Commercial Product Naming Practice in Thai Airline Business: An Examination of Language Choice and Names Used
การตั้งชื่อสินค้าในธุรกิจสายการบินของไทย: การเลือกใช้ภาษาและลักษณะของชื่อ

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Abstract

Since the liberalisation of domestic airline industry in Thailand in 2001, the airlines have shifted its revenue sources from predominantly air-fare based to ancillary services in both Full service and Low cost operators. This necessitates the launch of various products and services which are ticket and non-ticket related whereby such products need to have names that are attractive and easy to understand. This study examines the product naming practices among Thai domestic airline operators in terms of language choice and the use of branded product terms against generic product terms. The data of products' names were

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collected from airline's websites and offline media. A total of 116 products were offered by seven airlines that serve domestically as of December 2019. English language was found to be used more frequently than Thai for domestic airline product naming at 54.31% despite the fact that Thai has an official language status in the country. The use of branded names was found to be more popular than generic names at 54.31% or 63 products out of 116. Furthermore, this study attempted to identify the pattern in language choice and branded product usage. Nevertheless, it was found that there are no consistencies regarding the language used and name used in any of the seven airlines examined. Air operators were recommended to consider a more consistent approach to their product naming practices.

บทคัดย่อ

การที่เส้นทางการบินภายในประเทศไทยได้เริ่มมีการแข่งขันได้อย่างเสรีได้ตั้งแต่ปี พ.ศ. 2544 ทำให้สายการบิน ทั้งประเภทที่ให้บริการเต็มรูปแบบและสายการบินต้นทุนต่ำต่างมีการหารายได้จากค่าสินค้าและบริการอื่นที่นอกเหนือจาก ค่าบัตรโดยสาร แต่ละสายการบินจำเป็นต้องนำเสนอผลิตภัณฑ์และตั้งชื่อสินค้าและบริการให้น่าสนใจและเข้าใจได้ง่าย งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการตั้งชื่อสินค้าและบริการของสายการบินในประเทศไทยที่ให้บริการการบินเส้นทางภายในประเทศ ในแง่ ของภาษาที่ใช้และลักษณะของการใช้ชื่อทั่วไปหรือชื่อเฉพาะกับสินค้าและบริการ งานวิจัยนี้เก็บข้อมูลจากสินค้าและบริการ ที่วางจำหน่ายทั้งรูปแบบออนไลน์และออฟไลน์ โดยเก็บข้อมูลสินค้าและบริการ จำนวนทั้งหมด 116 ชนิด จากสายการบิน ที่ให้บริการเส้นทางบินภายในประเทศ จำนวน 7 สาย ในเดือนธันวาคม พ.ศ. 2562 ผลงานวิจัยพบว่า มีการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษ ในการเรียกชื่อสินค้าและบริการร้อยละ 54.31 ซึ่งมากกว่าภาษาไทยซึ่งเป็นภาษาประจำชาติที่มีร้อยละ 45.69 นอกจากนี้ ยังพบว่า การตั้งชื่อเฉพาะได้รับความนิยมมากกว่าการตั้งชื่อทั่วไป โดยมีสินค้าและบริการ จำนวน 63 จาก 116 ชนิดที่ตั้งชื่อ เฉพาะ คิดเป็นร้อยละ 54.31 นอกจากนี้ งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ยังได้พยายามระบุรูปแบบในการเลือกใช้ภาษาและการตั้งชื่อ แต่พบว่า การตั้งชื่อสินค้าและบริการของสายการบินทั้ง 7 สาย ไม่มีรูปแบบที่แน่นอน ผู้วิจัยจึงมีข้อเสนอแนะให้สายการบินหารูปแบบ ในการตั้งชื่อเพื่อป้องกันความสับสนและเป็นการเพิ่มโอกาสในการขายสินค้าและบริการ

คำสำคัญ: การตั้งชื่อสินค้า สายการบิน ตราสินค้า

Introduction

The liberalization of Thai airline industry in 2001 (Pasupa & Cheramakara, 2019) enabled airline operators to compete freely in the domestic market. This ended Thai Airways Monopoly over all domestic routes in which the network was reduced to only three domestic destinations in 2019 (Thai Airways International, 2019a). Thai airline industry witnesses dramatic changes in the competitive landscape with the introduction of low-cost carriers (LCCs) in the kingdom. The first LCC was Thai AirAsia from Malaysia which launched its operations in 2003. Other airlines soon followed with Thai Airways International Public Co., Ltd. launching its budget operation

Nok Air in 2004 to compete with Thai AirAsia, Thai Lion Air from Indonesia in 2013, and Thai VietJet from Vietnam in 2015 (CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.a; CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.b; CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.c; CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.d). Air passengers in Thailand have also been increasing, Airports of Thailand Public Company Limited (2019) reported that its airports handled 143,018,141 passengers in 2019 which slightly increased from 140.47 million in 2018.

The introduction of LCCs business model in Thailand intensifies the competitive nature of the industry. Traditionally, airlines had been relying on air fare as the main source of revenue. However,

the LCCs model which emphasises cheap air fares forcing airlines to rely on revenues from ancillary services for financial success. This results in airlines offering flight-related products such as seat-selection, checked luggage, in-flight meals sales, front row seats, etc. Non flight-related ancillary revenues include hotels, car rentals, travel insurance, etc. Additionally, both full-service carriers (FSCs) and LCCs also offer traditional products such as lounges, cabin classes, and fare structures. It is clear that products and services offered by airlines are not only increasingly competitive but also highly complicated particularly to the infrequent travellers. Pasupa and Cheramakara (2019) reported that Thai airline passengers are concerned about making mistakes when purchasing airline products as it may result in financial penalties or involuntary purchase of unwanted ancillary products. This raises the issue of the importance of product naming.

There are two main considerations in product naming practice. First, the ease of understanding of the product. Given the complexity of airline products and purchasing processes, the names must be easily understood and communicate effectively to the prospective customers in terms of product propose, description, and attributes (Harvey, 2019). The second consideration is brand communication by naming its products that reflects the brand of the company (Hodgson, 2019). It must be noted that with the exception of Nok Air, all LCCs in Thailand are part of larger international airline groups, namely; Thai AirAsia, Thai Lion Air and Thai VietJet (CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.b; CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.c; CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.d). These airlines must pay attention to consistencies in terms of products and services along with the branding. Furthermore, a choice of language must also be taken into account. Thai is the official language of Thailand and used in daily communication which can be at odds with the English language which dominates the airline industry.

A report produced by Education First (2019) stated a 'low proficiency level' of English among Thai public which placed Thailand at number 74 out of 100 nations. Hence, there is a need to balance between the use of branded names and generic names along with the language choice for product naming for effective communication and revenue opportunities. Despite the importance of product naming in the airline industry, there has yet to be an empirical study specific to the airline context. As far as the authors are aware, existing literatures only cover other sectors.

Hence, this exploratory study was conducted to answer two research questions a) what are the differences in the use Thai and English in airline product naming practices and b) Are there any differences in the use of branded versus generic names among Thai domestic air carriers? The study sets out to identify patterns and differences among air carrier operators from both the FSCs side which are Thai Airways International, Thai Smile Airways, and Bangkok Airways; and the LCCs which are Nok Air, Thai AirAsia, Thai Lion Air, and Thai VietJet. The assessment included the choice of language, generic names and branded names along with consistencies in naming practice of all Thailand's domestic operators

Literature review:
The importance of product naming

Naming a product or service is a crucial stage in marketing especially in a business with multicultural customers. Names are an important element for brand communication because they are the first things from which customers can perceive the product information (Snodin, Higgins, & Yoovathaworn, 2017). The brand name can enhance image perception and the product quality (Keller, Heckler, & Houston, 1998). Consumers are likely to purchase products that they are more familiar with or those that they are certain about the qualities

(Cheung & Chan, 2008). There were tremendous studies investigating the powerful effects of products' names on customers' perceptions. Irmak, Vallen, and Robinson (2011) explored the impact of product names on consumers' food evaluations and consumption and found that dieters perceived the food with unhealthy names to be less healthful and less delicious. Most customers do not spend much time studying the product details and descriptions before their purchase; thus, a memorable and meaningful brand name which can be recalled easily is more persuasive to those customers.

Product naming techniques: Generic names VS branded names

The brand name is one of the most significant factors to make the product popular and successful. Brand names should be inherently memorable and facilitate recall or recognition in consumption and purchase or their meanings should be strong, favorable, and unique (Keller et al., 1998). Companies usually choose the names that fit with the product and are well-liked because they can increase the product's favorable evaluations. Branded names used in this study refer to the product names specifically created by the company to reflect the brand identity and image. Branded names, therefore, are original and unique. Generic names, on the contrary, are general names used to describe products' features. Although generic names are not unique, they are easy to understand.

Considering naming rituals in families, parents in various cultures name their children with first names or even nicknames to show their children identities and signify a family bond and belongings (Kenny, 2014). Nicknames can help express affection and show emotional connection among family members; people use nicknames to express closeness. This family activity then indicates the great power of naming. Similar to family naming, a product with a special name designed only for a particular

brand may create a sense of belongings and strong bonding between a company and its customers. Sometimes product nicknames or branded names are used in brands' marketing campaigns to replace generic names, to increase consumer psychological ownership and more positive product evaluation due to their friendly nature and easiness to remember (Lin & Chen, 2020).

In business, branded names are often used as an affectionate name given by brands to substitute generic names that are too common among other business competitors. Using branded names specifically for a product or service, consequently, helps increase customers' brand recognition. Numerous examples of branded names usage for products can be witnessed across countries nowadays. In Thailand, for example, branded names are used predominantly with various types of products, particularly in hospitality business. Banyan Tree hotel in Thailand names its luxurious room types as Horizon, Oasis Retreat, Serenity Club for river view deluxe, city view deluxe, and executive deluxe respectively, while So Sofitel Hotel prefers calling its rooms as SO Cozy room for a twin room, SO Comfy room for a king room, or SO VIP Duplex Suite for an executive suite. Hence, selecting branded names over generic names helps enhance brand recognition and create memorable experiences for customers.

The use of English language in commercials: Pros and cons

English brand names can also increase the sense of global standard as it is an international language. Using English language in commercials has increased a global look which in turn signals the global quality of the products. Chang (2008) explored Taiwanese advertising and argued that there were two effective ways to increase the global perceptions of a brand when marketing in East Asia which were the use of Western models and English

brand names. Although the products are only sold locally, the use of English brand names encourages the customers to perceive the product as a global brand. As Chang (2008) stated, "An international global image creates an impression of technology advancement, workmanship, and prestige" (p. 201).

Not only in East Asia, Harris, Garner-Earl, Sprick, and Carroll (1994) also conducted experiments in Europe examining college students' reactions to advertisements for products with English, French, German, and Spanish names, and found that most students preferred English names. While many studies suggested the preferable use of English language in products and services, some customers prefer brands in their native language. Gerritsen, Korzilius, Meurs, and Gusbers (2000) conducted a research study on customers' attitudes towards English commercials in the Netherlands, and found that all research participants expressed negative attitudes towards English used in the commercials due to their lack of understanding. The use of English language for commercial purposes in some countries are therefore questionable because it may lead to miscomprehension rather than business success.

The use of English in commercial context in Thailand

Nowadays, English is used in an increasing domain such as education, business, advertising and so on. In Thailand, English used as a foreign language has gained an important role in different areas including professional advancement and business functions (Hiranburana, 2017). Many English terms are being used more prevalently and sometimes replacing the Thai equivalents. Snodin et al. (2017) have investigated the names given to Thai local community products: food, drinks, clothing and accessories, handicrafts and ornaments, and inedible herbs; and also the use of English language in product names in Thailand. The study indicated that Thai product names in English reflected language creativity

and Thai identity although some names were only understandable among Thais. The limitation of the use of English language in Thai commercials is due to the lack of language proficiency.

As English is still considered a foreign language in Thailand, language barrier is common. The use of English language in products and services can offer disadvantages to customers who lack English language proficiency. In addition, there are many cases where English names used for Thai products violate English grammar rules. Some English language used in Thai commercials deviates from standard English such as using false structures as a result of interference between Thai and English language (Yuvajita, Tayjasanant, & Sungkaman, 2018). Although these patterns can be well understood by Thais, foreign customers may find them confusing and reduce their purchasing interests.

Naming practice in the aviation industry

Due to the business competition and economic regression, aviation business can no longer rely solely on revenues from airfares. The demand for aviation products, services, and facilities is increasing to help the business survive. Aviation products, services, and facilities can be divided into three main categories: aircraft, passengers and crew, and facilities (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2012). In order to make these products and services fully established in the market, naming practice plays an important role. There was an evidence that many products failed due to naming mistakes; for example, Mitsubishi had to change its Pajero model into Montero in a Spanish speaking countries because Pajero is a taboo word in Spanish (Derexel & Gerlica, 2014). Different names are made to call aviation products ranging from the ticket and seating types, and non-ticket products ranging from menus, in-flight shops, hotels booking service, car rental service, shuttle service, in-flight magazines, airport lounges, privilege cards, partner deals, etc. Passengers can

select the airline and its products from the names that convey the qualifications and characteristics. Some airlines use generic names for their products and service while many prefer branded names to reflect their brand identities.

Research design and methodology

This study covered all scheduled airlines that operate domestic flights within Thailand. Seven airlines in total were included. Three FSCs were Thai Airways International (THAI) which is the flag carrier of Thailand with Thai Ministry of Finance acting as a major shareholder (Thai Airways International, 2019a), Thai Smile Airways which is a wholly owned regional subsidiary of Thai Airways, and Bangkok Airways which branded itself as 'Asia's boutique airline'. Four LCCs in this study were Nok Air in which Thai Airways has 13.28% stake (Stock Exchange of Thailand, 2020), Thai AirAsia, a part of Malaysia's AirAsia Berhad, Thai Lion Air, a part of Indonesia's Lion Air Group, and Thai VietJet which is a subsidiary of Vietnam's Vietjet Air (CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.b; CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.c; CAPA Centre for Aviation, n.d.d).

Data on commercial product naming were collected from both online and offline sources. On-line sources included websites and mobile applications where process began with booking stage to identify ticket-related products. The data collection then progressed to explore the website and applications to identify other products available for purchase. The offline sources were based on promotional and in-flight literatures. The content analysis employed a research tool, the coding sheet, which was used to record the product names. The names were categorised into ticket and non-ticket related products. Each product were recorded in terms of language (Thai or English) and product names (branded or generic). The data were then analysed to find the frequency and percentage value of naming practice. This study listed all commercially available products and services provided by seven airlines for data analysis which were categorised into flight and non-flight products.

A total of 116 product names were collected during October to December 2019, 69 of which are LCCs' and 47 are FSC's. The products were arranged in line with a typical air passenger journey. This included reservation, ancillary revenue options, pre-flight, in-flight and post flight stages. These data were then assessed for frequencies and percentages of product naming practice in terms of language choice and branded names. The comparisons were then made between FSCs and LCCs, Thai owned carriers and foreign subsidiaries along with individual airlines to identify patterns emerged.

Overall results

The products were categorized into ticket related products which are any products and services available during the ticketing-booking process (e.g. fare class name, premium seat selection, luggage fee) and non-ticket products which are other products and services unrelated to ticket booking (e.g. car rentals, hotel bookings, packaged holidays, in-flight meals and souvenirs, etc.). A total of 116 products were included in the analysis. Nok Air offers the largest number of products which is 27. The second place is Thai Airways offering 18 products and services, and closely followed by Thai AirAsia and Bangkok Airways, each carrier of which offers 17 products. Thai Lion Air has 13 products while Thai VietJet and Thai Smile Airways each contains 12 products. It was found that LCCs use English more frequently at 57.97% comparing to FSCs at 48.94%. Similarly, this study found that the LCCs use branded names more frequently at 60.87% compared to FSCs' use at 44.68%. The full details are reported in Table 1.

Table 1 Overall results

Product Types	Language and Name Used	Numbers of Products (Percentage)		
		LCCs	FSCs	Total
Language	Thai	29 (42.01)	24 (51.06)	53 (45.69
	English	40 (57.97)	23 (48.94)	63 (54.31)
	Grand Total	69 (100.00	47 (100.00)	116 (100.00)
Branding	Branded Names	42 (60.87)	21 (44.68)	63 (54.31)
	Generic Names	27 (39.13)	26 (55.32)	53 (45.69)
	Grand total	69 (100.00)	47 (100.00)	116 (100.00)

Source: Bangkok Airways (n.d.), Nok Air (2018), Thai AirAsia (2019), Thai Airways International (2019b), Thai Lion Air (n.d.a), Thai Lion Air (n.d.b), Thai Smile Airways (2019), Thai VietJet (n.d.a), Thai VietJet (n.d.b), Thai VietJet (n.d.c)

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Language choice

In terms of language choice, English is found to be more popular than Thai whereby 63 or 54.31% of the products are named in English while the remaining 53 of 45.69% are in Thai. FSCs favour the use of Thai language slightly over English at 51.06% for the former and 48.94% for the latter. LCCs were found to use English more often than Thai at 57.97% against 42.01%.

Table 2 Language choice

Product Types	Language Used	Numbers of Products (Percentage)									
		Nok Air	Thai Lion Air	Thai AirAsia	Thai VietJet	Thai Airways	Thai Smile Airways	Bangkok Airways	Total LCCs	Total FSCs	Total
Non-Ticket	Thai	5 (35.71)	2 (40.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (25.00)	5 (45.45)	2 (28.57)	7 (70.00)	8 (25.81)	14 (50.00)	22 (37.29)
	English	9 (64.29)	3 (60.00)	8 (100.00)	3 (75.00)	6 (54.55)	5 (74.43)	3 (30.00)	23 (74.19)	14 (50.00)	37 (62.71)
	Total	14 (100.00)	5 (100.00)	8 (100.00)	4 (100.00)	11 (100.00)	7 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	28 (100.00)	59 (100.00)
Ticket	Thai	7 (53.85)	3 (37.50)	6 (66.67)	5 (62.50)	4 (57.14)	3 (60.00)	3 (42.88)	21 (55.26)	10 (52.63)	31 (54.39)
	English	6 (46.15)	5 (62.50)	3 (33.33)	3 (37.50)	3 (42.88)	2 (40.00)	4 (57.14)	17 (44.74)	9 (43.37)	26 (45.61)
	Total	13 (100.00)	8 (100.00)	9 (100.00)	8 (100.00)	7 (100.00)	5 (100.00)	7 (100.00)	38 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)
Combined Products	Thai	12 (44.44)	5 (38.46)	6 (35.29)	6 (50.00)	9 (50.00)	5 (41.67)	10 (58.82)	29 (42.01)	24 (51.06)	53 (45.69)
	English	15 (55.56)	8 (61.54)	11 (64.70)	6 (50.00)	9 (50.00)	7 (58.33)	7 (41.18)	40 (57.97)	23 (48.94)	63 (54.31)
	Grand Total	27 (100.00)	13 (100.00)	17 (100.00)	12 (100.00)	18 (100.00)	12 (100.00)	17 (100.00)	69 (100.00)	47 (100.00)	116 (100.00)

Source: Bangkok Airways (n.d.), Nok Air (2018), Thai AirAsia (2019), Thai Airways International (2019b), Thai Lion Air (n.d.a), Thai Lion Air (n.d.b), Thai Smile Airways (2019), Thai VietJet (n.d.a), Thai VietJet (n.d.b), Thai VietJet (n.d.c)

Based on the results, there are no consistent patterns emerged in the aspect of language use. Thai AirAsia has the highest proportion of English usage at 64.70%. All non-ticket products of Thai AirAsia are in English. For example, the packaged holiday branded as *'AirAsiaGO'*, the in-flight magazine is named *'Travel 3-sixty'* and the in-flight souvenir service is called *'AirAsia Collection'*. Further examples are available in Table 3. This is followed by Thai Lion Air, Thai Smile Airways and Nok Air at 61.54%, 58.33%, and 55.56%,

respectively. Interestingly, Thai Airways and Thai VietJet both have a 50-50 split in Thai and English choice while Bangkok Airways is the only airline that Thai language dominates product names at 58.82%. Frequents flyers programme, travel insurance and in-flight shoppings are the three products that all airlines use English name (if the product is available). There is no product that every airline uses Thai language for product naming. (See Table 3 for example.) This study also found that foreign-owned LCCs (Thai AirAsia,

Thai Lion Air and Thai VietJet) favored the use of English language in non-ticket products of 100, 60, 75%, respectively to maintain consistencies with their foreign owners' business. Nevertheless, only Thai Lion Air used higher proportion of English at 62.50%. The remainders opted to use Thai names for ticket-related products.

Table 3 Examples of airline products

Airlines	Frequent Flyer	In-flight Magazine	Travel Insurance	Inflight Shopping
Nok Air	Nok Fan Club	Jib JIb	Nok Sure	Nok Shop
Thai AirAsia	AirAsia BIG	Travel 3-sixty	Tune Protect Travel	AirAsia Collection
Thai Lion Air	-	Lion Mag	Lion Care	-
Thai VietJet	-	One2 Fly	Travel Care	Skyshop
Thai Airways	Royal Orchid Plus	Sawasdee	Thai Travel Safe	Thai Shop
Thai Smile Airways	-	WE Magazine	WE Care	Smile Shop
Bangkok	Flyerbonus	Fah-Thai	Protective Wings	In-flight Variety

Source: Bangkok Airways (n.d.), Nok Air (2018), Thai AirAsia (2019), Thai Airways International (2019b), Thai Lion Air (n.d.a), Thai Lion Air (n.d.b), Thai Smile Airways (2019), Thai VietJet (n.d.a), Thai VietJet (n.d.b), Thai VietJet (n.d.c)

Table 4 Branded VS generic names results

Product Types	Name Used	Numbers of Products (Percentage)									
		Nok Air	Thai Lion Air	Thai AirAsia	Thai VietJet	Thai Airways	Thai Smile Airways	Bangkok Airways	Total LCCs	Total FSCs	Total
Non-Ticket	Branded Names	8 (57.14)	4 (80.00)	7 (87.50)	4 (100.00)	5 (45.45)	7 (100.00)	5 (50.00)	23 (74.19)	17 (60.71)	40 (67.77)
	Generic Names	6 (42.86)	1 (20.00)	1 (12.50)	0 (0.00)	6 (54.55)	0 (0.00)	5 (50.00)	8 (25.81)	11 (39.29)	19 (32.22)
	Total	14 (100.00)	5 (100.00)	8 (100.00)	4 (100.00)	11 (100.00)	7 (100.00)	10 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	28 (100.00)	59 (100.00)
Ticket	Branded Names	12 (92.31)	6 (75.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (12.50)	1 (14.29)	1 (20.00)	2 (28.57)	19 (50.00)	4 (21.05)	23 (40.35)
	Generic Names	1 (7.69)	2 (25.00)	9 (100.00)	7 (87.50)	6 (85.71)	4 (80.00)	5 (71.43)	19 (50.00)	15 (78.95)	34 (59.65)
	Total	13 (100.00)	8 (100.00)	9 (100.00)	8 (100.00)	7 (100.00)	5 (100.00)	7 (100.00)	38 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

Table 4 Branded VS generic names results (continued)

Product Types	Name Used	Numbers of Products (Percentage)									
		Nok Air	Thai Lion Air	Thai AirAsia	Thai VietJet	Thai Airways	Thai Smile Airways	Bangkok Airways	Total LCCs	Total FSCs	Total
Combined Products	Branded Names	20 (74.07)	10 (76.92)	7 (41.18)	5 (41.67)	6 (33.33)	8 (66.67)	7 (41.18)	42 (60.87)	21 (44.68)	63 (54.31)
	Generic Names	7 (25.93)	3 (23.08)	10 (58.82)	7 (58.33)	12 (66.67)	4 (33.33)	10 (58.82)	27 (39.13)	26 (55.32)	53 (45.69)
	Grand Total	27 (100.00)	13 (100.00)	17 (100.00)	12 (100.00)	18 (100.00)	12 (100.00)	17 (100.00)	69 (100.00)	47 (100.00)	116 (100.00)

Source: Bangkok AIrways (n.d.), Nok Air (2018), Thai AirAsia (2019), Thai Airways International (2019b), Thai Lion Air (n.d.a), Thai Lion Air (n.d.b), Thai Smile Airways (2019), Thai VietJet (n.d.a), Thai VietJet (n.d.b), Thai VietJet (n.d.c)

Branded and generic names

As for the use of branded and generic product names. This study found that the practice of using branded name for products is more popular than using generic names. A total of 63 out of 116 products were given branded names which are accounted for 54.31% while the remaining 53 products or 45.69% were given generic names. LCCs were found to employ branded names on their products more often at 60.87% while FSCs use generic names more frequently at 55.32%. Thai Lion Air has the highest proportion of branded names at 76.92% which is closely followed by Nok Air at 74.07%. Thai Smile Airways stood at the third place at 66.67%. The remainders were found to use generic terms more in which the highest user of generic names is Thai Airways at 66.67%. Table 3 provides examples of branded names. Nok Air (The word 'Nok' means 'bird' in Thai) uses the word Nok with most of its products and services. For example, front row seats are branded 'Nok Premium Seat', elite frequent flyer members are called 'Nok Smile Plus' and the priority boarding service is called 'Nok First', etc. Thai Smile Airways was found to favour the use of its airline designated code 'WE' and the word 'smile' for their product branding. The practice of using the airline name as the part of product naming also appears on Thai Airways and Thai Lion Air (See Table 3). On the other hand. Bangkok Airways and Thai VietJet were found to deviate from the use of its names as part of the brand. For example, Fah-Thai (Thai Sky) for Bangkok Airways' in-flight magazine and Sky-boss for Thai VietJet priority service. Similar to the language choice, this study found no consistent pattern or branded and generic names among Thai air operators.

Discussions

The key findings from this study are that all air operators indicated in the study used a mixed method in applying both language choice, Thai and English, and also both generic and branded naming practices. Every airline was found to combine the practices depending on the products offered. However, it found two areas of differences between FSCs and LCCs naming practice. First, LCCs were favoured the use of English over FSCs. Second, the higher branded product naming in LCCS over FSCs.

The overall results found the marginally higher use of English language for Thai airline product name is not unexpected as English is the main language for the aviation industry (International Civil Aviation Organization, 2003). Various aviation-related English borrowed words entered Thai vocabulary. The examples are 'boarding pass', 'check-in', 'gate', etc. This is in line with the existing empirical evidence which reports an increasing prevalence in the use of English language for product naming in Thailand (Hiranburana, 2017; Snodin et al., 2017).

It is imperative that airlines must take into account of the English language proficiency among its existing and potential customers. An English proficiency report by EF places Thai population at a 'low-proficiency' level. This means that the use of English language may cause confusions and mistakes and can be off putting to passengers particularly on LCCs (Pasupa & Cheramakara, 2019). One example is Nok Air which uses the name Fly 'n' Ride for its ground transportation connection service. Passengers who lack English proficiency may not understand this term.

The examination of the use of branded versus generic names also found that all airlined included in the study employed a mixed method in naming practice. It found marginal popularity of branded product name at 54.31%. This study found that Nok Air, Thai Smile Airways, Thai Airways, and Thai AirAsia partly incorporated their names into some of the products as shown in Table 3. On the contrary, Bangkok Airways and Thai VietJet were found not to incorporate their name into the product naming. One prominent feature of Thai aviation market is the presence of three foreign-originated airlines which are Thai AirAsia, Thai Lion Air and Thai VietJet. These carriers share branding, products and services with its foreign owners which results in the airline using the same branded product name. The issue that operators must consider is the potential confusions.

For example, Thai AirAsia uses the brand 'Santan' for its in-flight meals and beverage service which is the same brand with its Malaysian owner. This has no meaning to Thai audience. Another example is Nok Air which branded its infant transportation fee as 'looknok' which is translated as baby-bird in English.

The key point of consideration for air carriers is that it should consider adopting product naming standards within the airline to ensure consistency of language option and branded names. Particularly for the foreign-own companies to ensure that local population clearly understand the meaning of the name. The consistency in product naming can improve the brand perception, ease of use and customer experience (i.e. to reduce potential mistakes and improve customer's confident in product buying). One constraint of this study that the reliability test for the coding form was not performed. Furthermore, there is an opportunity for future researches in both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the current level of understanding of product naming in Thai airline industry from the perspective of domestic airline users on how naming practice affects customer's understanding of the product offered and buying behaviours. ◈

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