly impacted since the first case of COVID-19 reported in Thailand on 13 January 2020. In response, the country decided to close the borders to visitors and tourists, and place strict limitations on both domestic and international mobility. It resulted in a decreasing number of travelers and a decline of hotel's occupancy rates. When the nation officially announced its first cases, the hotel occupancy level dropped to 65%. Other than occupancy, hotels also had to reduce their regular rates by 10 to 20% (Pinchuck, 2020). However, this dropping rate was continued until the tourist arrival became zero. Consequently, revenue per available room or known as RevPAR showed the downward curve since January, 2020 and remains constant without any cue of what is ahead (JIL, 2020).

To support the statement above, the graph below can represent well on the decline of worldwide interest in hotels and accommodations in Phuket from December 2019 until November 2020. This graph shows the number of times that the hotels and accommodations located in Phuket were searched from websites.

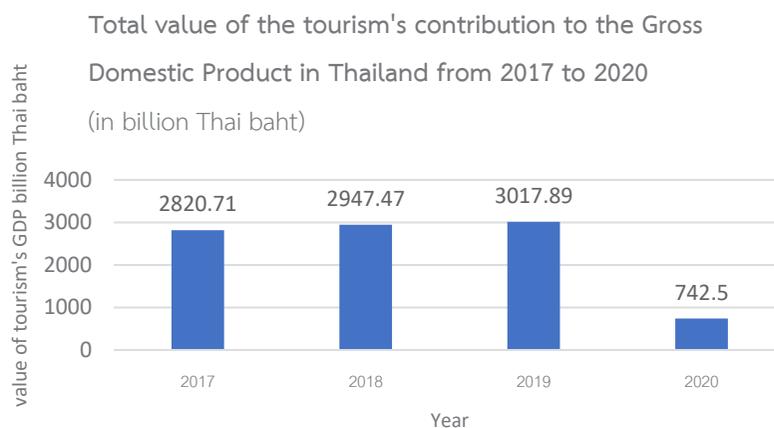


Figure 5 The number of times Phuket's Hotel and accommodation searched

Source: Google Trends (2020)

Delivery services aligned to the “New Normal”

The pandemic has not only changed the lifestyle of human beings, but it also has posed the new service design to be aligned with the concept of “New Normal”, this may include emphasizing on hygiene and sanitation, redefining restaurant concept, and partnering with health institutions (The Thaiger, 2020).

Many articles have presented that some international chain hotels are currently cooperating with hospitals, and cleaning institutions to bring back customer confidence. To promote the safety perception in the customer's mind, the hotels have replaced the regular chemical agents used with the hospital-grade products to clean all the hotel areas. Besides, temperature checkpoints and sanitizing stations seem to be a common place in the reception area and all hotel outlets to do thermal scanning. Moreover, the visibility of housekeeping staff is included as a part of New Normal practices in the hotel industry. Cleaning schedules, especially in public areas, are likely to be more frequent to promote sanitation and positive customer's perception.

Apart from new cleaning procedures, social distancing has been included in new service design. Hotels are emphasizing on maintaining physical distance, contactless, and touchless in their services. Therefore, marked seating and standing arrangements are obviously presented in all the hotel areas both where the products and services are consumed and all common areas such as lobby area, elevators, etc.

Even, accommodation has been considered as a core product of the hotel business, but food and beverage are also inseparable. Therefore, the pandemic of COVID-19 has influenced the change of food and beverage service procedures. The procedures are required to be aligned with regulations launched by local authorities and government. The change is mainly emphasized on hygiene and sanitation, and capacity which allows the outlets to maintain the physical distancing. Wearing a mask and hand-cleaning seem to be a must-do practice.

Decline in staff performance and productivity

Since the establishments have to pause their regular working pattern, and start introducing a new working system into their daily operations. It becomes a great challenge to all parties including the management team and staff to conduct and adjust themselves to be familiar with the New Normal practices (Van Zoonen & Van der Meer, 2015; Van Dick, Ciampa, & Liang, 2018). In addition, a number of new rules and procedures with safety purposes have been introduced, especially with the employees in the hotel industry. These safety policies are not only designed for bringing back the guest's confidence, but also staff's safety. Therefore, it would say that the issue also affects the staff performance and productivity because the additional requirements have been included in working processes. An insightful result from the study done by Muhmud, Asma, Sazali, and Mohammad (2020) presented that the new guidelines will reduce the staff performance, and it will also be low even in the post COVID-19.

Moreover, many articles also revealed that the staff performance also depends on their mental conditions. During COVID-19, the staff would be concerned mostly with safety, risk of infections, and job security. It caused stress and depression to the staff which led them to unhealthy mental conditions. Van Dick et al. (2018) stated in their study that mental health and well-being are important for their work performance and productivity. If they feel stressed, they will lose their performance at their workplace. Consequently, fear of the virus is negatively affecting the staff performance. Therefore, safety is one of many factors which can reduce stress. Employees should know the safety measures to minimize the threat of the virus, and also remain positive with all changes.

Department to increased overhead: Increased cleaning activities

With the comprehensive review from the guidelines and measures to prevent the infection of COVID-19 launched by various parties, one of the most-found measures is enhancing the cleanliness and sanitation in the property, especially on high touch surfaces such as public restrooms, lobbies, dining areas, workout facilities, etc. High touch surfaces can include tables, handrails, faucets, doorknobs, light switches, remote

control, and shared equipment (University of Washington, 2020). Moreover, reducing the risk of infection from COVID-19 by cleaning is seen as the most important part of reopening hotels to their guests once again. Most of the hotel upgraded the cleaning agents into the hospital-grade products, which cost higher investment. Furthermore, cleaning procedures have been developed by increasing more cleaning steps which consume more time from the staff to complete their cleaning tasks.

Decrease in employment retention

There is a gigantic economic impact of COVID-19 all around the world, many people lose their job because of the pandemic. Based on the study done by Oxford Economics (2020), Asia is expected to be the worst affected, especially the regions which mainly rely on the tourism industry. Phuket, Thailand is one of those regions where tourism is a key driver of revenue generated. Phuket is lost approximately 83% from the pre-COVID-19 values (Phetvaroon et al., 2020). Moreover, the lockdown measure and travel ban restriction have solely affected employment in the service industry. It does not only affect the demand, but also the supply side.

As it was stated in the above paragraph that the customer's demand has rippled down the bottom due to the reduction in business activity, it caused a high number of staffs lay-off. For those who are still employed, Phetvaroon et al. (2020) reveals that the total working hours of staff in the tourism and hospitality industry was reduced by 48% when compared with the same period in the previous year of 2019. Most of the staff who worked in the accommodation sectors were compelled to take leave without pay for cutting the cost of operations when the occupancy level was low. Phetvaroon et al. (2020) also presented that the income of the workers in this sector dropped more than 50 % from what they usually earned. Moreover, the hotel's survival is strongly required to cut off all unnecessary expenses or attenuate some staff benefits which may include reducing meals on duty, transportation, and other benefits. With these reasons, many workers decided to quit the job and find other solutions for themselves.

The Definition of “New Normal” and the Implementation in Hotels

The pandemic of COVID-19 has brought many new challenges to the world businesses, especially the tourism industry, it has hit the bottom since February, 2020 (BBC Travel, 2020). In Thailand, the government launched various measures to prevent the spread of the epidemic, the country introduced a government-directed lockdown and placed strict limitations on domestic and international mobility. With the start of recovery, the industry is required to adopt new conditions. Therefore, a concept of “New Normal” is introduced and it has been adapted in all industries. Until now, there

is no definite definition which can best describe the term “New Normal”, but generally, it was understood as a new way of living, working and interacting with other people to prevent an infection or even the spread of contamination. New safety, sanitation, and hygiene procedures are mainly included in the New Normal practices (KPMG, 2020). This concept has been implemented in our life routines and workplace. The hotel industry is also no exception.

Based on the comprehensive review from both related literature and announcements from hotels in Phuket such as Marriott hotels, IHG hotels, and other independent hotels, the key measures in the hotel industry in Phuket are found in three aspects: flexibility, hospitality and safety.

Flexibility

1. Hotels in this region have updated the cancellation policies to be more flexible to support unforeseen situations. Moreover, the hotels also offer free-penalty cancellation which is caused by local and international restrictions.

2. In case of unexpected quarantines, the hotels are willing to offer room upgrades to a room in a higher category, so the guests will be more comfortable and have more space.

3. For prepaid reservations, the hotels allow their guests to modify the reservations up to 24 hours prior arrival.

4. Hotels offer flexibility in terms of time for check-in and check-out, it would help to prevent the guests unnecessarily spending their time outside or in common areas where the contamination may exist.

Hospitality

1. Some hotels offer 24/7 medical service or even are collaborating with hospitals as a way to develop the guests' confidence.

2. Guidelines of the hotel's actions have been created to prevent the infections of COVID-19, and it is also available on the hotel's website.

3. Hotels offer an assistance to their guests since the preparation and provide a guideline of things to do during their stay including a list of service providers who are authorized and trusted by the hotels.

Safety

1. Importantly, the hotels should convey to their guests that the hotel constantly communicates with local authorities and the staff are emphasized to strictly follow the safety measures.

2. The history of recent trips of both guests and employees must be recorded.

3. Hotels offer a hotel's transfer from airport to the hotel to avoid their guests using public transportation which the guests are in close proximity with others.

4. Many hotels have revised the entire cleaning process of guest rooms, linens, and staff uniforms, and communicated to their staff to strictly follow.

5. Hotels use chemical agents that are recognized by the relevant authorities. Quarantine protocols are developed.

6. All staff are trained to be able to identify and recognize any possible signs or symptoms of COVID-19.

7. A temperature measurement system and touchless technologies are used.

Impacts of the Hotels in Phuket on the Implementation of New Normal

Since the implementations of New Normal seem to be something in regular use nowadays, both people and companies need to comply with this concept unconditionally if they wish to continue their businesses. Most of the articles revealed the impacts of COVID-19 on economic and social aspects, but very few of them mentioned the impacts of the hotel industry when they are required to implement the New Normal practices. From the literature review which presented the implementation of New Normal practices in Phuket, it illustrated that the hotels in Phuket need to bear with the impacts of these implementations as the following aspects;

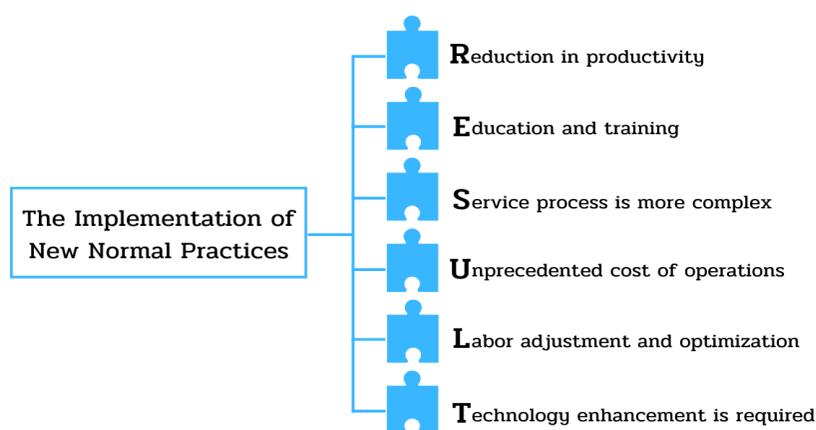


Figure 6 The impacts of the implementation of New Normal practices

Source: Developed by author

Reduction in productivity

According to the study done by Phetvaroon et al. (2020), it revealed that it is unavoidable for the employees not to be concerned about unsafety, risk of the COVID-19 inflection, and all the effects caused by the virus such as financial loss,

insecurity in their job. With these concerns, the employees will get stressed, and lose performance (Sasaki, Kuroda, Tsuno, & Kawakami, 2020). Moreover, it has found that the implementations of New Normal practices and new rules and regulations to avoid any risk of the virus, has reduced the productivity of the employees as well (Sasaki et al., 2020; Wolor, Dalimunthe, Febrilia, & Martono, 2020). Many hotels and companies in Phuket are emphasizing on safety and sanitation by developing new enhanced safety and sanitation protocols. One of the most well-known hotel brands like Marriott which has 9 properties in Phuket, they have developed next-level cleanliness standards by adding more cleaning steps and using some cleaning technologies (Miller, 2020). With these new protocols, it can be a cause of productivity reduction because the staff will spend longer time to complete their tasks.

Education and training

Ensuring the staff performance and compliance the safety measures would be successful through training programs. Training would be an essential method to enhance the common understanding of the staff about the New Normal practices which will contribute to a safe environment and bring back the guest confidence. The hotel business in Phuket during COVID-19 provides the training which emphasizes on the process to promote hygiene and sanitation, and the instruction to comply with all the measures. This may mean that the hotels are taking the prevention of COVID-19 seriously. Moreover, it can increase the guest and staff confidence to the hotel where the measures are strictly tightened in their operations.

In collaboration with healthcare experts or authorities, the hotels will be able to launch health and safety training programs to equip all staff with the essential and necessary knowledge and skills with the concept of the “New Normal” to develop and promote a safe environment which can protect staff themselves and guests

Although the training provides such benefits and a positive hotel’s image as mentioned above, in order to organize any training, the hotels need to invest their resources such as money and time. Lots of hotels, especially international chain hotels, have developed safety training programs via online platforms which can assure the same standard of safety conducted in the hotels, while other hotels need to spend a half-day or even a daylong on safety training. This investment can be considered as the cost of opportunity which can gain for long-term and promote positive perception on the hotel operations.

Service process is more complex

Hospitality and Tourism industry is highly affected by the outbreak of COVID-19, new service concepts have been designed to respond to the change of customer’s behavior and safe measures. Additional processes were added into the regular

procedures occurred before COVID-19. Therefore, the hotel staff are experiencing a significant service design challenge. One of the most common practices in hotels in Phuket is thermal screening and hand sanitizing before entering the hotel outlets or the service points. Throughout the nation, the guests are also required to scan a QR code called “Thai Chana” to check in and out of the places where they visit. It will allow the government to trace and monitor infection locations and contact points (Hicks, 2020). In addition, in Phuket, front of the house staff must wear protective items such as gloves, surgical masks, and also maintain the social distance while they are servicing. Touchless-technologies are utilized to eliminate physical contact such as self-check-in, e-payment, etc. However, clear instructions are still provided by hotel staff. In terms of the cleaning process, many hotels have revised the entire cleaning process of guest rooms, linens, and staff uniforms, and communicated to their staff to strictly follow.

For the food and beverage sector in hotels in Phuket, the service has been changed in many aspects. Beyond the information stated above, it found that utensils set on the tables are covered by plastic bags to avoid any contamination. Moreover, it also found that the capacity of the seats is limited to ensure social distancing. Advanced technologies are taking a significant part of the service under the New Normal concept. Some chains have implemented digital ordering through iPads or tablets and contactless-payments, this can reduce risk that may result from the contact between service staff and their customers. Furthermore, many hotels have considerably changed the breakfast service style from buffet service to plates of food or even amplified to to-go-bags which may consist of fruits, sandwiches, and some drinks that the guests can grab and go.

Unprecedented cost of operations

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions to the business operation, all the firms around the world are suggested that cost-cutting is required to safe-guard the firms’ competitive position and survive during the crises (Deloitte, 2020). The hotels in Phuket are also conducting cost-optimization exercises such as: reducing manpower, cutting-off some staff benefits, etc. In fact, the business operation during this pandemic causes unprecedented costs especially in the implementation of New Normal, which is required to prevent further infection (Margiono, 2020). The unprecedented costs may include medical masks, alcohol gel, hospital-grade cleaning products, thermometer, disinfectant products, additional signage, and so on. This cost may be a consequence from the higher demand of the guests on the higher standard of hygiene, cleanliness, and sanitation. The hotels and restaurants need to bear these costs while the occupancy and room price are declined, or even the business can

operate at half of their capacity because of the social distancing.

Labor adjustment and optimization

Uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic situation has put the hotels into the difficulty to anticipate the occupancy levels (Heymann, 2020). The hotel industry in Phuket was sunk into the darkness due to the lockdown measures and travel ban restrictions. The zero number of tourists was obviously shown as a consequence resulted from these restrictions. Many hotel employees were forced intentionally and unintentionally to quit their job since the business could not carry the same labor costs while the occupancy levels were severely reduced. The hotels adopted staffing optimization strategy to manage the human resources during this critical situation. Therefore, to secure the jobs, all the workers need to enhance their knowledge and skills to be able to perform a diverse range of tasks. Multi-skills staff would receive greater retention than staff who can perform mono-task.

Because of staffing optimization, the hotels in Phuket have adjusted and made the best use of their existing staff to remain profitable during low business volumes. Apart from reducing their working hours which is mainly for cost saving, those individual staff are assigned to perform multi positional responsibilities which are on top of their primary ones. For example, receptionists might be assigned to switch the role to become a food and beverage service staff during the peak dining hours. This is consistent with the suggestion by Heymann (2020) that staff during COVID-19 must be able to perform tasks rather than positions. The staff need to adjust themselves to be versatile and cross utilized, it allows hotels to have adaptability to manage the staff and labor costs without reducing service quality.

Technological enhancement is required

The hospitality and tourism industry is suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry is required unconditionally to adapt the new travel norms and other safety regulations, or even other more effective ways to maintain the industry survival (Ranganathan, 2020). One of the most challenging in the hotel business operations is to main physical distancing. As the industry has been considered as a high-touch industry, but the firms are compelled to follow the guideline of social distancing to avoid close interaction between hotel staff and guests. With this regard, it is accelerating the hotels to adopt the technology, especially touchless technology. The technology is addressing the new guest experience and also safety measures (Ranganathan, 2020). Based on the comprehensive review on the articles and websites of hotels in Phuket, the use of technologies is presented in the different aspects such as; mobile technology and high-tech virtual management system for communicating with the guests about cleanliness and safety programs and also providing an enhanced hygienic environment,

infrared temperature readers for screening or measuring body temperature to prevent the virus, cloud-based housekeeping systems for managing guest room cleanliness and ensuring the compliance with the COVID-19 guidelines and requirements, electrostatic spray technology for sanitizing the guest rooms and public areas, mobile or self-service technology for check-in and out to avoid the human contact, and online payment system (Hospitalitynet, 2020; Marriott International, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020). With this investment, the technology may pave the way for the hotel's operations to become smarter and quickly respond to the change of the guest demand. Although technological enhancement may require high initial investment, it would be beneficial for the long-term.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 has been transmitted all over the world, the human lives and business activities globally have severely changed and never been the same. Safety measures and new style of business operations are adopted to guard the threat and eliminate the impacts of the virus. New Normal practices have been implemented as a new norm to maintain the business survival and gain trust and confidence from the potential customers. Furthermore, World Health Organization (2020) advised that social distancing is the best and effective way currently to slow down this effect of this crisis. For the hospitality industry, which is considered as one of the high-touch industries, is experienced with the hardest time to survive. The industry needs to bear unprecedented challenges. The key impacts of the implementations of New Normal in hotels in Phuket were presented in reduction staff performance and productivity, education and training, complexity of service process, unprecedented costs of operations, labor adjustment and optimization, and technology enhancement. The new service concepts have been designed by following the instructions and guidelines provided by both government and medical associations. Moreover, numerous strategic responses should be implemented in this regard such as; labor optimization, economic sharing among the hotels, training enhancement, and etc.

Therefore, it could be suggested that the hotel business survival during COVID-19 would be arose from these key contributing factors; safety, trustworthiness, responsibilities, awareness, teamwork, education, guarantee, information updated, and COVID-19 related measures, or it can be called "STRATEGIC" in short. The hotels with these attributes may have a great chance to remain their business operations and gain trust from their potential customers.



Figure 7 Key Contributions for Future Hotel Success

Source: Developed by author

Furthermore, based on the comprehensive review on the articles which presented some strategic approaches for the hotel business operations during this pandemic, it suggested that innovation and technology enhancements take a significant part of the hotel services. The technology may pave the way for the hotel's operations to become smarter and quickly respond to the change of the guest demand and also eliminate the risk of infections. Although technological enhancement may require high initial investment, it would be beneficial for the long-term.

Besides, the labor adjustment and optimization allow hotels to have adaptability to manage the staff and labor costs without reducing service quality. Beyond the safety training, the employees must get trained for the tasks in various positions regardless of their responsibilities. This will allow hotels to have adaptability to manage the staff and labor costs without reducing service quality. Another suggested paradigm for cost saving is to create a collaboration among the hotels in developing and conducting the training programs, then, those hotels can share the costs that incurred.

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