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Statement from the Managing Editor

It is our privilege to enhance our Editorial Board with well known and respected experts, who I am sure, will facilitate our journal to evolve to the next level. It is also pertinent, at this point, to thank our current board members, reviewers and contributors who have helped us in making significant improvements to the journal over the past decade. As with previous issues, it is encouraging to see the younger generation of researchers from our institution and others, sending in their manuscripts.

In our first article, Siamwalla examines the antecedents of British expatriates' adjustment in Thailand. Her article offers several important implications for multinational companies who send expatriates, especially from western countries with their highly individualistic cultures, to the more collectivist cultures of Asia. Leejoeiwara, in our second article, studies a trend that is becoming more popular in the world of education; students' intention to enroll for postgraduate study courses online. Her findings indicate that Thai students' self-efficacy, technology and resource facilitation as well as interpersonal influences were significant influences on their decision to take up online study. Another growing trend in Thai society is consumers' patronage of lifestyle centers which have mushroomed all around Bangkok. Pattarakitham examines the factors that result in both revisit intention and desire to stay. Based on her findings, she offers several important recommendations to marketers of lifestyle centers so as to enhance customers' experience. Our fourth article by Rungtrakulchai focuses on how customers perceive price deals, quality and brand equity for a high involvement product. The author cautions marketers to be wary of price promotion activities as unsatisfying price deals can create negative brand associations and brand knowledge even for high involvement products. With the number of travelers increasing globally, Sangkatat na Ayutthaya has examined passengers' perceived service and brand image and the impact these have on repurchase intention toward low-cost carriers. Her findings are especially relevant in the Thai tourism sector where the number of low cost carriers as well as the competition among airlines is ever increasing. Finally, Jantasri and Wannarat examined Thai customers' intention to adopt restaurant websites. Interestingly, trialability and observability were significant factors which developers should pay special attention to when designing their websites.

I want to encourage both new and long-time readers to write for the Journal. Make the next issue of the Journal the one in which your own article appears, thereby making it personally historic for you as you contribute to the knowledge base of business.

Happy New Year!

Patricia Arttachariya, Ph.D.
Managing Editor

Statement of Editorial Policy

AU Journal of Management is an interdisciplinary journal that welcomes submission from scholars in disciplines related to business and management (e.g. marketing, finance, economics, accounting) and from other related disciplines (e.g. education, IT). The journal is multidisciplinary in scope and interdisciplinary in contents and methodology.

AU Journal of Management accepts both research and academic papers. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies are both encouraged as long as the studies are methodologically rigorous. The journal does not publish manuscripts about teaching materials/methods, articles that merely criticize previous work, or those aimed solely at business practitioners. On the other hand, articles that discuss theoretical, empirical, practical or pedagogical issues are welcome.

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A set of detailed guidelines for authors can be found on the back pages of the journal. All manuscripts on acceptance become the copyright of Assumption University.

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FACTORS AFFECTING BRITISH EXPATRIATES' ADJUSTMENT IN THAILAND

Yanida Siamwalla

Martin de Tours School of Management and Economics, Assumption Univerisy

Abstract

Building on literature relating to expatriate adjustment, this study attempted to identify factors that affect individualistic expatriate responses to cross-cultural adjustment in a collectivist culture. This study examines empirically the degree to which 387 British expatriates have adjusted themselves in terms of interaction, general/cultural and work adjustment in Thailand. It also analyzes the expatriates' adjustment antecedents which are personal factors, work related factors and cultural factors. Multiple regression analysis exhibited that expatriates' work related adjustment were affected by spouse and family adjustment, social support and role discretion. The cultural factors showed no effects on all dimensions of British expatriates' adjustment. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Expatriate Adjustment, Self-efficacy, Language Fluency, Culture Novelty, Cultural Intelligence

บทคัดย่อ

สืบเนื่องจากรวมกันที่เกี่ยวกับการปรับตัวของชาวต่างชาติ ได้นำสู่วัตถุประสงค์ของการศึกษานี้ เพื่อหาปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อชาวต่างชาติในการปรับตัวทางด้านวัฒนธรรมที่ต่างกัน จากการศึกษาชาวอังกฤษ 387 คน ในหัวข้อ การปรับตัวเองในแง่การปฏิสัมพันธ์ต่อคนทั่วไป การปรับตัวต่อสิ่งแวดล้อมทั่ว ๆ ไปหรือในแง่วัฒนธรรม และการปรับตัวเองในด้านการทำงานในประเทศไทย การศึกษานี้ได้วิเคราะห์ถึงปัจจัยส่วนบุคคล ปัจจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการทำงาน และปัจจัยทางด้านวัฒนธรรม จากผลการวิเคราะห์ได้แสดงให้เห็นถึง 3 ปัจจัยหลักที่มีผลกระทบต่อการทำงานของชาวต่างชาติคือ การปรับตัวของคู่สมรสและครอบครัว การได้รับการสนับสนุนทางสังคม และจากบทบาทการทำงาน โดยสรุปแล้ว จากผลการวิเคราะห์ยังได้แสดงว่าปัจจัยทางวัฒนธรรมไม่มีผลต่อทุกมิติของการปรับตัวของชาวอังกฤษ ผลกระทบจากการศึกษาที่จะนำไปสู่การทำวิจัยในอนาคตและการปฏิบัติได้มีกล่าวถึงในช่วงท้าย

คำสำคัญ: การปรับตัวของชาวต่างชาติ, ประสิทธิภาพในตนเอง, คล่องภาษา, ความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรม, การปรับตัวทางวัฒนธรรม

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has created opportunities for Multinational Companies (MNCs) to expand businesses ranging from exporting to foreign direct investment (FDI) (Phatak, Bhagat, & Kashlak, 2009). MNCs implement an expatriation strategy to ensure successful competitive outcomes (Cullen & Parboteeah, 2008; Perkins, 1994; Tung, 1982) which are to control and coordinate their international business operations (Harzing, 2001), to develop a potential employees as a career advancement (Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005), to

transfer technology, knowledge and skills (Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005), and to establish new foreign markets (Scullion & Brewster, 2001).

During an international assignment, expatriates have to live and work in a new cultural setting, and experience different role behaviors that local people might expect from them. To perform their work and live comfortably in the new cultural society, expatriates need to be culturally sensitive (Moran, Harris & Moran, 2007). To manage cultural differences, Ang, Van dyne, Koh, Ng, Templer and Tay (2007) recommended the concept of cultural intelligence. A cultural intelligent expatriate

is aware of the cultural differences by carefully observing the host cultural practices, decodes cultural messages from locals, and responds correctly to local people. Expatriates who respond to local employees with different behaviors might face the discomfort of being treated as outsiders.

According to Wang (2001), there is a lack of research regarding the expatriate's interpersonal interactions within the local culture. In addition, the cultural distance between the expatriates and the locals can cause difficulties to expatriate adjustment (Peltokorpi, 2008; Rarick, 2002). However, the difficulties caused by the distance between cultures can be solved by being a culturally intelligent expatriate who is aware of cultural differences, knowledgeable of both cultures, and motivated to behave appropriately in the particular culture. Thus, the expatriate's social support and cultural intelligence will be integrated into the proposed framework to test for the most influential factors that affect expatriate adjustment in this study.

Many European based MNCs have increased their presence and significance to counteract global competition (Scullion & Brewster, 2001). UK products imported to Thailand grew by double digits for 4 consecutive years (British Chamber of Commerce Thailand [BCCT], 2012). In 2011, the bilateral trade and investment between two countries reached just under £5 billion. UK investors ranked number one in terms of the number of expatriates among the European countries (Department Of Employment, 2011). The United Kingdom is ranked as the largest EU investors in Thailand (BCCT, 2012). It is necessary to understand various factors that facilitate the cross-cultural adjustment of the British expatriates in Thailand. Therefore, the problems here are the extent to which British expatriates adjust to Thai culture and which factors among personal factors, work factors and cultural factors are most influential to their cross-cultural adjustment in Thailand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Huang et al., (2005), expatriate adjustment is a process of experience adjustment or the process through which an expatriate feels comfortable with a new environment and harmonizes with it. According to Selmer (2006a), expatriate adjustment can be referred not only to the

ability to fit in to new environment but also the capability to interact effectively with the locals. But the expatriates should be psychologically comfortable in dealing with work in that environment (Aryee & Stone, 1996; Fenner & Selmer, 2008). Relocating expatriate employees to work in other countries exposes them to different cultures. They need to adjust to live and to work in different cultural settings. Hence, the terms expatriate adjustment and cross-cultural adjustment are sometimes used interchangeably.

The concept of adjustment has been discussed and empirically confirmed to be multi-dimensional in the expatriation literature (Aycan, 1997; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). Expatriate's adjustment can be divided into three distinct facets: work adjustment, cultural adjustment and interaction adjustment (Black, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1999; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Black & Porter, 1991). The 'work adjustment' occurs when an individual needs to adjust to new work and role requirements, work responsibilities, work difficulties and work abilities (Black, 1988; Black et al., 1991). The 'cultural adjustment' which Black (1988) termed 'general adjustment', includes living conditions and cultural differences and refers to non-work issues such as food, weather, transportation, school and entertainment. The 'interaction adjustment' refers to interpersonal relationship by socializing with the local people. Black et al. (1991) strongly suggested that each dimension of international adjustment should be treated separately from others as a multidimensional concept (Selmer, 1999). However, the three facets of expatriate adjustment are the main predicted variables emphasized in this study.

Black et al., (1991) proposed a framework to integrate many sets of variables that could predict the three facets of expatriate adjustment. This framework has been tested by many researchers in order to confirm the ability of the three facets to predict expatriate adjustment. Those independent variables are personal factors, work and non-work factors, organization culture and socialization factors. Shaffer et al. (1999) extended the model with some of the moderating factors which are positional factors and two additional personal factors and empirically tested the whole concept. This study's proposed framework integrates the models by both Black et al. (1991) and Shaffer et al. (1999). Additionally, this research framework also

includes social support factors and cultural intelligence factors to examine the significant variables that affect British expatriates in Thailand.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES/HYPOTHESES

The main objective of this research is to examine the personal factors, work factors and cultural factors that can influence the cross-cultural adjustment of British expatriates in Thailand. The personal factors include self-efficacy, spouse/family adjustment, previous overseas experience, and host-country language fluency. The work factors that influence work adjustment in this study include work role clarity, work role discretion, work role conflict, work role novelty, work role overload, social supports, and hierarchical level. The cultural factors included in this study are cultural novelty and expatriate's cultural intelligence.

Factors Hypothesized to Influence Expatriates' Adjustment

Self-efficacy is found to have a positive association with expatriate psychological adjustment (Fenner & Selmer, 2008), social adjustment (Gong & Fan, 2006) and is a strong predictor of the role change to achieve high job performance (Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, and Luk (2004) found a positive relationship between self-efficacy and interaction adjustment but not work adjustment. Expatriates who have self-efficacy or belief in their abilities to adjust to new cultural environments will have better work adjustment, general adjustment and interaction adjustment. Thus,

Hypothesis 1: Self-efficacy has a positive influence on the general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment of British expatriates in Thailand.

It is widely accepted in the expatriate literature that spouse adjustment is a very important factor in the expatriate's adjustment (Aycan, 1997; Black, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). The study done by Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, (2001) reported no relationship of spousal support on expatriate adjustment. Caligiuri (2000) found that family adjustment was significantly related to expatriate's general adjust-

ment. The result from Lee and Liu's (2006) study found spouses adjustment to have a significant positive relationship with the expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment. However, spouse/family adjustment was also reported to have a weak positive relationship with interaction adjustment and work adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2004). Therefore, the family/spouse adjustment is expected to have an influence on the cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriate. Hence,

Hypothesis 2: Family/spouse adjustment has a positive influence on the general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment of British expatriates in Thailand.

In the expatriate literature, overseas experiences such as living and working in foreign environment provide expatriates with confidence, skills and abilities to adjust to the general living environment and to interact and behave to meet the expectations of the locals. Parker and McEvoy's (1993) study found that the previous overseas experiences had a significant positive relationship with general adjustment but the overseas experiences showed no significant relationship with the work adjustment. Fenner and Selmer (2008) also reported no significant relationship between overseas experiences to expatriate's psychological adjustment. Another research found that previous overseas experience has significant positive relationship to work and interaction adjustment only (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2004). Thus,

Hypothesis 3: British expatriates' previous overseas experiences have a positive influence on their general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment in Thailand.

Knowing the host country language will facilitate the interaction with the locals and help obtain general information regarding the host environment and work related information (Black et al., 1991; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). It also involves learning the culture which helps expatriates to overcome cultural barriers (Takeuchi, Yun, & Telsuk, 2002). Freeman and Olson-Buchanan's (2013) online survey of expatriates in 30 countries found that local language fluency has predicted all three expatriate adjustment. Selmer (2006b) studied the Western expatriates in China and found that de-

spite the local language fluency's strong positive relationships with interaction and general adjustment, it had a weak relationship with work adjustment. However, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2004) found the host country language fluency to have positive relationship with both general living adjustment and interaction adjustment but not with work adjustment. Thus,

Hypothesis 4: British expatriates' Thai language fluency has a positive influence on their general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment.

There are five work roles related to expatriate work adjustment. Role clarity involves the clarity of expatriate's scope of responsibility and others' expectations of expatriate's performance. Morley and Flynn's (2003) study shows role ambiguity (lack of role clarity) has a significantly negative relationship with work adjustment (Black, 1988; Forster, 1990) but not on the expatriate general and interaction adjustment. Shaffer et al.'s (1999) study found the strongest positive effect of role clarity on expatriate work adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2004). This study also predicted positive relationship between work role clarity and expatriate adjustment. Thus,

Hypothesis 5: British expatriates' role clarity has a positive influence on their work adjustment in Thailand.

Role discretion is defined as the expatriate's opportunities to change the components and relationships of role demands (Black, 1988), or the degree that expatriates is allowed to change the new work role to fit his/her abilities (Andreason, 2008). Fenner and Selmer (2008) reported a significant positive association between role discretion and the expatriate's psychological adjustment. Selmer and Fenner (2009) who studied personnel from public sector found no relationship between role discretion and work adjustment. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2004) found very strong relationship between role discretion and work adjustment. Therefore, role discretion is expected to have a positive relationship with work adjustment. Thus,

Hypothesis 6: British expatriate's role discretion has a positive influence on their work adjustment in Thailand.

Role conflict is referred to as conflicting ex-

pectations regarding work role or the expatriate's expected behaviors do not fit the new culture (Andreason, 2008). Morley and Flynn (2003) found the negative relationship between role conflict and work adjustment (Aryee & Stone, 1996; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2004; Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Black & Gregersen, 1991). Some studies found no relationship between role conflict and work adjustment (Selmer & Fenner, 2009; Shaffer et al., 1999). This study therefore hypothesizes the role conflict as:

Hypothesis 7: British expatriates' role conflict has a negative influence on their work adjustment in Thailand.

Role novelty is defined as the role differences between the current foreign assignment and the previous one (Andreason, 2008; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). Role novelty was reported to have no significant relationship with work adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2004; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Black, 1988; Shaffer et al., 1999). In contrast to Nicholson and Imaizumi's (1993) study, the result of this research showed that role novelty had a negative relationship with work adjustment. Hence,

Hypothesis 8: British expatriates' role novelty has a negative influence on their work adjustment in Thailand.

The most obvious cause of stress for expatriate's work adjustment is overload demands that rise from the expatriate's new position (Morley & Flynn, 2003) or when the expatriate might not have the ability to comply with the work demands (Karasek, 1979). Role overload was reported to have a weak negative relationship with the expatriate adjustment (Fenner & Selmer, 2008). The inconsistent results showed no relationship between role overload and work adjustment in the studies of Black (1988) and Morley & Flynn, (2003).

Hypothesis 9: British expatriates' role overload has a negative influence on their work adjustment in Thailand.

Social support from multiple sources in the host country will be very useful in adjusting to the new culture. Caligiuri's (2000) study found a negative linear relation between the amount of contact with host nationals and the adjustment which indicated that social supports from other expatriates are pref-

erable as compared to host nationals. On the other hand, many studies found positive cross-cultural adjustment with social support from the host country's supervisors and coworkers (Shaffer et al., 1999; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Lee & Van Vorst 2010) and Thus,

Hypothesis 10: Social support has a positive influence on the general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment of British expatriates in Thailand.

The hierarchical power of authorities can have an influence on how the work role would require expatriates to interact with host country nationals. The level of hierarchy and type of functional work was found to have a moderating effect between the predictors and the expatriate work adjustment and interaction adjustment (Andreason, 2008; Feldman & Tompson, 1993). However, the higher the level of hierarchy or greater the number of workers/subordinates to manage, to interact and to work with, the more the stress and difficulty for expatriates to adjust. Hence, the hypothesis set for hierarchical level to have negative relationship to all three facets of adjustment is,

Hypothesis 11: Hierarchical power has a negative influence on the general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment of British expatriates in Thailand.

The result from Caligiuri (2000) study showed that cultural difficulty had no relationship with the cross-cultural adjustment (Selmer, 2006b). Takeuchi et al. (2002) found that cultural novelty was negatively related to the work adjustment. In Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2004) the meta-analysis reported that cultural novelty had a significant negative relationship with the three dimensions of expatriate adjustment. Zhou and Qin's (2009) study found no significant correlation between work adjustment and cultural distance but negative association between cultural distance, general adjustment (Manev & Stevenson, 2001) and interaction adjustment. Ward and Kennedy (1993) found cultural distance was significantly related to socio-cultural adjustment. Hence,

Hypothesis 12: Cultural novelty has a negative influence on the general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work

adjustment of British expatriates in Thailand.

Cultural intelligence has been identified as a multidimensional construct consisting of metacognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, motivational CQ and behavioral CQ (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2009). Templer, Tay and Chandrasekar (2006) studied the motivational CQ and had found significantly positive relationship with cross-cultural adjustment. Motivational CQ seems to be the most important factor to gain confidence to initiate contacts, and to be persistent to overcome cultural obstacles. Thus,

Hypothesis 13: Cultural intelligence has a positive influence on the general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment of British expatriates in Thailand.

METHODOLOGY

Data were obtained from expatriates by a structured questionnaire using convenience sampling and the snow ball method. The samples were 387 British expatriates currently working in Thailand. Two hundred and seventy (69.8%) of the respondents are males, 34.7 percent of the expatriates are in the age group between 30 and 39 and nearly 80 percent of the respondents are below 50 years old and 198 were single (51%). There are 218 (56.3%) respondents who claimed that they are able to communicate in Thai adequately. Two hundred forty nine (64.3%) respondents said they had previous overseas experience and 219 (56.5%) expatriates had tenure in Thailand for more than 4 years.

The original measure for expatriate adjustment consisted of 11 items which were taken from Black (1988). Additional 11 items were added to apply Thai culture. Response scale ranged from '1 = very difficult to adjust' to '5 = very easy to adjust'. The 22 individual items were factor analyzed and revealed three distinct factors. The 12 item of expatriate work adjustment reports Cronbach's Alpha of 0.885. The 7 item expatriate interaction and socialization adjustment (EXIS) with scale's alpha reliability of 0.874. The expatriate general environment adjustment (EXEN) contains 3 items and

Cronbach's Alpha is 0.697.

The 8 items of the self-efficacy scale was taken from Chen, Gully and Eden (2001). A statement sample is "I can do most tasks very well". Response options ranged from '1 = strongly disagree' to '5 = strongly agree'. This factor has high reliability coefficient of 0.833. Spouse/family adjustment measure consisted of 15 questions, seven items of which were taken from Black (1988). In this study, eight more items were added in order to apply Thai culture into the study. This factor has a relatively high reliability coefficient of 0.933. Previous overseas experience is considered as an important personal factor (Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique, & Burgi, 2001), a direct question was asked "Do you have experience living or working in any foreign countries?" The responses, 249 answered "Yes" and 138 answered "No". Expatriates were asked to rate their ability to speak Thai language in 3 levels: "not at all or very few words", "adequately as ordering food and can give directions to taxi drivers" and "fluent in communicating and giving orders to Thai workers".

Work role construct is composed of five work roles: work role discretion, work role clarity, work role conflict, work role novelty and work role overload. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point scale; '1 = strongly disagree' to '5 = strongly agree'. The 5-item scale of work role clarity (RCR) revealed Cronbach's Alpha of 0.819. The 8-item scale of work role discretion factor was taken from Gregersen and Black (1992) and reported Cronbach's Alpha of 0.875. The work role conflict (RCF) scale included some objective wordings such as: "things should be done differently" and "incompatible requests from many people". The answers to this scale were reverse coded. The scale was taken from Rizzo et al., (1970). The reliability coefficient test on 8 item factor reports Cronbach's Alpha of 0.853.

The six item scale for the work role novelty (RNV) includes statements regarding expected patterns of work behavior altered from the previous work role. For example: "I have changed the way I do my work". The reverse score was done for this item scale and reliability test indicated Cronbach's Alpha of 0.804. The three item work role overload (ROL) was taken from Black (1988). The key words in the scale are "excessive work load" and "demand excessive time". The reliabil-

ity test on three items indicated Cronbach's Alpha of 0.896.

Social support scale taken from Wang (2001) consisted of 20 items. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point scale; '1 = strongly-disagree' to '5 = strongly agree'. Sample item is 'your friends, colleagues and supervisors gave you information about Thai environment activities'. The Cronbach's Alpha of 0.925 showed high reliability of the items. A single question was asked to assess hierarchical power, whether British expatriates have any subordinates who work under their supervision. The response could be either "yes" or "no".

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A review of the Table 1 reveals the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of variables and shows that mean scores of the variables are significantly higher than the mid-level point (3.00 out of a maximum score of 5). The mean scores of three dimensions of expatriate adjustment which are general adjustment (3.62), interaction adjustment (3.76), and work adjustment (3.89) indicate that British respondents are well adjusted to working and living in Thailand. As shown in Table 2 the results of personal factors indicate that British expatriates in Thailand can adjust themselves well mainly due to one of the four personal predictors' significant positive effect of spouse and family adjustment on expatriates' general adjustment, expatriates' interaction adjustment and expatriates' work adjustment.

Hypothesis 1 stated that self-efficacy has a positive influence on all three dimensions of expatriates' adjustment. The results in Table 2 show that Hypothesis 1 is not supported. Hypothesis 2, on the other hand, shows a highly significant positive influence on expatriates' adjustment. The data in Table 2 show that neither previous overseas experiences nor expatriates' Thai language ability significantly influences xpatriates' adjustment. Hence, Hypothesis 3 and 4 are not supported.

Consistent with previous findings (Aryee & Stone, 1996; Shaffer et al., 1999) work related predictors of expatriates' adjustment indicate that British expatriates experience work role conflict in Thailand and even more complexity when expatriates have more hierarchical power which might

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of study variables (N=387)

Variables	Means	Std. D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1 General Adjustment	3.62	.77	1															
2 Interaction Adjustment	3.76	.70	.350**	1														
3 Work Adjustment	3.89	.56	.418**	.696**	1													
4 Self-efficacy	4.29	.48	-.007	.327**	.444**	1												
5 Spouse Adjustment	4.11	.57	.426**	.637**	.600**	.390**	1											
6 Previous Experiences	1.36	.48	-.074	-.210**	-.238**	-.252**	-.294**	1										
7 Thai Language Ability	2.06	.66	.207**	.252**	.354**	.230**	.174*	-.131*	1									
8 Role Clarity	4.02	.66	.299**	.494**	.561**	.395**	.522**	-.192**	.301**	1								
9 Role Discretion	3.82	.64	.336**	.529**	.603**	.375**	.508**	-.239**	.321**	.749**	1							
10 Role Conflict	2.84	.79	-.082	-.351**	-.410**	-.241**	-.256**	.172**	-.269**	-.237**	-.315**	1						
11 Role Novelty	3.19	.77	-.119*	-.296**	-.332**	-.143**	-.228**	.165**	-.258**	-.197**	-.283**	.549**	1					
12 Role Overload	2.83	.97	-.048	-.318**	-.339**	-.212**	-.308**	.155**	-.255**	-.247**	-.288**	.487**	.468**	1				
13 Social Support	2.67	.51	.397**	.595**	.663**	.291**	.497**	-.195**	.348**	.480**	.534**	-.262**	-.293**	-.334**	1			
14 Hierarchical Power	1.47	.50	-.052	-.155**	-.250**	-.092	-.139	.171**	-.194**	-.102*	-.133**	.159**	.146**	.199**	-.271**	1		
15 Culture Novelty	3.77	.67	-.127*	-.401**	-.355**	-.151**	-.369**	.181**	-.266**	-.250**	-.261**	.301**	.319**	.336**	-.312**	.133**	1	
16 Cultural Intelligence	3.59	.54	.330**	.516**	.562**	.289**	.358**	-.099	.393**	.377**	.410**	-.268**	-.282**	-.345**	.654**	-.233**	-.289**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

hinder British expatriates' work adjustment (Table 2). The conflicting signals related to work roles can be a source of stress and cause lesser work adjustment of British expatriates. As earlier hypothesized that work role conflict and hierarchical power have negative influence on expatriates' work adjustment, the results (Table 2) show this to be the case. Thus, Hypotheses 7 and 11 are supported.

However, support received from friends, colleagues and supervisors strongly facilitate British expatriates' interaction and work adjustment. Work role discretion of British expatriates also has a positive effect on British expatriates' work adjustment. This is supported by Black and Gregersen's (1991) study that work role discretion provide opportunities and authorities for expatriates to control work related processes which enable them to continue their previous work experiences and behavioral patterns. Work role discretion and social support show significant positive influence on expatriates' work adjustment, confirming Hypotheses 6 and 10. Work role clarity (Table 1) shows positive correlation while work role novelty and work role overload are negatively correlated with expatriates' work adjustment, but all three work roles show no statistically significant influence (Table 2) on expatriates' work adjustment, thus generally providing no support for Hypotheses 5, 8 and 9.

The zero-correlation results showed cultural novelty to be significantly negatively related to

expatriates' adjustment, and cultural intelligence to be significantly positively related to expatriates' adjustment. The regression analyses revealed none to be significant, thus generally providing no support for Hypotheses 12 and 13. The nonsignificant effect of both cultural factors on British expatriates' adjustment could stem from British expatriates' expectation of Thai culture shock. The results from this research revealed that British expatriates are well aware of the cultural differences and acquired Thai cultural knowledge from reading books, taking cultural orientation courses, and getting advice from their compatriots to improve their understanding of Thai culture.

Practical Implications

The implication of the significant relationship between spouse/family adjustment and British expatriates' adjustment is that MNCs should provide spouse and family support programs during expatriates' overseas assignment to facilitate spouse and family adjustment. These support programs should also include interviews with their families during selection of expatriates, family preparation in terms of cultural and environmental training before taking international assignments and the provision of organizational supporting programs to the expatriates' families during international assignments (Andreason, 2003; Black & Stephens, 1989).

Table 2: Results of Standard Multiple Regression Analyses of Expatriate Adjustment

Independent Variables		Dependent Variables		
		General Adjustment	Interaction Adjustment	Work Adjustment
Personal Factor:	Self-efficacy	-.099	.064	.087
	Spouse/family Adjustment	.408***	.317***	.227***
	Previous Experiences	.029	-.020	.015
	Thai Language Ability	.032	.027	.054
Work related Factor	Role Clarity	.088	.078	.064
	Role Discretion	.089	.124	.144*
	Role Conflict	.164*	-.106	-.144*
	Role Novelty	-.001	.050	.000
	Role Overload	.099	.032	.088
	Social Support	.069	.195*	.275***
	Hierarchical Power	-.015	-.054	-.116*
Cultural Factor	Culture Novelty	.072	-.111	-.084
	Cultural Intelligence	.084	.082	.094
R ²		.266	.581	.646
Adjusted R ²		.211	.550	.619
		4.828***	18.473***	24.278***

Another implication of the significant relationship between social support and British expatriates' work adjustment and interaction adjustment is that British expatriates' work adjustment requires them to be sociable or culturally intelligent which is the natural ability to understand and interact with local people. The Human Resources Department that has the duty to select the right candidate for overseas job posting needs to match the level of position to the characteristics of job and expatriates who have high level of social intelligence (Brislin, Worthley, & Macnab, 2006), and possess personality trait of openness (Caligiuri, 2000). MNCs should also provide support programs to improve the level of expatriates' adjustment by providing intense cross-cultural training, introducing mentors both from head office and in-country compatriots, and providing support in joining in business associations in Thailand.

For the immediate supervisors whose duty is to delegate types of work and to assign workload, the implication of the significant relationship between work role discretion, work role conflict and British expatriates' work adjustment would help them to better choose the right kind of work or work characteristics suitable for the expatriates.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

A limitation of this study is that during four months of data collection there was major flooding throughout Thailand, which might have had some impacts on the expatriates' adjustment. A cross-sectional study might not reflect the real relationship of expatriates' adjustment; therefore, a longitudinal study is recommended.

A second limitation is the self-response survey could be susceptible to bias. The study asked respondents to rate their spouse/family adjustment to general living conditions and their interaction to people in Thailand. This may have biased the statistical conclusions of spouse and family adjustment. Therefore, in future research the spouses or family members should answer the questionnaire.

A third limitation of this study is the sample frame identified. There are 52.8 % of the respondents who work in the management and supervisory positions and 57% of British respondents have worked in Thailand for more than 4 years. These respondents have high positions and have more

overseas experience than the other expatriates. Therefore, they may have more accurate perception of how to live and work in Thailand and are able to adjust better to the living conditions of the country. Future research should cover and represent a good number of the British expatriate population.

A fourth limitation of this study is the sample frame of British expatriates in Thailand. This study's results may not be generalizable to other samples. Conducting research in other countries may yield different results. Expatriates from other nations in Thailand may have different perception of the degree of adjustment.

A fifth limitation of this study is the theoretical framework used which originated from Black et al., (1991). This study focuses only on the in-country adjustment and does not include the pre-departure adjustment in terms of training and selection criteria. This study also excludes the personal skill of establishing relationship, perception skills and socialization tactics and contents.

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MODELING ADOPTION INTENTION OF ONLINE EDUCATION IN THAILAND USING THE EXTENDED DECOMPOSED THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR (DTPB) WITH SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the determinants of online education adoption based upon the extended Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior with self-directed learning attributes. Quantitative research method was employed for data collection from a sample of 542 students in Thailand. Data was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Results showed that all four main variables based on the extended DTPB with self-directed learning were significantly related to adoption intention. However, perceived relative advantage and perceived trialability were found to be insignificantly related to attitude towards online education. Interpersonal influences include peers, family, and the community were found to be significantly related to subjective norms, while superiors' influence was not. In addition, self-efficacy, technology and resources facilitations were found to be significantly related to perceived behavioral control, and subsequently related to adoption intention towards online education. Surprisingly, more importance was given to factors such as whether online education is personally and socially compatible, simple to use, and seeing other people studying online. Interpersonal referents are influential factors rather than external referents in the students' decisions, with the exception of more distant relationships with superiors or employers. Findings also indicate that if Thai students are autonomous learners (self-directed learning), have confidence in their capabilities, and have sufficient resources as well as technological facilitations, they are more likely to have intention to adopt online education. This study then provides discussion on both academic and practical implications based on the findings.

Keywords: Online Education, Thailand, Distance Learning, DTPB, Innovation, Adoption, Self-Directed Learning

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้จัดทำขึ้นด้วยจุดประสงค์ในการค้นหาปัจจัยที่มีผลกระทบต่อการยอมรับการศึกษาแบบออนไลน์ โดยการปรับใช้ทฤษฎี Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior ร่วมกับคุณสมบัติส่วนบุคคลในการเรียนรู้แบบนำตนเอง ใช้วิธีวิจัยเชิงปริมาณโดยการเก็บตัวอย่างจากกลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งหมด 542 คนในประเทศไทย ข้อมูลที่ได้ถูกนำไปประมวลผลเชิงสถิติแบบสมการโครงสร้าง (Structural Equation Modeling) ผลการวิจัยพบว่าตัวแปรหลักทั้งสี่ตัวมีผลกระทบต่อการตั้งใจเลือกศึกษาต่อแบบออนไลน์ อย่างไรก็ตามตัวแปรย่อยหรือมิติย่อยของตัวแปรหลักบางมิติมีผลกระทบในขณะที่บางมิติไม่มีผลกระทบที่เป็นนัยสำคัญดังต่อไปนี้ คุณสมบัติที่เหนือกว่าและความสามารถในการทดลองใช้ของการศึกษาออนไลน์ไม่มีผลกระทบต่อทัศนคติของนักศึกษากลุ่มเป้าหมาย ในขณะที่มีการให้ความสำคัญกับความง่ายในการใช้งาน การเข้ากันได้กับรูปแบบการใช้ชีวิตแบบเดิม และการที่ได้เห็นผู้อื่นศึกษาแบบออนไลน์มาก่อนจะทำให้เกิดทัศนคติเชิงบวกต่อการศึกษาดังกล่าวอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ นอกเหนือจากนี้ พบว่ากลุ่มอ้างอิงระหว่างบุคคลที่มีความสัมพันธ์ใกล้ชิดกันจะมีอิทธิพลทางสังคมซึ่งส่งผลกระทบต่อการตั้งใจเลือกศึกษาแบบออนไลน์ ในขณะที่สื่อมวลชนและกลุ่มอ้างอิงที่ไกลตัวอย่างผู้มีชื่อเสียงและดาราไม่พบว่ามีผลกระทบที่เป็นนัยสำคัญใด ๆ คือ กลุ่มเพื่อน ครอบครัวและคนรัก รวมถึงคนในชุมชนที่อาศัยอยู่แถวหน้างานหรือเจ้านาย ทั้งนี้ ผลวิจัยยังพบว่าปัจจัยที่เป็นความสามารถในการควบคุมความสำเร็จของการศึกษา อันได้แก่ ความมั่นใจในตัวเอง อุปกรณ์การเรียนเชิงเทคโนโลยีและปัจจัยทางการเงินเวลาและอื่น ๆ ก็มีผล

กระทบต่อการตัดสินใจอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ และที่สำคัญ ผลวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่าคุณสมบัติส่วนตัวในการเรียนรู้แบบนำตนเอง มีผลกระทบโดยตรงต่อความตั้งใจที่จะเลือกศึกษาแบบออนไลน์ ซึ่งงานวิจัยและผลการวิจัยนี้เป็นประโยชน์ทั้งในภาคการศึกษาเชิงทฤษฎีและภาคปฏิบัติในเชิงธุรกิจ

คำสำคัญ: การศึกษาแบบออนไลน์, ประเทศไทย, การเรียนทางไกล, ทฤษฎีจำแนกพฤติกรรมตามแผน (DTPB), นวัตกรรม, การยอมรับ, การเรียนรู้แบบนำตนเอง

INTRODUCTION

Driven by key factors including globalization, technological innovation, student demographic shift with increasing number of non-traditional students, and the growth in demand for education due to the need for lifelong learning, skill upgrades and re-skilling, “online education” has transformed from a niche to become the main educational delivery method offering strategic competitive advantages to many educational services providers (Economist Intelligence, 2008; Henshaw, 2008). The changes that occur in higher education are considered as a paradigm shift when courses are provided anytime anywhere with year round operations as a result of technological innovation (Heydenrych, 2002; Virkus & Metsar, 2004; Virkus & Wood, 2004).

With increasing access to network and higher quality bandwidth at lower costs, Thailand possesses an infrastructure ready for online education (www.ntc.or.th). Thailand is still at the very early stage in terms of online education development, however to attract international students, while also retaining the Thai students in the country, distance or online education was mentioned as one of the competitive strategies (Khaopa, 2011). There are 150 higher educational institutions in Thailand, nonetheless only few of them have started to provide formal online courses.

Furthermore, there has been a lack of empirical studies in this area particularly in the context of Thailand (Bhatiasevi, 2011; Teo, Wong, Thammetar, & Chattiwat, 2011). In addition, there is necessity to find a research model suitable for understanding technological innovation adoption or acceptance that take into account of social influences in the social computing paradigm (Baron, Patterson & Harris, 2006; Vannoy & Palvia, 2010). In addition, online education is considered a subset of distance education (Gunasekaran et al., 2002), therefore a framework that is suitable for

understanding online distance online education will be a beneficial add-on to the knowledge in distance education research (Liu & Han, 2010). Consequently, this study aims to fill these gaps, thus providing both practical implications as well as theoretical contributions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online education is defined as the delivery or access to learning experience over the Internet, using all kinds of Internet-based tools from legitimate educational institutions with formal accredited degrees in higher education (Bhattacharye & Sharma, 2007; Gunasekaran et al., 2002; www.onlineeducation.org).

Online education is considered an innovation in the education industry in Thailand since adoption rate is not yet known. Empirical evidence suggests that attitudes towards innovation attributes can affect the consumers’ decision (Taylor & Todd, 1995). According to Rogers (2003), individuals or a unit’s decision to adopt the particular innovation is not an instantaneous act, but rather is a process described as a innovation-decision process, occurring over time which comprises a series of actions starting from obtaining knowledge about an innovation, being persuaded by the perceived characteristics of an innovation, making decision whether to adopt or reject, implementing or using an innovation, and confirming the decision after use.

The perceived characteristics of an innovation is highly important since an individual’s belief of these characteristics or attributes significantly predicts most of the variance in future adoption and use (Rogers, 2003; Vishwanath & Goldhaber, 2003; Warford, 2009). Furthermore, the innovation-decision process which identifies that norm of a social system is one of prior conditions that affect decision-making. In addition, the characteristics of decision-making unit are also influential

factors in the innovation-decision process. According to Rogers (2003), social structure gives regularity and stability to human behavior in a system. It allows people to predict behavior with a certain degree of accuracy and can facilitate or impede the diffusion of innovations by representing a type of information that decreases uncertainty. Furthermore, the propensity to adopt a behavior increases proportionately with the number of reference groups that have adopted it (Young, 2000). Rogers (2003) also suggested that individuals are exposed to the innovation through their network of peers, and this exposure has a cumulatively increasing influence on adoption. Therefore, social influence and personal characteristics of the target adopters are proposed as additional key factors affecting the consumer's decision to adopt a new form of educational service, i.e. online education.

To study innovation adoption at individual decision-making level, researchers including Vishwanath and Goldhaber (2003) recommend integration of DOI and acceptance models. This study adopts DTPB, an acceptance model that integrates DOI theory's innovation attributes in the model developed by Taylor and Todd (1995). The model posits that behavioral intention is determined by three main belief constructs including attitudinal beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs. By decomposing these beliefs into specific dimensions, in-depth understanding of the antecedents can be obtained, along with ability to determine specific factors that impact the adoption intention of the new technology (Ajjan & Hartshorned, 2008; Taylor & Todd, 1995). In addition, the DTPB adds value by proving higher explanatory power than the TPB as demonstrated in the study by Taylor & Todd (1995). The social influence or subjective norms construct that TAM excludes, while suggested to be a significant factor influencing the adoption in the age of networked applications and social computing (Vannoy & Palvia, 2010) is also included in the DTPB model. Moreover, online education adoption behavior as being the context of this study is voluntary in nature. DTPB includes the perceived behavioral control construct to address this perspective, positing that people are motivated in performing certain behaviors if they perceive that they have a greater chance of success, which depends upon their self-efficacy, resources and technology facilitating conditions (Ajzen, 1991; Taylor & Todd, 1995).

In consumers' decision making, factors that contribute to final decision are not limited to cognitive evaluation based on the attributes or characteristics of the products and services, but also include factors such as reference groups and constraints such as time, money, and other resources available to them. Furthermore, many researchers including McVey (2000), Smith et al. (2003), Song and Hill (2007) and Liu and Han (2010) suggested that individual's characteristics of readiness for online learning are related to the preferences and performance in online education. However, there is still a lack of empirical evidence on its effect on intention to adopt online education (Liu & Han, 2010). The researcher, thus, proposes that integrating individual's characteristics of self-directed learning in the research framework to determine its relationship towards the behavioral intention to adopt online education would add to the knowledge base in the field of online education as a subset of distance learning. Based on the rationale discussed, a conceptual framework is then derived and proposed for this study.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Based on DTPB by Taylor and Todd (1995), decomposing the attitudinal, normative and control beliefs structures into various belief dimensions, specific factors associated with the adoption intention towards online education can be uncovered. Thus, specific to this study, these three belief structures are decomposed into dimensions as below. The original DTPB model is also extended to include self-directed learning, from the field of distance education, according to the rationale described previously (Figure 1).

Attitudinal Beliefs

Perceived Relative Advantage refers to the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes (Rogers, 2003). It reflects the consumer perceptions about the innovation's attributes to be superior or more valuable as compared to the existing alternatives (Flight, D'Souza & Allaway, 2011). Advantages can be economic or non-economic (Rogers, 2003). Despite the criticisms about credentials of online edu-

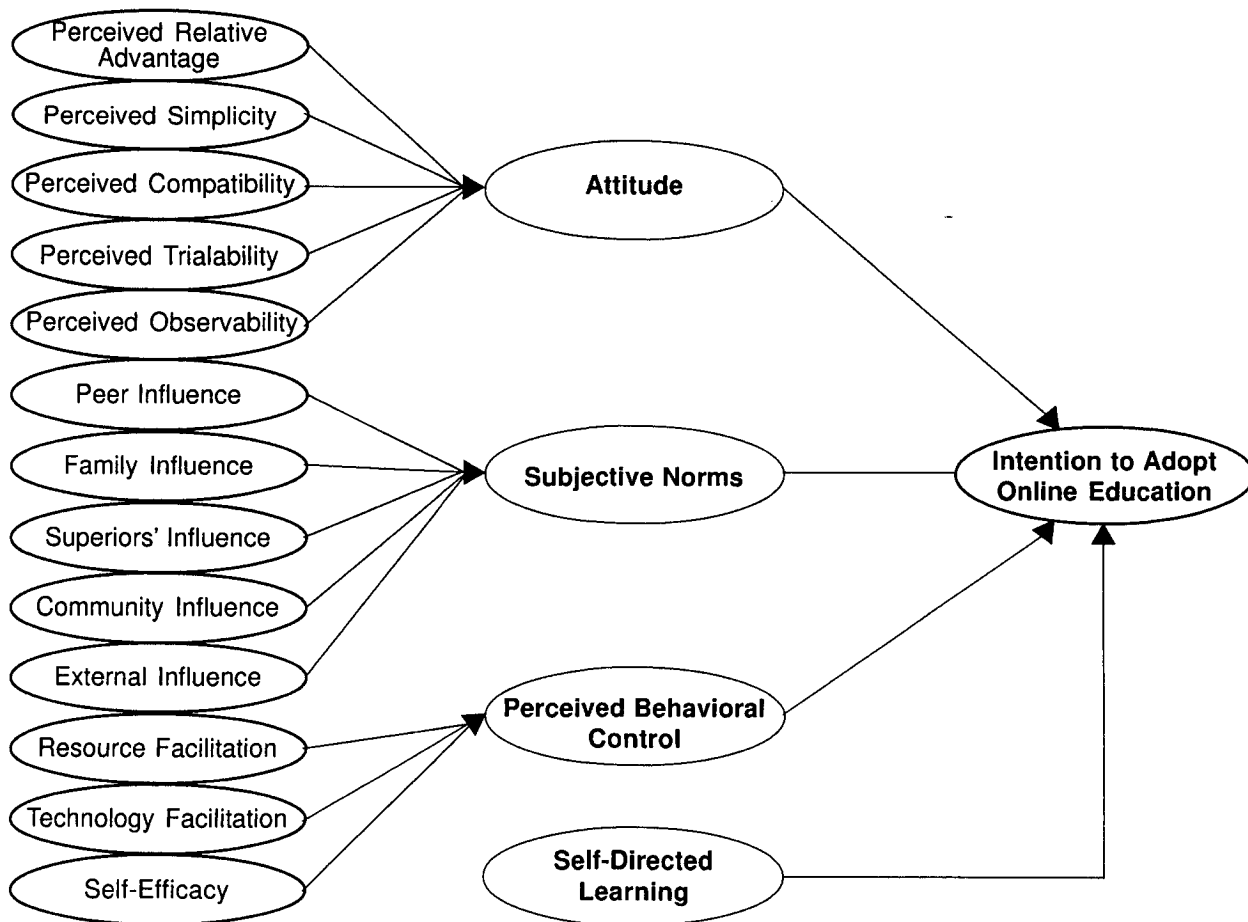


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Study

cation, especially among employers with respect to quality standards and accreditation issues (Tiene, 2002; Virkus & Wood, 2004; Tierney & Findlay, 2009; ICDE, 2009), online education offers several advantages both economic and non-economic that has created a surge in growth worldwide (Henshaw, 2008; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008). Common relative advantages include lower costs of traveling expense, flexibility of time and places, 24 hours 7 days accessibility, ability to review course contents anytime, advancing student-centered learning, encouraging communication and interactivity among students and instructors, and supporting lifelong learning (Gunasekaran et al., 2002; Bray, 2004; Bhattacharya & Sharma, 2007; Economist Intelligence, 2008; Henshaw, 2008). Several research studies in the educational industry such as Jebeile and Reeve (2003), Lu, Liu, and Liao (2005), Janardhanam, Sinha, and Babu (2011) suggested and confirmed that perceived relative advantage and attitude towards educational technology are positively related, which would then lead to behavioral intention to use the technology. This implies that if an individual perceives online

education to be more advantageous, he or she will be likely to form a positive attitude towards it, and in turn, will be more likely to adopt online education. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Ha1.1: Perceived relative advantage is positively related to attitude towards online education adoption.

Perceived simplicity reflects whether an individual perceives an innovation to be easy (not difficult) to understand and use (Rogers, 2003). In the innovation-decision making process, the potential adopters evaluate subjectively whether an innovation presents any risk due to complexity, which will lead to difficulties or failure to satisfy their needs and wants (Flight et al., 2011). In educational technology acceptance context, researchers such as Jebeile and Reeve (2003), Lu, Liu, and Liao (2005), Abdel-Wahab (2008), and Janardhanam, Sinha, and Babu (2011) confirmed that perceived ease of use or simplicity and attitude are positively related, which then lead to the behavioral intention to use the education technol-

ogy. In this study, online education is highly dependent on ICT tools and therefore, it implies that technical attributes of online education may require prior familiarity with web-based technology or an effort to learn (Henshaw, 2008; Parsons, 2010). The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

Ha1.2: Perceived simplicity is positively related to attitude towards online education adoption.

Perceived Compatibility refers to the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters (Rogers, 2003). Flight et al. (2011) described compatibility in terms of how well the innovation fits into the potential adopter's personal life and social structure. The innovation is considered personally compatible if it fits with existing habit, routines, and lifestyle without requiring a person to change much of his/her existing way of life (Flight et al., 2011). Such innovation is considered socially compatible if it is congruent with the adopter's social expectation or reference groups and allows the person to be part of the group or the community (Flight et al., 2011). In the context of online education, it allows flexibility of time and place for people to obtain access to education anytime and anywhere. Therefore, they do not need to change their normal routines such as jobs or family commitment. However, additional workload that require extra efforts and commitment of time as well as efforts in learning online may present some challenges in self-management or self-direction. In addition to the personal compatibility issue, social issue such as expectations from workplace in terms of time management between job and study can create pressure for the potential adopter (Crossman, 2005). Furthermore, degrees received via online education are perceived to be inferior to traditional degrees in general especially when there are comparisons of educational qualifications among employers, implying that online education might be socially incompatible (Osborne & Oberski, 2004; Ashraf, 2009). In the educational technology acceptance context, previous research by Jebeile and Reeve (2003), Lu, Liu, and Liao (2005), Janardhanam, Sinha, and Babu (2011) confirmed that perceived compatibility and attitude are positively related, which then lead to the behavioral intention to use the education technology. The fol-

lowing hypothesis is therefore derived:

Ha1.3: Perceived compatibility is positively related to attitude towards online education adoption.

Perceived trialability is the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis (Rogers, 2003, p.258). Personal trial of an innovation will allow the person to give meaning to the particular innovation, experience and adapt to one's own conditions to reduce any uncertainty or risk which might occur when adopting the innovation (Rogers, 2003). In other words, it is part of information gathering or knowledge stage of an innovation to support decision-making. As suggested by Holak and Lehman (1990) as well as Rogers (2003), new ideas or objects that are divisible, allowing targeted adopters to use part of it without destroying the capabilities of what is not used are generally adopted more rapidly than innovations that are not divisible. Additionally, an innovation may actually be changed during or after its trial to suit individual conditions and improvements to the product can be made, thereby increasing the success rate of the adoption. Rogers (2003) then posited that the trialability of an innovation, as perceived by the members of a social system, is positively related to the rate of adoption. If an innovation can be designed so as to be tried more easily, it will have a more rapid rate of adoption. According to Rogers (2003), innovations can be in the form of hardware and software. In the context of online education, it is considered software which may be difficult to offer for trial. However, there are some researchers who previously examined the relationship between attitudinal belief construct as "trialability" such as Jebeile and Reeve (2003). These authors demonstrated that there was a positive relationship between trialability and attitude, which then positively affected the behavioral intention to use e-learning innovation. The researcher thus proposes the following hypothesis:

Ha1.4: Perceived trialability is positively related to attitude towards online education adoption.

Perceived observability refers to how visible the results are after an innovation is used (Rogers, 2003, Flight et al., 2011). Since consumers make decisions based on information gathering through

communication channels (interpersonal and external), some innovations can be observed and communicated to other people easily, whereas others are difficult to observe or to describe to others. Rogers (2003, p.259) posited that the observability of an innovation, as perceived by members of a social system, is positively related to its rate of adoption. Positive information and knowledge about new products and services obtained from observing others using the innovations can reduce risks and increase potential adopters' confidence to use such products and services, thus making the observability attribute a powerful mechanism to communicate new ideas or new products and services to targeted adopters (Flight et al., 2011). In education technology acceptance research, Jebeile and Reeve (2003) suggested that results demonstrability and visibility (observability in Roger's DOI, 2003) should be considered to increase rate of e-learning system adoption among users. Lu, Liu, and Liao (2005) also suggested that results demonstrability is a significant predictor for intention to use e-learning websites. The researcher then proposes the following hypothesis:

Ha1.5: Perceived observability is positively related to attitude towards online education adoption.

Normative Belief Constructs

The DTPB model posits that opinions of relevant people can influence the decision of an individual to perform certain behavior. Norms are a prior condition affecting an individual's decision in innovation-decision making process (Rogers, 2003). In Thailand, Jairak, Praneetpolgrang and Mekhabunchakij (2009) also found that social factor had a positive significant relationship with behavioral intention to use mobile learning. In similar vein, Bhrommalee (2012) argued that Thai students are likely to use the system if respectable and influential people around them also use the system. Importance of subjective norms on the behavioral decision has been widely agreed by researchers in both IS and education research, though empirical results have been mixed in terms of the effectiveness of its influence on behavior (Kraut et al., 1998; Hsu & Lu, 2004; Nysveen et al., 2005; Lin, 2006).

As applicable to this context and included in the model, relevant people include peers, family

and loved ones, employers or superiors, the community that the decision maker belongs to, and the external reference. Many empirical findings have supported that these reference groups influence the subjective norms (Karahanna et al., 1999; Matti & Jani, 2010; Lin, 2007). However, different referent groups may differ in their opinion towards adoption of online education, and individuals face dilemma in choosing to comply with referents that they are most attracted to (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1987). Based on this rationale, Taylor and Todd's DTPB suggest the decomposing of the subjective norms construct in order to clearly identify influential effect of each referent, as well as preventing the effect of cancelling out each other's affects if combined together. The following hypotheses are therefore derived:

Ha2: Subjective norms are positively related to intention towards online education adoption.

Ha2.1: Peer influence is positively related to subjective norms.

Ha2.2: Family influence is positively related to subjective norms.

Ha2.3: Superiors' influence is positively related to subjective norms.

Ha2.4: Community influence is positively related to subjective norms.

Ha2.5: External influence is positively related to subjective norms.

Control Belief Constructs

Positive motivation will then lead to intention to adopt online education. Taylor and Todd's (1995) study demonstrated that self-efficacy and resource facilitating conditions were significantly related to the perceived behavioral control and were significantly related to behavioral intention to use computer resource centers by students. In Thailand's higher education, Jairak, Praneetpolgrang and Mekhabunchakij (2009) studied factors affecting the usage intention of mobile learning, and the results showed that facilitating conditions have a significant positive relationship with behavioral intention to use mobile learning. Bhrommalee (2012) also conducted a study to determine factors influencing Thai students' decision towards e-learning adoption, and the results showed that one of the key factors was facilitating conditions. The author concluded that students are

likely to adopt e-learning when there exist organizational and technical infrastructure readiness with support and assistance provided for them when needed. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are therefore proposed:

Ha3: Perceived behavioral control is positively related to intention towards online learning adoption.

Ha3.1: Self-efficacy is positively related to perceived behavioral control.

Ha3.2: Resource facilitation is positively related to perceived behavioral control.

Ha3.3: Technology facilitation is positively related to perceived behavioral control.

Self-Directed Learning

According to Smith et al. (2003), self-directed learning or self-management of learning is defined as the extent to which an individual feels he or she is self-disciplined and can engage in autonomous learning. The need for self-direction or self-management of learning is an important trait in learners identified throughout the distance education and resource-based flexible learning literature (Evans, 2000; Smith et al, 2003; Warner et al, 1998). Since online education is considered a kind of distance education, it is expected that a person’s level of self-directed learning attributes will have a positive relationship with his or her behavioral intention to adopt online education (Smith et al., 2003). Evidence was found as in the study by Smith (2005) on the learning preferences and readiness for online learning. Consistent results were found in the study by Wang et al (2009) that self-directed learning positively affects the behavioral intention to adopt mobile learning. According to Fischer and Sugimoto (2006), cultural dimensions may be related to the self-directed learning capability. In the Eastern collectivist and high power-distance culture such as Japan and China, students tend to leave the authority of the group to powerful persons and expect the classroom to be led by a respected teacher. As such, it is valuable to validate in the collectivist culture of Thailand, whether self-directed learning will be related to intention to adopt online education. Self-directed learning reflects the state of readiness in terms of internal motivation, the strengths or weaknesses of motivation that can

deter or propel the intention to perform the behavior, which is adopting online education in this study (Greener, 2003; Smith et al., 2003; Dodor & Rana, 2009). The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

Ha4: Self-Directed Learning is positively related to intention towards online education adoption.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative research method with self-administered questionnaires to collect primary data from respondents. The target population is Thai people in Thailand, both male and female, who are currently pursuing undergraduate degrees in their final semester before graduation, as well as those who have completed undergraduate degrees, with the opportunities to pursue post-graduate degrees in the future.

Using a convenience sampling method for data collection, self-administered questionnaires were distributed to respondents in organizations and universities around Changwattana area in Bangkok, Thailand in June, 2012. The area is a center for public organizations and there is one private university and one public Open University located these.

Measurement items adapted for this study have been developed and tested empirically by various researchers in the past. The forward and back-translation (English-Thai) processes have been employed in order to maintain the content validity of the instrument at a conceptual level across different cultures (Beaton, Bombadier, Guillemin & Ferraz, 2000). Additionally, the measurement items are refined after the pretest results to ensure reliability. In sum, all variables have reliability scores ranging from .676 to .925 representing reliability of the instrument (Maholtra, 2007).

Table 1 illustrates the sources from which the questionnaires has been adapted and the pretest results using Cronbach’s Alpha.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A total of 600 self-administered questionnaires were distributed in Bangkok, Thailand using convenience sampling technique. Of these, 542 re-

Table 1: Measurement Items and Pretest Results (Cronbach's Alpha)

Variables	Adapted From	# of Items (Original)	# of Items (Retained) Alpha	Pretest Cronbach's
Attitude	Taylor & Todd (1995)	4	4	.856
Perceived Relative Advantage	Moore & Benbasat (2001)	4	4	.818
Perceived Simplicity	Moore & Benbasat (2001), Dearing (2007)	4	4	.870
Perceived Compatibility	Moore & Benbasat (2001)	4	4	.830
Perceived Observability	Moore & Benbasat (2001), Lee, Hsieh, & Hsu (2011)	13	3	.769
Perceived Trialability	Moore & Benbasat (2001), Lee, Hsieh, & Hsu (2011)	3	3	.676
Subjective Norms	Taylor and Todd (1995)	3	3	.683
Peer Influence	Taylor and Todd (1995)	4	4	.911
Family Influence	Teo & Pok (2003)	3	3	.878
Superiors' Influence	Taylor & Todd (1995)	2	2	.925
Community Influence	Adapted from Taylor & Todd (1995)	2	2	.836
External Influence	Perdersen & Nysveen (2007) Bhattacharjee (2000).	2	2	.844
Perceived Behavioral Control	Taylor & Todd (1995)	3	3	.819
Self-Efficacy	Taylor & Todd (1995)	6	6	.873
Technology Facilitation	Taylor & Todd (1995)	4	4	.783
Resource Facilitation	Taylor & Todd (1995)	4	4	.862
Self-Directed Learning	Smith (2005)	7	7	.868

sponses were obtained and valid, which accounted for a 90.33 percent response rate.

Demographics Profile of the Respondents

Among 542 respondents, 329 respondents (60.7 percent) have completed a Bachelor's degree, whereas the remaining 213 (39.3 percent) of them are currently pursuing a Bachelor degree in their final semester. With respect to age range, more than half of the respondents (314 respondents or 57.9 percent) were in the age range of 18-30 years old. The age range between 41-50 years old comprised 12 percent and 0.7 percent was in the age group of over 50 years old. In terms of family income, the majority group comprised of 141 respondents (26%) who had family income ranging from 30,001 to 40,000 Baht per month.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this study, the chi-square statistics (CMIN/DF) for the measurement model is 2.611 and yielded 2.460 value for the structural equation model. Therefore, both measurement model and the structural equation model are considered an acceptable fit based on the relative/normed chi-square statistics (CMIN/DF). RMSEA values for measurement model and structural equation model are 0.055 and 0.052, respectively. Therefore, both measurement model and the structural equation model in this study are considered acceptable fit based on the RMSEA values. The statistics for incremental fit indices include TLI, NFI, IFI, and CFI for both measurement model and the structural equation model yielded value ranging from 0.729 to 0.852. Based on Ho (2006), the value range from 0 (indicating the model is no better than the null model) to 1 (indicating a perfect fit model). In this study, it is therefore considered an acceptable fit model (Table 2)

Table 2: Fit Statistics of the Measurement and Structural Equation Models

Goodness-of-Fit Measures	Recommended Value	Measurement Model	Structural Equation
CMIN/DF	≤ 3.00	2.611	2.460
RMSEA	< 0.1	0.055	0.052
TLI	> 0.9	0.813	0.830
NFI	> 0.9	0.765	0.773
IFI	> 0.9	0.841	0.852
CFI	> 0.9	0.838	0.850

Hypotheses Testing

Path analysis results are illustrated in figure 2 below. The first group measures attitude its sub-variables Among the five attitudinal belief variables, three are statistically significantly and positively related to the attitude towards online education, including perceived simplicity ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05$), perceived compatibility ($\beta = 0.43, p < 0.001$), and perceived observability ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.001$). In contrast, perceived relative advantage and perceived trialability were not found to have any statistically significant relationship with attitude towards online education. However, the relationship between attitude towards online education and adoption intention are also strongly and positively significant with predictive power of 31 percent ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$). The second group of independent variables is subjective norms or social influences. This is divided into two main referent

groups, which include interpersonal influences (peer, superiors/employer, family/loved ones, and community influences) and external influences. These referent groups are decomposed into sub-variables under subjective norms. The results shown in the path model indicate that three out of four interpersonal influences are statistically significantly and positively related to the subjective norms, including peer ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$), family ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.01$), and community ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.001$) influences. On the other hand, superiors/ employer was not found to be statistically significantly related to the subjective norms. Moreover, the external influences did not show any significant relationship with subjective norms. Furthermore, the relationship between subjective norms and adoption intention towards online education were found to be statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ level with predictive power of 17 percent ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.001$). All of sub-variables under subjective

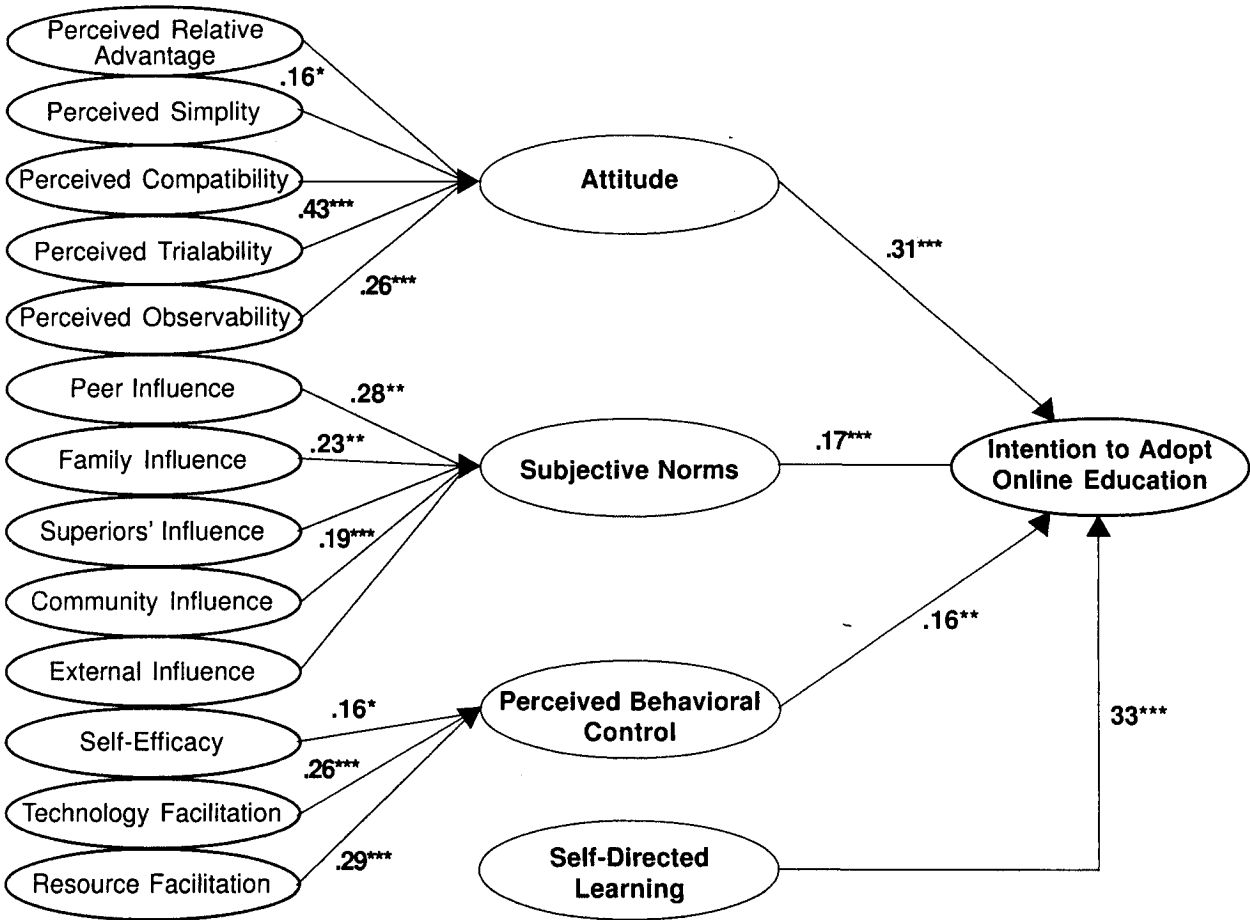


Figure 2: Path Analysis of the Structural Equation Model

*** $p < 0.001$, coefficient is statistically significant at 0.001 confidence level

** $p < 0.01$, coefficient is statistically significant at 0.01 confidence level

* $p < 0.05$, coefficient is statistically significant at 0.05 confidence level

norms can explain 78 percent variance with residual value of 0.22 or 22 percent variance unexplained. With respect to the third group of independent variables, all of the three sub-variables under the control beliefs construct (perceived behavioral control) were statistically significantly and positively related to perceived behavioral control, and the perceived behavioral control then was statistically significantly related to the adoption intention towards online education. The path model has shown that direct linkage between self-efficacy and perceived behavioral control were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$) with predictive power of 16 percent ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). Resource facilitations can explain approximately 29 percent variance ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$), while the technology facilitations can explain approximately 26 percent variance ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$) for the perceived behavioral control. Consequently, the perceived behavioral control were found to be statistically significantly and positively related to the adoption intention towards online education with ability to explain approximately 16 percent at $p < 0.01$ confidence level ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$). Lastly, the fourth main variable included in the study is self-directed learning. The path results showed a strong and significant positive relationship between self-directed learning and adoption intention towards online education ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$).

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results imply that potential Thai students for online education will make decision by taking into account all main factors included in this study with variations in terms of strength of influence.

With regards to attitudinal belief components, the results indicate that Thai students will be likely to adopt online education if they perceive it to be simple, compatible, as well as if they see their references studying online. This might be attributable to difficulty in comparing between online and offline education due to little availability or exposure to online education in Thailand, thus perceived relative advantage and trailability may be ignored. The perceived observability, which was not suggested as an influential attribute, was found to be significant in this study. This implies that Thai students want to have references who support their deci-

sion-making. The result might be related to Thai culture and the concept of “face” (Lee & Green, 1991) or “image” (Moore & Benbasat, 1995). Thai people want to maintain social status, therefore, seeing others engaging in an action before can reduce the social risk and protect them from losing face (Hirunyawipada & Paswan, 2006; Flight et al., 2011).

Furthermore, subjective norms were found significantly related to the adoption intention towards online education. The results are congruent with the findings from the case study by Bhrommalee (2012), which found that Thai students would intend to use e-learning if they are convinced that respectable and influential people around them want them to use the system. Thai people have a strong sense of collectivism, according to Hofstede (2001), the dependency between a person and in-groups is therefore stronger as compared to out-groups. Additionally, Burn and Thongprasert (2005) suggested, Thais tend to hold views and opinions respecting the group and rely on the spirit and moral support from in-groups in their decisions. Thai people are also characterized as high in uncertainty avoidance, i.e. they feel threatened by ambiguous situations and try to avoid challenging experiences (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, each individual Thai would try to restrain his/her own interest or desire in situations where there is the potential for discomfort or conflict, and where there is a need to maintain a pleasant relationship (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995). These cultural traits explain how subjective norms or social influences are significantly related to the Thai students’ decision on adopting online education.

Lifelong learning and skills upgrading has driven full-time employed people to take distance online education (Osborned & Oberski, 2004). However, credentials of online education and employers’ perception as inferior to classroom on-campus education have been issues related to the adoption (Chorpothong & Charmonman, 2004; Preston, 2011). Thanasankit and Corbit (2000) suggested that it is typical to see Thai subordinates accepting their superiors’ decisions and carrying out work unquestioningly. This study, however demonstrated that superiors’ influence was not found to be an influential factor, which may be attributable to the voluntary nature of students’ decision making (Baron, Patterson & Harris, 2006). In addition, the results may be attributable to the

fact that almost 40 percent of the samples are currently studying, and therefore employer or superiors' influence may not yet be accountable for their decision. The findings indicate that employer's perception of online education as inferior or less credential might not affect the decision for online education by potential Thai adopters.

Most importantly, community influence was found to be significantly related to the subjective norms, and consequently is related to decision to adopt online education. The findings may also be explained in terms of cultural aspect of the diffusion of innovation process since culture consists of value system of a particular society (Dubois, 1972). Since members of the community share common understandings or societal norms, and cultural beliefs determine practice or acceptable behavior in the community (Dubois, 1972), cultural values and norms underlying the system could influence community's member decision making, thus impacting the success as well as the rate of innovation diffusion in the community.

Previous empirical studies on learning have evidenced that an individual with high self-efficacy would perform better since self-efficacious students would have high level of effort in learning, are more persistent, and have lower adverse emotional reactions when they encounter difficulties (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000; Cameron & Kirkman, 2010). With respect to Thailand's educational context, Bhatiasavi (2011) found that computer self-efficacy had a significant effect on students' perceived ease of use, but was not significantly related to their intention to use the system. This study found significant relationship between self-efficacy and perceived behavioral control, which indirectly affects the behavioral intention to adopt online education. With respect to the facilitating conditions, both resources and technologies, results showed significant positive relationship with perceived behavioral control. Therefore, the results are in line with the findings from the original DTPB model by Taylor and Todd (1995). Congruent with the findings, Bhrommalee (2012) also found facilitating conditions to be a strong predictor of students' behavioral intention to adopt e-learning system in his case study of a Thai university. Therefore, students would agree to use e-learning system if both organizational and technical infrastructures in the university are ready to support and assist them in using the system (Jairak et al., 2009; Bhrommalee,

2012).

Liu, Han, and Li (2010) confirmed that self-directed learning would lead to the willingness to adopt m-learning as well as other online learning. Wang, Wu, and Wang (2009) found evidence that self-directed learning plays a critical role in acceptance of mobile learning. The findings imply that people with high autonomous learning abilities, regardless of the medium of access will be more likely to adopt online education. This results also confirm the validity of self-directed learning proposed by Smith et al (2003) to predict behavioral intention towards online distance education.

Implications

Findings on consumers' perception specific to online education adoption worldwide, as well as Thailand in particular, due to its newness, (Bhatiasavi, 2011; Teo, Wong, Thammetar, & Chattiwat, 2011) should facilitate stakeholders to formulate strategies to improve the country's competitiveness in the education industry. The findings suggest that policy makers should issue clear policies when implementing online education for their country or institutions with regards to provisioning resources and technological readiness. For international marketers, the business model and services of educational institutions may be designed by taking into account local culture with the right combination of independent learning and social interaction among peers and instructors. Acceptance among interpersonal networks or groups will be more essential than personal cognitive evaluation of the services and external references. Therefore, marketing communication programs, can be designed to leverage the word-of-mouth communication strategy, engage the target students' personal network including peers, family and loved ones, and the community in the marketing activities or programs and promotion. Technology providers can design online education systems with functions and features that incorporate simplicity for usage, compatibility of the existing lifestyle without too many changes to the students' routines, ease of use to create positive experience and reduce workload or effort in learning to use the system.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The scope of the study is limited to respondents in Bangkok only; the results therefore may not be generalized to the whole of Thailand. Future research may be extended to cover other factors including reputation of the university and cultural traits, which have not been included in this study, but are believed to influence the behavioral decision based on findings. Cross-national validation of the study is recommended for researchers interested in consumer behavior theory by comparing between different countries' cultural traits. In addition, since community influence, a new addition in this study, is geographically bound, future research may validate the findings by extending the definition of this particular variable to include non-physical community such as sports and other leisure clubs, virtual community, and other social communities.

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THE INFLUENCE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ON BEHAVIORAL RESPONSE IN LIFESTYLE CENTERS IN BANGKOK

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the influence of customer experience on consumer behavior towards lifestyle centers in Bangkok using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. In addition, the influences of the stimuli such as mall environment, customer-to-customer interaction, and mall tenant mix (variety), on behavioral response (revisit intention and desire to stay) were found in this study. A self-administered questionnaire was employed to collect data from customers who had visited lifestyle centers in Bangkok area in the period during which the study was conducted. The survey period was during January 2013, and 492 questionnaires were used to analyze the data by using a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. Results show that affective dimension of customer experience has the greatest influence on the revisit intention and the desire to stay. Mall tenant mix (variety) has the greatest influence on the affective dimension of customer experience, followed by store social interaction, and the ambient factor. Customer-to-customer interaction also influences both the revisit intention and the desire to stay but has a lesser influence on the desire to stay than the ambient factor.

Key words: Customer experience, Environmental stimuli, Social interaction, Tenant mix, Revisit intention

บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์หลักของการวิจัยนี้คือ การสำรวจพฤติกรรมผู้บริโภคต่อไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ในกรุงเทพฯ โดยใช้แบบจำลอง สิ่งเร้า-การรับรู้-การตอบสนองต่อสิ่งเร้า รวมทั้งอิทธิพลของสิ่งเร้า อาทิเช่น สิ่งแวดล้อมของไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างลูกค้า และความหลากหลายของร้านค้า ก็ยังส่งผลกระทบต่อพฤติกรรมของลูกค้าซึ่งได้แก่ ความตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์และความประสงค์ที่จะอยู่ที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ แบบสอบถามด้วยตนเองได้ถูกแจกจ่ายเพื่อรวบรวมข้อมูลจากลูกค้าที่เคยมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ในกรุงเทพฯ และช่วงเวลาในการแจกแบบสอบถามอยู่ในเดือนมกราคม ปี 2556 แบบสอบถามจำนวน 492 ฉบับ นำมาใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยแบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง ผลการศึกษาพิสูจน์ได้ว่า ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลมากที่สุดต่อความตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์และ ความประสงค์ที่จะอยู่ที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ได้แก่ประสบการณ์ด้านความรู้สึกของลูกค้า ยิ่งกว่านั้นความหลากหลายของร้านค้าก็มีอิทธิพลอย่างมากต่อประสบการณ์ด้านความรู้สึกของลูกค้า รองลงมาได้แก่การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมและสภาพแวดล้อมของไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ ทั้งนี้การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างลูกค้าก็ยังส่งผลต่อความตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์และความประสงค์ที่จะอยู่ที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ของลูกค้า อย่างไรก็ตามสภาพแวดล้อมของไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ส่งผลต่อความประสงค์ที่จะอยู่ที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์ของลูกค้ามากกว่าปัจจัยด้านการมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างลูกค้า

คำสำคัญ: ประสบการณ์ของลูกค้า, สิ่งเร้าจากสิ่งแวดล้อม, การมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคม, ความหลากหลายของร้านค้า, ความตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาที่ไลฟ์สไตล์เซ็นเตอร์

INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, the retail industry is one of the most important industries due to its continuous

growth. The Retail Sales Index rose from 178.73 in 2010 to 186.30 in 2011, and then to 220.48 in 2012 (Bank of Thailand, 2013). The community mall, the so-called lifestyle center, is popular and

has been growing rapidly in Thailand since 2011 (Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, 2012). Century 21 Research Company estimated that in the next few years, the area occupied by lifestyle centers will be greater than 150,000 square meters, with more retail centers entering the market (Century 21 Thailand, 2011).

Colliers International Thailand Research (2008:2) identified that a lifestyle center is designed to meet the changes in customers' needs and lifestyles. The mall/center offers a casual feeling where customers can shop, drink coffee or eat snacks and dine in a relaxing atmosphere, and is normally located in the centre of community areas or near residential projects, such as J Avenue and The Crystal, in Bangkok. Levy and Weitz (2009) pointed out the importance of lifestyle centers as opposed to other types of mall because customers visit lifestyle centers 2.5 times more often than other types of mall, and spend around 50 percent more in the United States market. Verhoef et al. (2009) also pointed out that creating a better customer experience is considered as the main objective for a retailer. Even though some researchers such as Berry, et al. (2002) acknowledged the importance of customer experience, they only provided some suggestions for improving managerial outcomes. Verhoef et al. (2009) identified the scarcity of academic research on the customer experience construct and asked that more research to clarify the concept of customer experience be conducted.

Thai retailers are also aware of improving the variety of products/services and strive to offer an impressive experience to customers when they shop at a retail mall. In particular, the retail format called "lifestyle center" focuses on the concept of fun shopping experience trends and aims to be a better place for shopping for their customers (Watchravesringkan & Punyapiroje, 2011). However, there is a lack of research into customer experience in the lifestyle center format, especially in Thailand. Social interaction at malls is the new lifestyle of Thais that should be an important factor for retailers to consider in offering a variety of products/services and experiences. Generally, Thai people visit malls with their family. Malls are the place for them to eat, interact with each other and/or go shopping with their family. Researchers also have stated that social interaction could be a reason for people to visit a service provider or re-

tail mall because they like to interact with other people at that location. It could be a reason for customers to choose one service provider or retail mall over other places (Moore, Moore & Capella, 2005). However, there are limited empirical studies about social interaction (Verhoef et al., 2009).

The first purpose of this study is to examine the relative influence of affective dimension of customer experience on behavioral response when shopping at a lifestyle center. The second purpose is to determine customer stimuli influencing affective dimension of customer experience, and behavioral response when shopping at a lifestyle center. The third purpose is to investigate customer-to-customer interaction influencing affective dimension of customer experience, and behavioral response when shopping at a lifestyle center. The last purpose is to examine the impact of tenant mix (variety) on affective dimension of customer experience, and behavioral response when customers shop at a lifestyle center.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer experience

The customer experience concept was investigated by Schmitt (1999) who referred to the importance of sensory experience in both service and retail businesses. The five modes can be named as sense, feel, think, act, and relate, respectively. Creating engaging and lasting experiences with the customers is a new trend in the marketing field (Berry et al., 2002; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999). Ismail et al. (2011) defined customer experience as "emotions provoked, sensations felt, knowledge gained and skills acquired through active involvement with the firm pre, during and post consumption". Experiences are broad and complicated because they consist of several types of experiences. Researchers used the term "consumption experience" for general business. The term "service experience" was used in bank and bar service industries in the study of Hui and Bateson in 1991. The term "product experience" was subsequently used when customers purchased products such as boats and electronic guitars. After that, the term "shopping experience" was used by Babin et al. (1994) and Babin and Darden (1995) in the retail industry. During the end of 1990s to the begin-

ning of 2000s, the majority of studies in both service and retail industries used the term “customer experience”, such as the work of Pine and Gilmore (1998), Schmitt (1999), Berry et al. (2002). Recently, the term “customer experience” has also been used in retail settings in the work of Ismail et al. (2011). This study uses the term “customer experience” because it is also conducted in a retail setting, and the term “customer experience” is most used nowadays. It is also recognized that customer experience overlaps with shopping, service, product, and consumption experiences both in retail and service settings.

Affective Dimension

The affective dimension was first defined by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) who asserted that the affective dimension refers to feelings or emotions such as fun, enjoyment and pleasure. It can be considered as hedonic consumption based on the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one’s experience with products. Regarding affective dimension, researchers emphasized emotion (Babin et al. 1994; Hui & Bateson, 1991; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Therefore, this study implies that the affective dimension can be considered as emotion, such as pleasure or enjoyment and arousal or excitement (Babin et al., 1994; Babin & Darden, 1995) in accordance with the feelings of each customer when shopping at a lifestyle center.

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm in a retail context demonstrates the relationship between the physical environment at malls (environmental stimulus) as an antecedent or independent variable, the internal dimensions (organism) as a mediator, and behavioral response as the dependent variable. Donovan and Rossiter (1982) first tested the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm. They found that environmental factors had positive relationships with emotional states and responses. The studies of Baker, Grewal and Parasuraman (1994), Baker et al. (2002), and Wakefield and Baker (1998) similarly classified stimuli into three main factors: social factors (relationship between customer and employees), design factors (visual senses such as decoration), and

ambient factors (non-visual senses such as temperature and music). This study used the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory which includes the three stimuli (ambient factor, design factor, and social factor), and has adopted the S-O-R paradigm as the main theory to explain the relationship between customer experience and behavioral response. This is due to its wide acceptance by many researchers and its application in both service and retail settings (Baker et al., 1992; Bitner, 1992; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982).

Antecedents of Customer Experience

Antecedents of customer experience consist of mall appearance (environment), customer-to-customer interaction, and mall tenant mix (variety). Mall appearance (environment) is illustrated by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory.

Mall Appearance (Environment)

Mall appearance or environmental factors consisted of ambient factor, design factor and social factors. Bitner (1992) described ambient conditions as factors such as temperature, lighting, and music that tend to affect non-visual senses (Baker et al., 2002:121). Bitner (1992) assessed space and function (similar to design; equipment, furnishings, colors) which tend to affect visual senses (Baker et al., 2002:121). Fiore and Kim (2007) stated that the social factor in malls consist of the interactions between staff and customers. Baker et al. (1992) showed that friendly employees in a mall had a positive influence on customers in terms of both arousal and pleasure.

Customer-to-customer Interaction (friends, family and other customers)

Customer-to-customer interaction has gained the attention of some researchers (Moore et al., 2005) because it is an important factor in the customer experience to increase satisfaction and loyalty (Bitner et al., 1990). Tauber (1972) pointed out that people also shop for social reasons. Social factors are characterized as social experiences and communication with other people who have a similar interest, such as peer group attraction.

Mall tenant mix (variety) is defined as the number of tenants in mall, such as restaurants, entertainment services, apparel shops, and technological shops to satisfy consumers when shopping at a retail outlet (Teller & Elms, 2010). It outlines the success of a specific mall because a proper tenant mix can attract more loyal customers (Teller & Reutterer, 2008; Yiu & Xu, 2012).

Dependent Variables of Customer Experience

The dependent variable of customer experiences in this study is behavioral response and consists of desire to stay, and revisit intention. It can be considered as approach behavior or the behavior of customer to stay and shop at the mall (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996). In this study behavioral response includes both the intention to shop, and the desire to stay longer at the lifestyle center (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996).

In the initial phase, this study conducted an exploratory research to provide useful information and enhance understanding about beliefs, thinking, feelings, experience and the behavioral response of customers in the lifestyle center format. The personal interviews were conducted without making prior appointments with the respondents. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30-50 minutes for each person. The personal interviews were conducted with ten tenants at the lifestyle centers in Bangkok to learn about their opinions and experience about the mall environment and customers. Next, personal interviews were also conducted with 20 customers in Bangkok to learn about their shopping experiences. The interviews were conducted during November 28, 2011 to December 4, 2011 at some lifestyle centers including The Promenade, Amorini, The Nine, Punya Village, Nawamin Festival Walk, and Nawamin City Avenue with both tenants and customers. The results of the interviews are discussed in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of In-depth Interview

Factors	Quotation
Customer-to-customer Interaction (Friends)	"I always come to this lifestyle center to meet friends at some restaurants" (Interview with customer)
	"I only come here because of my friends. They want to eat and meet at the famous restaurant name "Wine I love you" (Interview with customer)
	"Normally, my customers come here to interact with their friends. Sometimes, they come together but sometimes they come and wait for their friends. Some customers come and interact with me. Now, we are friends". (Interview with owner of coffee shop)
	"Most of my customers come here with their friends. They can have a happy time staying together. I think that they enhance their relationships here". (Interview with sales people of ice-cream shop)
Mall tenant variety	"Normally, I come here with my husband and son. My son learns piano at Siam Yamaha in this lifestyle center. I do some shopping at the supermarket and small apparel shops while I am waiting for my son. Then, we will have lunch together at some restaurants here" (Interview with customer)
	"I come here to eat Japanese food. This lifestyle center has enough Japanese restaurants for me" (Interview with customer)
	"I usually go to eat at S&P, McDonald's, or MK restaurant. This lifestyle center has all the standard shops that I want" (Interview with customer)
	"There are suitable numbers of apparel shops here" (Interview with owner of apparel shop2)
Mall's appearance (environment)	"I really like the decoration and design. It makes me feel like I live in Australia" (Interview with customer)
	"The lifestyle center that has a better mall environment attracts more customers to visit" (Interview with owner of apparel shop1)
	"I like the environment here rather than the open market at Tawana" (Interview with owner of apparel shop2)
Affective experience	"I enjoy shopping at the lifestyle center" (Interview with customer)
	"I feel like I can forget some problems/anxieties when I shop here" (Interview with customer)
	"The time spent shopping here is enjoyable" (Interview with customer)
	"My customers have told me that they like to come here because they enjoy spending time here" (Interview with owner of restaurant2)
Desire to stay	"I spent more time at the lifestyle center" (Interview with customer)
	"My customers have told me that they like to come here because they want to spend a longer time with their friends" (Interview with owner of restaurant2)
Revisit intention	"Next time, I will also want to come to the lifestyle center" (Interview with customer)

Source: Developed for this study.

The results of the interviews of both tenants and customers at lifestyle centers are mostly consistent with the literature review with regard to the variables, i.e., mall environment and tenant variety. However, some variables which appeared during the interviews have not been widely investigated in literature, i.e., customer-to-customer interaction. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study consists of three types of variable: antecedents (mall appearance or environment, customer-to-customer interaction, and mall tenant mix or variety); affective dimension of customer experience or mediators; and behavioral response (revisit intention, and desire to stay). Hence, these variables are used to develop a model based on the S-O-R. This study investigates the mall environment as stimuli, customer experience as organism, and behavioral response as customer response. The conceptual framework is illustrated in the following model (see Figure 1).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

PRE-TEST

This study measured the reliability of variables from the data set of the pre-test of 60 respondents. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were acceptable

ranging from 0.74 to 0.91 (see Table 4).

Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Ambient factor (A)	0.74
Design factor (D)	0.93
Store social factor (S)	0.85
Customer-to-customer (CC)	0.89
Mall's tenants mix or Variety (V)	0.82
Affective dimension of customer experience (AF)	0.91
Desire to stay (DS)	0.82
Revisit intention (RI)	0.87

In the pre-test, all constructs obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficients higher than the recommended level of 0.7 (Hair et al., 1998; Nunnally, 1978). Therefore, there was no adjustment in wording after the pre-test in this study because all respondents in the pre-test understood all of the questions in the questionnaire.

In the second phase, a total of 492 respondents participated in this study. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to test how well the measurement variables represent the constructs before analyzing data using the structural equation model (SEM).

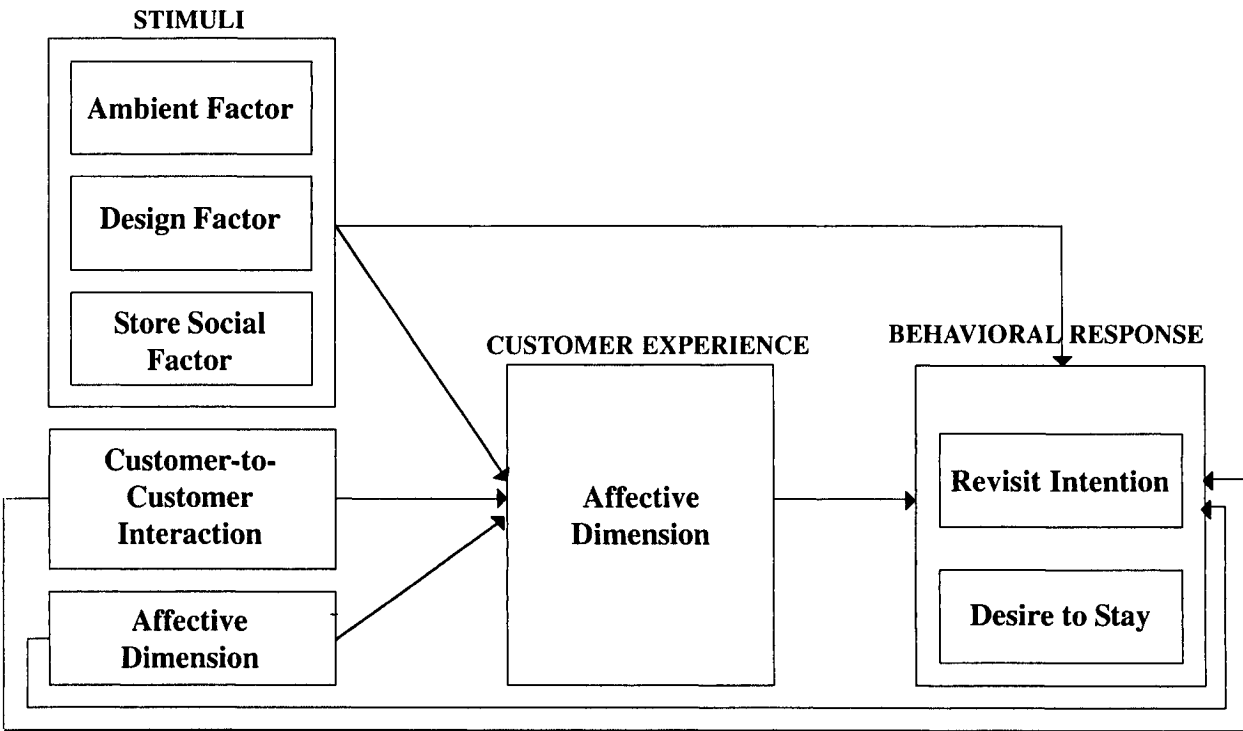


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

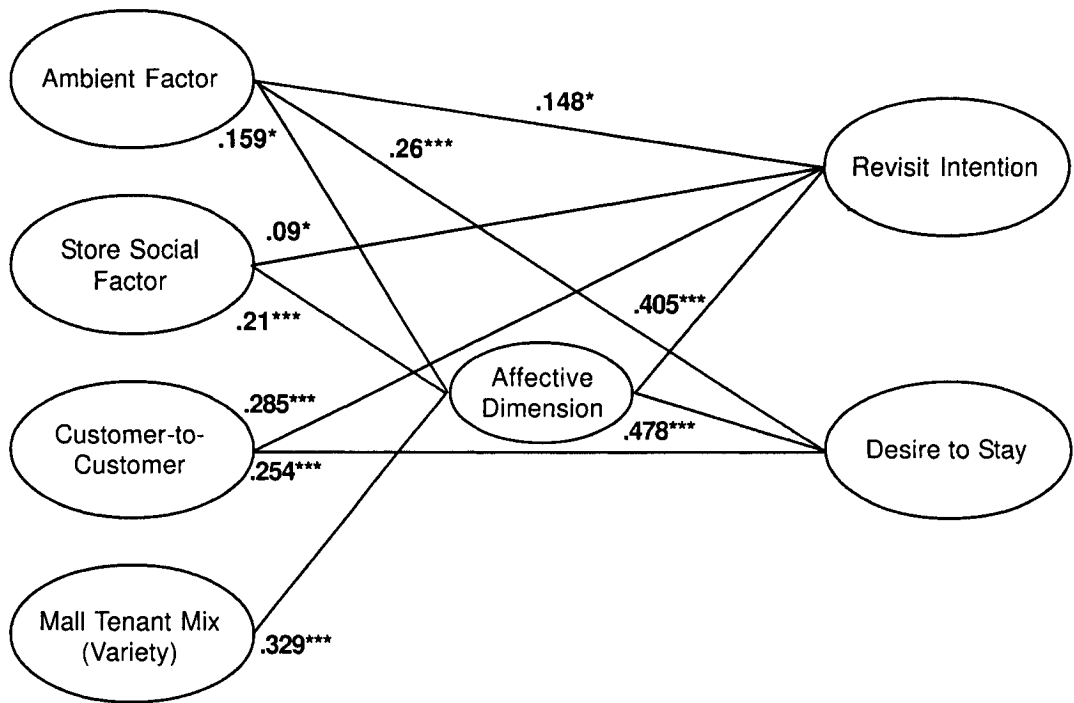


Figure 2: SEM Model with Standardized Loading

Note: $\chi^2/df = 3.384$; $p < 0.001$; NFI = 0.873; RFI = 0.855; IFI = 0.907; TLI = 0.893; CFI = 0.907; RMSEA = .070

FINDINGS

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

The results of the measurement model demonstrate that the chi-square statistic (χ^2/df) is 3.891, $p < 0.001$, and the RMSEA is 0.077. Regarding the rule of thumb, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) should not be greater than 0.1 (Ho, 2006), and the incremental fit indices should be above 0.9 (Hair et al., 2006; Ho, 2006). The statistical criteria for determining goodness-of-fit or the baseline comparisons fit indices illustrated a marginally acceptable fit for the hypothesized model (NFI = 0.835; RFI = 0.816; IFI = 0.872; TLI = 0.856; CFI = 0.872) in this study. To improve the fit of the model, some items with high modification indices (MI) values were removed from the model (Hair et al., 2006). Then, the results of the modified measurement model show that the chi-square statistic (χ^2/df) is 3.166, $p < 0.001$, and the RMSEA is 0.066. The baseline comparisons fit indices illustrated a better fit for the measurement model (NFI = 0.882; RFI = 0.864; IFI = 0.916; TLI = 0.903; CFI = 0.915) than the

original measurement model. Hence, the model fit was improved after deleting four items regarding the baseline comparison fit indices of the proposed model.

Structural Equation Model (SEM).

The results reveal that the chi-square statistic (χ^2/df) is 3.384, $p < 0.001$, and the RMSEA is 0.070. The baseline comparison fit indices illustrated an acceptable fit for the hypothesized model (NFI = 0.873; RFI = 0.855; IFI = 0.907; TLI = 0.893; CFI = 0.907) in this study. The results of hypotheses testing are shown in Table 5.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the ambient factor has a significant and positive influence on the affective dimension. However, design has no influence on the affective dimension and the result of design factor. Another environmental stimulus, store social factor, has an influence only on the affective dimension. This result implies that

Table 5: Hypotheses Test Results

Hypotheses	Hypotheses Test Results
H1: Mall appearance (Environment)→Affective dimension	Supported Not Supported Supported
H1a: Ambient factor→Affective dimension	
H1b: Design factor→Affective dimension	
H1c: Store social factor→Affective dimension	
H2: Customer-to-customer interaction→Affective dimension	Not Supported
H3: Mall Tenant Mix (Variety)→Affective dimension	Supported
H4: Affective dimension→Behavioral Response	Supported Supported
H4a: Affective dimension→Revisit intention	
H4b: Affective dimension→Desire to stay	
H5: Mall appearance (Environment)→Behavioral Response	Supported Not Supported Supported Not Supported Not Supported
H5a1: Ambient factor →Revisit Intention	
H5a2: Design factor → Revisit Intention	
H5a3: Store social factor→Revisit Intention	
H5b1: Ambient factor → Desire to stay	
H5b2: Design factor → Desire to stay	
H7b3: Store social factor→Desire to stay	
H6: Customer-to-Customer Interaction→Behavioral Response	Supported Supported
H6a: Customer-to-Customer Interaction→Revisit Intention	
H6b: Customer-to-Customer Interaction→Desire to stay	
H7: Mall Tenant Mix (Variety)→Behavioral Response	Not Supported Not Supported
H7a: Mall Tenant Mix (Variety)→Revisit Intention	
H7b: Mall Tenant Mix (Variety)→Desire to stay	

store’s social factor or friendly employees in a lifestyle center has a positive influence on customers in terms of affective dimensions (pleasure and arousal). In other words, a store’s social factor helps fulfill customer’s need for enjoyment which also helps customers have a good time and forget their problems (Timothy, 2005). Among mall appearance, mall tenant mix (variety) has the strongest influence on affective dimension.

It is also noticed that the affective dimension has a stronger influence on revisit intention, when compared to the impacts of customer-to-customer interaction, ambient factor, and store social factor. The affective dimension also has a significant positive influence on desire to stay at the lifestyle center, when compared to the impacts of the ambient factor, and customer-to-customer interaction. Therefore, the results provide empirical weight to the importance of generating exciting and pleasant experiences for customers when shopping at lifestyle centers. In other words, this research suggests that the exciting and pleasant shopping environments are more likely to generate repeat visiting, and desire to stay at these centers.

Customer-to-customer interaction also has a significant and positive influence on revisit inten-

tion and the result is consistent with the exploratory study results. Furthermore, the ambient factor such as music provided at the lifestyle center, and customer-to-customer interaction also have significant influence on desire to stay at the lifestyle centers. This result is also consistent with the exploratory study results. The ambient factor has the strongest effect on desire to stay, followed by customer-to-customer interaction. Therefore, it is apparent that only the ambient factor and customer-to-customer interaction have significant and direct influence on desire to stay at the lifestyle centers. Finally, there is no direct and significant impact of mall tenant dimension, on the desire to stay and revisit intention, mediated through the affect dimension.

CONCLUSION

The findings provide important contributions and recommendations to scholars or academics in the retail industry. For theoretical implications, this study extends knowledge of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory to clarify the relationship between environmental factors (stimulus),

the affective dimension (organism), and revisit intention (response). The results of this study illustrate that the affective dimension is mediating between mall environmental factors, such as the ambient factor and store social factor, and behavioral response (revisit intention and desire to stay). To be specific, the findings in this study suggest that the ambient factor is an important factor that influences the affective dimension, revisit intention, and desire to stay. Wakefield and Baker (1998) found that three environmental stimuli factors (ambient factor, design factor, and store social factor) influence the affective dimension. However, the results of this study indicate only two environmental stimuli factors (ambient factor, and store social factor) influence the affective dimension of customer experience. The results of this study also clarify that customer-to-customer interaction has a significant and positive influence on both revisit intention and desire to stay but does not have any significant relationship with the affective dimension of customer experience.

This study also provides useful knowledge for managers about the importance of the affective dimension toward behavioral response (revisit intention, and desire to stay). To enhance the affective dimension, managers should also improve the ambience and mall tenant mix (variety). The findings suggest that managers should pay attention to building a better environment at the lifestyle center such as music, lighting, and temperature because it will also enhance the consumers' desire to stay longer. Specifically, it is evident from this study that managers might not have to spend a lot of money on fancy design but should focus more on the ambient factor. This study verified that building a good environment and maintaining a pleasant environment (through factors such as music, lighting, and temperature) can make customers feel good, and encourage revisit intention. Finally, lifestyle centers should consider improving the store social factor by increasing the number of employees in lifestyle centers.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRICE DEALS, PERCEIVED QUALITY, AND BRAND EQUITY FOR A HIGH INVOLVEMENT PRODUCT

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of price deals and perceived quality on the brand equity in the context of brand knowledge and brand associations. This study extends the previous literature on brand equity by focusing on how a consumer perceives brand in high involvement products. Eighteen face-to-face interviews were conducted to identify the product category for a high involvement product. Three hundreds and eighty-six sets of questionnaires were usable and completed. The findings supported that price deals and perceived quality are important factors which create the associations that consumers make with a brand in order to create brand equity.

Keywords: Brand, Brand Equity, Brand Associations, Perceived Quality, Price Promotions

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาผลกระทบของราคาที่เปลี่ยนแปลงตามกิจกรรมการตลาดและคุณภาพของสินค้าต่อการรับรู้ค่าของตราสินค้าของผู้บริโภค โดยมุ่งเน้นไปที่กลุ่มสินค้าที่มีระดับความเกี่ยวข้องกับผู้บริโภคสูง (High Involvement Products) จากการศึกษากลุ่มตัวอย่างที่นำมาวิเคราะห์จำนวน 386 คน พบว่า ราคาสินค้า (บริการ) ที่เปลี่ยนแปลงเนื่องมาจากกิจกรรมทางการตลาด และการรับรู้คุณภาพของสินค้า มีผลต่อความผูกพันของผู้บริโภคต่อตราสินค้า (Brand Associations) และความรู้ของผู้บริโภคต่อตราสินค้า (Brand Knowledge) ซึ่งส่งผลต่อการรับรู้คุณค่าของตราสินค้า และคุณค่าของตราสินค้าในความคิดของผู้บริโภค อย่างมีนัยสำคัญ

คำสำคัญ: ตราสินค้า, คุณค่าตราสินค้า, การรับรู้คุณภาพสินค้า, ราคาสินค้า, กลยุทธ์ราคา, โปรโมชัน

INTRODUCTION

Brand, as an asset of a firm or company, does not serve only an identification purpose, but also offers the firm legal protection for unique features or aspects of the product or service. Brand also offers additional value to the firm performance (Simon & Sullivan, 1993). In addition, brand is a valuable factor that influences consumer behavior, and provides the security of sustained future revenues (Hunt & Keaveney, 1994; Kevin & John, 1999; Sloot & Verhoef, 2008). Therefore, brands have an enormous impact on both marketing performances, and financial performances (Baldauf, Cravens, & Binder, 2003; Rajagopal, 2009; Rust, Lemon, & Zeithaml, 2004; Simon & Sullivan, 1993).

Previous literature has studied the relationship

between marketing activities and brand equity (Keller, 1993; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). For example, Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) found that a higher advertising budget contributed to higher levels of brand equity. However, they did not study whether different marketing activities influence each brand differently. In other words, they did not investigate whether particular marketing mix activities affect brand equity differently. Furthermore, the work of Keller and Lehman (2006) confirmed that literature on brand and branding in the past has reported mixed results of the relationship between marketing mix activities and consumer perception on a brand. They also suggested that the study of particular marketing mix activities should be more focused and should be introduced and measured in terms of customer mindset.

This study aims to investigate the impact of

price deals and perceived quality on the consumers' mindset in the context of brand. This would assist marketing practitioners to obtain insights of the impact of the price and pricing strategy on their brand. There are reasons why this study selected price deals and product quality as the factors which influence brand equity. First, price promotion strategy is generally a critical strategy that generates market demand and stimulates short-term company profitability. In addition, price promotion strategies are generally widely implemented in most marketplaces. Secondly, price and product quality has been found to be primary reasons why consumers purchase products or services, especially when the consumers are value conscious (Parasuraman, 1997; Zeithaml, 1988). Price deals and product quality are considered as the most important marketplace cues and the very first information for consumer evaluation of a product or service among experienced customers. Furthermore, this study extends the previous literature on brand equity, focusing on how a consumer perceives brand in high involvement products.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Equity: Brand Knowledge and Brand Associations

Keller (1993) conceptualized brand equity, which determines the brand effects on the individual consumer, called "Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)". He defined brand equity as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on customer response to marketing activity with respect to that brand". Keller (1993) also conceptualized brand knowledge in terms of brand awareness and brand associations. Therefore, brand associations and brand awareness are the consequences of marketing activities according to how consumers respond to the brand. He argued that this perspective of brand equity concept allows managers to specifically determine how their marketing actions distribute the value of a brand for consumers.

Keller (1993)'s study had demonstrated that brand knowledge consists of two elements; brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness is based on the brand recall and recognition abilities of consumers and brand image is the associative network of memory of a consumer. Attributes,

benefits, attitudes, and experiences dimensions of brand knowledge are parts of brand image (Keller, 1993). Brand image can be classified in terms of three associative characteristics: Favorability, Strength, and Uniqueness. Keller (1993) also categorized brand association by the levels of abstraction, in other words, by how much information is summarized or subsumed in the association. Hence, brand association can be classified into three categories: attributes, benefits, and attitudes. He also mentioned that additional distinctions can be added in these categories according to the qualitative nature of the association. These different types of brand association define brand image.

Price Deal and Perceived Quality

Price deals are a price promotion offer on a product or service. Price deals save the buyers money when a product or service is purchased. The main types of price deal include price discounts, price-cut, coupons, rebates, refunds, and bonus pack. In this study, price discounts and price cut promotion are focused. Price deals are found to have a negative relationship with behavioral intention (Pauwels, Hanssens, & Siddarth, 2002; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). Price deals are usually intended to recruit new buyers for a mature product, accelerate consumer use and purchase multiple units to encourage trial use of a new product or line extension or to convince existing customers to increase their purchases. Consumers usually evaluate price deals in relation to a reference price. The difference between the reference price and deal price produces the transaction utility of an exchange and induces brand preference (Silva-Risso & Ionova, 2008; Sloot & Verhoef, 2008).

Zeithaml (1988) suggested that consumers organize the information which is perceived from product attributes ranging from simple attributes to complex personal values. She also indicated that these attributes can be categorized into two types of information cue: intrinsic cues (physical composition of the product) and extrinsic cues (product-related, not the physical product itself). Therefore, for this study, perceived quality reflects the perception of the consumers of both the physical and emotional attributes which a consumer perceives as intrinsic cues and extrinsic cues.

Price has been debated by scholars as to

whether it can be a quality signal to consumers (Luk & Yip, 2008; Martínez & Mollá-Descals (2008): Zeithaml, 1988). Zeithaml (1988) argued that consumers depend on price as the primary quality signal in some product categories, especially in the categories where quality variation is expected. Rao and Monroe (1987) found a significant effect between price and quality expected. Therefore, price and perceived quality is related in terms of the use of price as an indicator of quality. This depends on price variation and quality variation in the product categories, the level of price awareness, the consumers' knowledge of the price, and the availability of other cues to quality (Zeithaml, 1988). However, it is not only price that can be a signal of quality, but also the brand name (Hunt & Keaveney, 1994; Luk & Yip, 2008).

Since a quality level is associated with a brand, consumers' perception of product quality involves their network memory. A higher satisfaction level of perceived quality increases the probability of choosing the brand over competitors because higher brand recall and recognition (Aaker, 1996; Yoo, et al., 2000), enhances the brand position (Carol & Carl, 2003), and increases the customer value and value equity (Christopher, 1996; Lemon, Rust, & Zeithaml, 2001). Therefore, perceived quality is a one of the most important components driving brand equity.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Price deals represent the marketing activity and a source of information which influence the perceived quality, brand associations, and brand knowledge of a consumer. To extend previous studies, the effects of price deals and perceived quality are investigated as antecedences of brand associations and brand knowledge. Brand associations are based on brand attributes, brand attitude, and brand benefits and brand knowledge is based on brand awareness and brand image. For brand awareness, there are two components, which are brand recall and brand recognition. The conceptual framework of this study can be seen in Figure 1.

The conceptual framework offers an explanation as to how brand associations and brand knowledge change when the perceptions of price deal in the mind of a consumer change, which in turn give rise to brand equity. It also explains how perceived quality and perceived brand value play roles in consumer-based brand equity. Therefore, perceived quality, perceived brand value, brand associations and brand knowledge serve to clarify the nature of the relationship between price deals and brand equity.

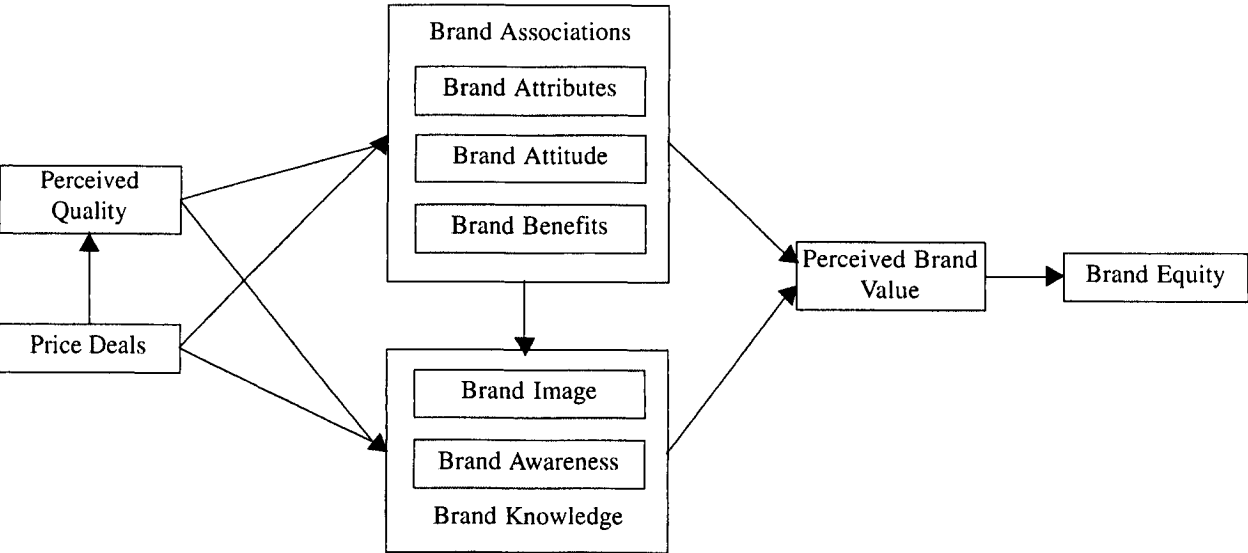


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Hypotheses

Literature has indicated that there is a positive relationship between price and quality, at least over some range of prices for some product categories. Hence, the findings of price-quality relationship remain mixed and do not provide generalizability. Zeithaml (1988) summarized the literature on the price-quality relationship and presented research evidence which supports how price and quality are related. First, it depends on the availability of other information to consumers. Jacoby, Olson, and Haddock (1971) found that price is an indicator of product quality when it is the only cue available but not when embedded in a multi-cue setting. Therefore, if there are other sources of information, such as brand name, which can be a cue for product quality, the relationship between price and quality might be weaker.

Second, if consumers are unaware of product prices, they would not use price to infer quality. On the other hand, if consumers are not interested in product quality or do not have sufficient product knowledge, they would not be able to judge the quality of a product by using the price as an indicator. Third, consumers appear to depend more on price as a quality signal in some product categories. Monroe (1973) suggested that the perception of price of a consumer is very subjective. One of the factors which affect the relationship is the level of price awareness on a particular product category. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that

H1: Price deals negatively influence perceived quality

The change of price leads to a change of consumer expectation of a brand due to the change of the associative information in their memory. Price discounting may influence a consumer to perceive a low quality association. On the other hand, price increases may convey a high-quality association to a consumer. Brand attitude is based on the belief of consumers on the quality of a brand (Mitchell & Olson, 1981), and Keller (2008, p 385) stated that because of the embedded meaning of brand attitude, consumers store and retrieve brand attitude separately from other information.

Brand attributes are explained by the features that characterize a product or service. Price deal information is an extrinsic cue which describes the change of a product or service's characteristic. As

the price indicates the product or brand's quality, a price deal leads to a change in consumer expectations about quality (Liao, 2006; Sloot & Verhoef, 2008). The attribute associations in a consumer's mind may also change in terms of its structure.

Brand benefits include the personal perceived value and the meaning that consumers perceive from a product or service. This is clearly conceptualized by Zeithaml (1988) who stated that the perceived value of a consumer is related to the perceived price of the product or service, which is mediated by perceived quality. In general, a strong brand benefit association can be created through the direct experience of a consumer. Park et al. (1986) argued that marketing activities create a source of benefit information and enable consumers to understand brand concepts. Therefore, the hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Price deals positively influence brand associations (attitude, attributes, and benefits)

From the perspective of information processing, price deal information is a cue that is stored in a consumer's memory and is associated with other information which is related to the price of the product (Raju, Srinivasan, & Lal, 1990; Somjit & Audhesh, 2005; Vincent, Marnik, Jan-Benedict, & Dominique, 2001). Monroe (1973) argued that consumers often question the motivation behind price deals. The decreases in price can be interpreted in the following ways: the items are about to be replaced by new models; the items are defective or are not selling well; or that the quality has been reduced. Price deals might also create a loss of brand image due to such reservations (Kevin & John, 1999). However, previous literature argued that price promotions create awareness to consumers (Martínez & Mollá-Descals, 2008). Consumers' ability of recall and recognition is better when they have an awareness of the price. Therefore, price deal information is perceived in the form of consumer knowledge. The hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Price deals positively influence brand knowledge (brand image and brand awareness)

The positive perceived quality creates the brand attitude, brand attributes, and brand benefits to a consumer. Consumers usually seek a reason to purchase a product or service. A high level of per-

ceived quality shows that consumers experience brand benefits, and create positive brand attributes or that there is a reason for the consumer to purchase the brand again.

Therefore, high levels of perceived quality of a brand might place stronger, more favorable, and unique associations in the memory network of consumers for brand attributes, brand attitude, and brand benefits. It can be hypothesized that:

H4: Perceived quality positively influences brand associations (brand attitude, brand attributes, and brand benefits)

Perceived quality creates image associations in the mind of a consumer. This is the uniqueness association of Keller (1993). Consumers transform the product attributes into a brand personality (Praveen, Carl, & Lawrence, 1999). Ramaseshan and Tsao (2007) found that there is a positive relationship between perceived quality and brand personality when the brand contains a symbolic and experiential brand-concept image. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H5: Perceived quality positively influences brand knowledge (brand image, and brand awareness)

Keller (1993) originally introduced the concept of CBBE (Customer-Based Brand Equity) which is based on the concept of brand association. He conceptualized that brand association is the fundamental part of brand knowledge and CBBE; the strength, uniqueness, and favorability of associations used to measure the level of brand image. The abilities of brand recall and recognition reflect the strength of brand placement in the mind of a consumer. Therefore, brand associations conceptually act as a source of brand knowledge. For CBBE, the linkages in the associative memory network create the structure of brand knowledge.

H6: Brand associations (attitude, attributes, and benefits) positively influence brand knowledge (brand image and brand awareness)

Brand associations consist of three dimensions: brand attitudes, brand attributes, and brand benefits (Keller, 1993). From the perspective of brand attitude, consumers favor a brand for the functional benefits and experiential benefits that they receive in return (Zeithaml, 1988). Those benefits are the

customer value which consumers perceive they obtain from a brand.

Consumers encode the product attribute information and store it in a brand evaluation context. Consumers, who satisfy brand attributes in terms of the functional concept, would perceive the value of the brand for themselves. Therefore, satisfaction of brand attributes leads consumers to perceive high value. Brand benefits respond to four components: functional performance of the product or service, convenience and ease of accessing the product or service, brand personality, which fits the consumer, and the value proposition which the brand offers. These components offer value to consumers in terms of quality, convenience, satisfaction, and value for money. Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

H7: Brand associations (brand attributes, brand attitude, and brand benefits) positively influence perceived brand value.

The recall and recognition ability on a brand can lead to positive consumer assessments in terms of considering the brand as good value for money or a good deal for the product or service. Higher brand awareness assists the consumers in eliminating other brand choices. Previous literature pointed out that consumers are more likely to purchase familiar brands (Silva-Risso & Ionova, 2008) and are willing to pay price premiums for familiar brands (Aaker, 1992). Furthermore, previous literature also found that brand awareness influences the customer value (Baldauf, et al., 2003). Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

H8: Brand knowledge (brand image, brand awareness) positively influences perceived brand value.

Perceived brand value underpins the perception of benefits of a brand weighed up against the cost (sacrificing) of purchasing the brand. Consumers' perception of more brand value leads to higher brand equity. This explains that the perception of the value of a brand by consumers generates competitive advantage over other brands. Consumers find that the brand is superior to other brands when they perceive more value or benefits from the brand. In addition, consumers create their own brand value from the way they perceive, which leads to brand equity creation. Hence, it can be

hypothesized that:
H9: *Perceived brand value positively influences brand equity.*

High Involvement Product as Control Variables

Brand is linked to product category, and the product category is linked to the brand. A product or service category also shares a set of associations. Some product categories have a specific link to or belief in the brand (Banerjee, 2009; Fei, 2008). In addition, product categories vary in terms of weighted brand association. Consumers will not assess the importance of brand associations equally, nor view them as the same in different product categories. Hence, product category can be a particularly important determinant of consumer response to a brand. For this study, the level of product involvement is placed in the conceptual framework as a control variable of the study. The study focuses on only high involvement products and only one brand in that category. This would create the generalizability of the results for high involvement products and allows the study to manage the variance of the impact of price deals and perceived quality across products and brands in the market.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Eighteen face-to-face interviews were conducted to identify the product category for high involvement product. The results indicated that the focused brand and product category is SONY HD TVs. Four hundred and four consumers who have

experience purchasing a SONY HD TV were asked to complete the questionnaire survey. After data screening process, three hundreds and eighty-six sets of usable questionnaires were found. The experience of consuming and purchasing could not be longer than 3 months ago. In particular, the key informants of this study are the current consumers of SONY HD TV who are in Bangkok. The back translation between Thai and English version of questionnaires were performed to confirm the content validity. All respondents were mixed between male and female and earned income from 15,000 baht to more than 100,000 baht per month.

The results of the EFA show that cross loading items were eliminated (eleven out of thirty-nine measurement items) and other measurement items were consistent with the construct validity. The results of the CFA show that the sample data were a favorable fit to the measurement model. Hence, the structural model was reasonably accepted. The fit indexes for the path model are as shown in Table 1.

Four major criteria of fit indexes were applied to check the fit of the SEM model (Kline, 2005); χ^2/df , RMSEA, CFI, and SRMR (GFI and AGFI are affected by sample size (Sharma, Mukherjee, Kumar, & Dillon, 2005) and TLI is highly correlated to CFI). For this study, the SEM fit indexes show that the chi-square to degree of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) is 2.516 which is a reasonable fit (Kline, 2005). CFI was exceeded the acceptable fit point at 0.90 (CFI=0.915), RMSEA was 0.063 which was considered to be reasonable fit as well as SRMR which was below 0.10 (SRMR = 0.0722) (Ho, 2006; Kline, 2005).

Table 1: The Model Fit Indexes for the Path Model

$\chi^2/df, p < 0.001$	GFI	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA, $p < 0.001$	SRMR
2.516	0.932	0.869	0.836	0.916	0.894	0.915	0.063	0.0722

Thus, the model fit indexes for the path model indicated an acceptable approximation of the proposed relationship among the constructs. The results of structural path analysis indicated that seven of nine hypotheses are statistically significant and positive, as shown in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

Price deals and perceived quality influence brand equity through brand associations and brand knowledge. The results shows that price deals and perceived quality increase the functional benefits (brand attributes, and brand benefits) and emotional benefits (brand attitude) which influence perceived brand value through brand knowledge. This value chain process is consistent with the study of Grewal et al. (1998) and the study of Dodds et al. (1991) which argued that price discounts and brand’s perceived quality significantly influence the perceived value of a consumer. Thus, consumers find value while the product is on price deals and this value enhances brand equity; similar to when consumers find value when they find the product is better than competitors or when they think the product is superior.

The findings show statistical evidence that price deals and the perception of quality send information about the brand to the mind of a consumer to create brand associations. Thus, the findings support that marketing activities is an important factor which creates the associations that consumers make with a brand. These associations induce what

the firm wants the brand to stand for in the consumers’ mind (brand image) and how deeply the firm wants the consumers to remember the brand (brand recall and brand recognition).

Finally, a more positive brand image and brand recall lead to a stronger brand equity which contributes to consumer loyalty, consumer beliefs and willingness to search for the brand. Furthermore, positive brand equity will help consumers to view the brand favorably and create a halo effect to resist competitors’ marketing activities (Keller, 1993; Leuthesser, Kohli, & Harich, 1995).

The findings provide statistical evidence to support the concept of Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) which was developed by Keller (1993). The results show that brand associations develop the network memory of brand knowledge which contribute to brand equity in the mind of consumers.

The major academic implication of this study is the extent to which marketing activities influence a consumer’s brand evaluation. The findings of this study extend the boundary of understanding of brand equity and its sources in terms of the effects of marketing activities on the creation of brand equity. Previous literature reported mixed findings on how price promotions influence consumers’ brand evaluation (Bart & Luc, 1996; Davis, Inman, & McAlister, 1992; DelVecchio, Henard, & Freling, 2006; Dodds & Monroe, 1985; Yoo, et al., 2000). Therefore, this study has identified, with statistical evidence, a particular area of how price promotion activities influence the perception of brand equity in the minds of consumers.

Table 2: Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypotheses and Path Analysis			Standardized Regression Weights	Critical Ratio (Z-value)	p-value	Results
H1	Price Deals	→ Perceived Quality	.100 (.154)	2.762	**	Not Supported
H2	Price Deals	→ Brand Associations	.139 (.372)	5.901	***	Supported
H3	Price Deals	→ Brand Knowledge	.041 (.293)	2.664	**	Supported
H4	Perceived Quality	→ Brand Association	.417 (.719)	8.574	***	Supported
H5	Perceived Quality	→ Brand Knowledge	.009 (.044)	.432	NS	Not Supported
H6	Brand Associations	→ Brand Knowledge	.299 (.794)	3.611	***	Supported
H7	Brand Associations	→ Perceived Brand Value	-1.333 (-.881)	-1.878	NS	Not Supported
H8	Brand Knowledge	→ Perceived Brand Value	5.816 (1.446)	2.743	**	Supported
H9	Perceived Brand Value	→ Brand Equity	.514 (.373)	5.948	***	Supported

Note: * shows p-value < 0.05 ** shows p-value < 0.01 *** shows p-value < 0.001
 NS - Not significant at a 0.05 significance level
 The standardized coefficients are shown in the bracket.

Price deals strategy has been used as an important strategy in order to create revenue and motivate consumer purchase intention. This study shows that the implementation of price promotion activities has a positive effect on consumers' perceived quality. To put it simply, when the consumers are more satisfied with the price deals which the brand offers, they tend to have more positive perceived quality. This means that, even though they are a highly competitive market, where HD TV sellers invariably employ price deals, the consumers still do not reduce their expectation of product quality. This might be because when the product is on a price promotion activity, consumers would seek more information about the product (especially for high involvement products). Once they know the product, and they know that the quality of the product remains the same, their perception of quality would increase. Moreover, for some high involvement products, consumers already know about the product attributes. Thus, the reduction of the price for that product would create more benefits to consumers who are benefit-seeker consumers, and this would create more perceived quality for those consumers. Hence, no matter what the price deals are, the perceived quality of the product would not be decreased. This is what consumers have experienced at least for this product category.

The findings support the concept that consumers perceive price deals in the form of information about the brand. This information is interpreted as both positive and negative associations about the brand in order to create a network memory of brand knowledge. These positive and negative associations can be weak or strong associations. Hence, market practitioners should pay more attention to how they implement the price promotion activities because unsatisfying price deals would create negative brand associations and brand knowledge. This includes those brands which do not have any price promotions activities.

The findings also support the idea that perceptions of quality of the product can influence attitude and behavior toward the brand. Consumers create strong and unique associations in their mind when they find the product of a firm has consistent quality and is superior to that of competitors. These associations are very important for marketing practitioners to differentiate their product or service from their competitors.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study focuses on a particular product and a particular brand, which is SONY HD TVs. Moreover, the samples of the study were collected only in Bangkok, Thailand. Hence, the major limitation of this study is the generalizability of the findings. The results may not be generalized to other product categories or brands in other industries, especially low involvement products. In addition, this research is under positivistic paradigm. Therefore, marketing practitioners should apply the findings of this study with care. The study of low product involvement is suggested for future research.

The amount of consumer knowledge of a brand is another limitation of this study. Different consumers have different knowledge on a brand or product, inferring different meanings and employing different behavior. Hence, the amount of knowledge on a brand held by individual consumers, as well as the effects of other marketing activities, is not within the boundary of the study's framework. The framework of this study did not include the post-effects of price deals such as price sensitivity or promotional expectation. Previous studies indicated that the frequency of price promotion activities increases consumers' price sensitivity and they would not buy the products again until the next promotion has come (Kalwani & Yim, 1992; Ramirez & Goldsmith, 2009). This may indirectly affect brand equity in the long-term if consumers often purchase only when the products are on price promotions. Future research in this area is suggested.

Other marketing activities could be added to the conceptual framework in order to investigate how it affects brand associations and brand knowledge. Advertising, event marketing, sales force marketing or sport marketing are also found to have an effect on brand differentiation (Boulding, Lee, & Staelin, 1994) and brand preference (DelVecchio, et al., 2006), but how these activities influence brand equity has not been investigated. Thus, future research could be conducted on how other marketing activities influence brand associations, brand knowledge, and brand equity.

Finally, Keller (1993) stated that individuals have different perceptions of brands, and the evaluation and purchase of a product or service is done at a particular time, based on how individuals perceive the brand at time. Thus, the generalizability

of the results is limited to a particular period of time. Future investigation on a variety of brands is needed with a longitudinal research on the post-promotion effects on brand equity. Such future research could allow greater generalizability of the findings and expand the knowledge of brand equity in this area.

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IMPACT OF PERCEIVED SERVICE ON BRAND IMAGE AND REPURCHASE INTENTIONS OF THAI PASSENGERS TOWARDS LOW COST CARRIERS

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Abstract

Since the application of the Open Sky Policy in 2002, Low Cost Carriers (LCCs) have been gaining a progressive market share in Thailand. However the numbers of academic researchers in this field are limited, the researcher hence focused on Thai passengers traveling on LCCs to explore new knowledge. Based on a comprehensive literature review, the conceptual model investigated whether the perceived service quality affects airline brand image and repurchase intention of Thai passengers was developed and tested in LCCs sector. Data from four hundred travelers was obtained and statistically analyzed; a regression analysis aided in examining the impacts of tested variables. The results revealed that the perceived service quality of Thai passengers had a significant impact on the LCCs' brand image, with the empathy aspect being the most critical factor. Besides, the carriers' brand image proved to have an influence on passengers' repurchase intention. The brand evaluation dimension provided the strongest support, whereas brand experience, brand expectation and brand strength were also statistically significant in explaining Thai passengers' repeat patronage.

Keywords: Perceived Service Quality, Brand Image, Repurchase Intention, Low Cost Carriers, Thai Passengers

บทคัดย่อ

หลังจากที่ประเทศไทยมีการบังคับใช้นโยบายเปิดน่านฟ้าเสรีในปี พ.ศ.2545 สายการบินต้นทุนต่ำได้เติบโตและมีส่วนแบ่งทางการตลาดที่เพิ่มสูงขึ้นอย่างรวดเร็ว แม้กระนั้น การศึกษาค้นคว้าที่เกี่ยวข้องกับสายการบินต้นทุนต่ำยังไม่เป็นที่แพร่หลายและมีจำนวนจำกัด ผู้วิจัยจึงมุ่งเน้นศึกษาความคิดเห็นของผู้โดยสารชาวไทยที่ใช้บริการสายการบินต้นทุนต่ำเพื่อค้นหาความรู้และข้อค้นพบใหม่ ๆ จากการสืบค้นรายงานจำนวนมาก ผู้วิจัยได้พัฒนากรอบความคิดที่จะมีนำมาศึกษาโดยงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้ถูกออกแบบเพื่อศึกษาผลกระทบของคุณภาพการบริการที่มีต่อภาพลักษณ์ของสายการบินต้นทุนต่ำซึ่งมีผลต่อความตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาใช้บริการซ้ำของผู้โดยสารชาวไทย ข้อมูลจากกลุ่มตัวอย่าง 400 คนถูกนำมาประมวลและวิเคราะห์เชิงสถิติ การวิเคราะห์เชิงถดถอยถูกนำมาใช้เพื่อตรวจสอบผลกระทบของตัวแปรต่าง ๆ ผลการวิจัยระบุว่าคุณภาพการบริการของสายการบินต้นทุนต่ำมีผลกระทบต่อภาพลักษณ์ของสายการบินนั้น ๆ โดยปัจจัยที่ส่งผลกระทบมากที่สุดคือความเอาใจใส่ของพนักงาน (Empathy) นอกจากนี้ ภาพลักษณ์ของสายการบินต้นทุนต่ำยังมีผลกระทบต่อความตั้งใจที่จะกลับมาใช้บริการซ้ำของผู้โดยสารชาวไทย ปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลสูงสุดต่อความตั้งใจกลับมาใช้บริการคือการประเมินคุณค่าของภาพลักษณ์ (Brand Evaluation) ทั้งนี้ประสบการณ์ที่ได้รับจากตราสายการบิน (Brand Experience), ความคาดหวังต่อตราสายการบิน (Brand Expectation) และความเข้มแข็งของตราสายการบิน (Brand Strength) ต่างก็มีส่วนที่ส่งผลต่อความตั้งใจที่ผู้โดยสารชาวไทยจะกลับมาใช้บริการสายการบินต้นทุนต่ำเช่นกัน

คำสำคัญ: คุณภาพการบริการ, ภาพลักษณ์ตราสินค้า, ความตั้งใจในการซื้อซ้ำ, ผู้โดยสารชาวไทย และสายการบินต้นทุนต่ำ

INTRODUCTION

Although the airline deregulation policy under the Free Determination Agreement commenced at the beginning of 2002, Low Cost Carriers (LCCs) are still comparatively new to the airline market in Thailand (Realrangsutthar, 2008). The Thai aviation industry experienced rapid growth due to the emergence of new comers in the market; this in turn alerted existing airlines to reexamine their service quality to maintain market share and passengers' repeat purchases (Cheosakul, 2004). Since then, the changes in travel pattern of Thais were noticed as the market liberalization encouraged market competition, a drop in fare prices and an increase in the number of suppliers. Public doubts regarding the LCC's standards and qualities were raised initially. However, LCCs claimed that the low fare business model and that low value was not part of their strategy. Providing a different service and product features, service quality is significant if LCCs are to extend their profitability, brand recognition and gain repeated business. According to Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2006), customers perceive service in terms of service quality and how they are satisfied with the service received.

Airline service quality and brand image were examined by countless numbers of scholars and practitioners; however, passengers' repurchase intentions of Thai passengers traveling on LCCs has not been well researched; obtaining such knowledge can benefit the airline business and management of aviation. Consequently, this paper was developed to investigate whether Thai passengers' perceived service quality of LCCs has an influence on carriers' brand image, and the intention to repeat purchases. The knowledge and finding of the study will be beneficial to airlines as the understanding of passengers' attitudes and behaviors allows carriers to correctly provide the services that meet customers' needs, create the images that prospect airlines' proficiency and encourage passengers' repeat purchases.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived Service Quality

Service quality is a "consumer's overall impres-

sion of the relative superiority/inferiority of the organization and its services" (Bitner & Hubert, 1994, p.77). The empirical studies on service were separated from goods in the early 1980s, after which, several frameworks and conceptualizations were developed (Schneider & White, 2004). However, the core debate was mostly devoted to the two competing perspectives of Nordic model of Gronroos and the American Model by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (Mels, Boshoff, & Nel, 1997 as cited in Brandy & Cronin Jr., 2001). The SERVQUAL is the most utilized evaluation tool owing to its analytical practicality, and is proved to be a parsimonious and handy framework for researchers (Kheng, Mahamad, Ramayah & Mosahab, 2010). Based on the concept and dimensionalities of the SERVQUAL concept, SERVPERF measures was introduced by Cronin and Taylor without the inclusion of gaps model. The scale measures the service's performance from post-consumption perception, and it is assessed from five dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Though considerable number of studies on airlines have involved service quality as a core concept, the research on service quality of LCCs from the perspective of Thai passengers are still limited as LCCs in Thailand are considered at an initial stage.

Homer (2008) revealed that there is an interrelation between perceived quality and brand image. Berry, Lefkowitz and Clark (1988) explained that good service performance and good name can generate the powerful branding effect for the firm, and the quality of service is a key determinant to the success of brand image. Gupta (2007) stated that the service encounter is an inherent strength within service quality which elevates the service brand image. Chen and Tseng (2010) reported that a good service quality related to an airline as perceived by customers leads to a good (brand) image held in their memory. However, Chen, Zhou and Li (2008) argued that service quality does not directly affect brand image establishment. Vigripat and Chan (2007) examined the relationship between brand image and repurchase intention, and found that brand image does not affect repurchase intention; brand trust does. On the other hand, Wu (2011), as well as Cretu and Brodie (2007), found a reverse relationship that brand image in turn had a significant impact on service quality.

Brand Image

Brand image is the perception about a brand as reflected by the brand association held in consumers' memory (Keller, 1993). Since the 1980s, the importance of brand activities increased substantially and branding was touted as a cornerstone of marketing (Weilbacher 1993, as cited in Realrangsutthar, 2007). From comprehensive literature on brand image, Han (2006) summarized that brand image can be defined by six clusters of association, namely strength, uniqueness, expectation, perception, experience and evaluation of the brand. These have covered several measurement variables proposed by other researchers. In this study, the researcher applied the Hans' framework as a comprehensive measurement of brand image and the following are the dimensions:

Strength: The strength of a brand image is determined by the magnitude and complexity of the brand identity signal as well as the complexity of the processing of the signals (Han, 2006, p.83).

Uniqueness: Differentiation or uniqueness is defined as "to what degree consumers feel that the brand differs from competing brands" (Netemeyer et al., 2004, as cited in Anselmsson, Johansson & Persson, 2011, p.11).

Expectations: Brand expectations are linked to how brand users expect the brand to perform (Han, 2006, p.84).

Perceptions: A strong brand image association would involve the creation of customers' perceptions (awareness); this is reflected in the consumer's ability to identify the brand under different circumstances (Keller 1993).

Experiences: Brand image can be shaped directly from actual experiences and contact services (Keller 2003).

Evaluations: Evaluations refer to how brand users interpret and evaluate the brand and related marketing information. It is determined by the perceptions, expectations and, most importantly, by the experiences of the brand in question (Keller 2003).

Airlines are excellent examples of an almost industry-wide use of the company or corporation

name as a carrier brand (Driver, 1999). While the growth and competition in airline market are intensifying, brand image can generate value by helping consumers to process information, differentiate the brand, create reasons to buy, give positive feelings, and provide a basis for extensions (Aaker, 1991).

There is empirical evidence which indicates that the values of brand image is positively related to loyalty and repurchase intention. Aaker (1992) explained that brand image provides a good reason to buy and reduces the incentive to select other available brands. Wu (2011) found a causal relationship between brand images and re-visit intention in the hospital service. Ogba and Tan (2009) revealed that brand image has a positive impact on customer repurchase intention. Lin (2008) investigated the effects of brand image and indicated that the individual who perceived better brand image had a significantly higher level of intention to repurchase the same brand. In similar vein, Silva and Alwi (2006) examined corporate brand image from several dimensions using intention to repurchase as one of the loyalty factors. The research results confirmed a direct relationship of brand image and repurchase intention.

Repurchase Intention

Repurchase intention is defined as a consumer behavioral intention that measures the tendency to continue, increase, or decrease the amount of service from a current supplier (Jackson, 1985, as cited in Kitchathorn, 2010, p.3). Service encounter that customers experience is a core aspect of various service industries as the service experience, whether satisfactory or not, will finally impact the customer's repeat purchase intention (Liu & Liu, 2008).

Comprehensive studies on repurchase intention are sparse and largely fragmented; more empirical studies are required to support and confirm its theoretical concept (Hellier, Geursen, Carr & Rickard, 2003). In a tourism context, "a travelers' satisfaction with the overall service quality directly affects repurchase intention and future travel behavior" (Tian, 1998, as cited in An, Lee & Noh, 2010, p.159), whereas the level of perceived risk negatively influences repurchase intention (An, Lee & Noh, 2010). While repurchasing intention is an effective way to anticipate an actual response, brand

plays an important role in customer decision-making. According to Driver (1999), traveling is seen as experiential with any good features from the travel experience likely to be rewarded with renewed patronage.

From the literature, repurchase intention is commonly measured as a uni-dimension variable (Dhru, Roggeveen & Tsiros, 2008; Kitchatorn, 2010; Liu & Liu, 2008; Park, Robertson & Wu, 2005; Vigripat & Chan, 2007). This research applied a single question querying the intention to repurchase in the future.

Park, Robertson and Wu (2005) conducted a study entitled “Effects of airline service quality on airline image and passengers’ future behavioral intentions”. Their research results also reconfirmed a positive relationship between the three constructs. In this research study, there are three mentioned constructs, perceived service quality, brand image and repurchase intention, tied in a conceptual framework.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From the previous literature and empirical confirmation of the relationship between constructs, a conceptual framework was established. The perceived service quality was measured from five dimensions according to SERVPERF model by Cronin and Taylor (1992) while the brand image was assessed from six dimensions using framework of Han (2006). The conceptual framework is depicted in the following figure 1.

Hypotheses

The literature that examined perceived quality is overwhelming; however, “there is relatively low empirical attention on its relation to brand image” (Gupta, 2007; Homer, 2008, p.715). The causal relations and contradictions between service quality and brand image encouraged this investigation

of Thai passengers’ perception towards LCCs. The evaluation of perceived service quality is conducted using the SERVPERF model. For the first hypotheses, researcher assumed the relationships between five service quality dimensions and brand image. The research hypotheses were developed as following:

H1o: Service Quality, in dimension of Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy as perceived by Thai passengers traveling on LCCs has no statistically significant impact on airline brand image.

H1a: Service Quality, in dimension of Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy as perceived by Thai passengers traveling on LCCs has a statistically significant impact on airline brand image.

Several authors have explored the antecedent(s) to repurchase intention, (Hocutt, 1998; Storbacka et al., 1994; Zahorik & Rust, 1992, as cited in Hellier et.al, 2003). Brand image, likewise, is proposed to have a causal impact on repurchase intention of LCCs service. In this research, six dimensions of airline brand image were hypothesized to have significant impact on repurchase intention of Thai passengers. The research hypotheses were developed as follows:

H2o: Airline brand image, in dimensions of Strength, Uniqueness, Expectation, Perception, Experience and Evaluation, as perceived by Thai passengers traveling on LCCs has no statistically significant impact on their repurchase intention.

H2a: Airline brand image, in dimensions of Strength, Uniqueness, Expectation, Perception, Experience and Evaluation, as perceived by Thai passengers traveling on LCCs has a statistically significant impact on their repurchase intention.

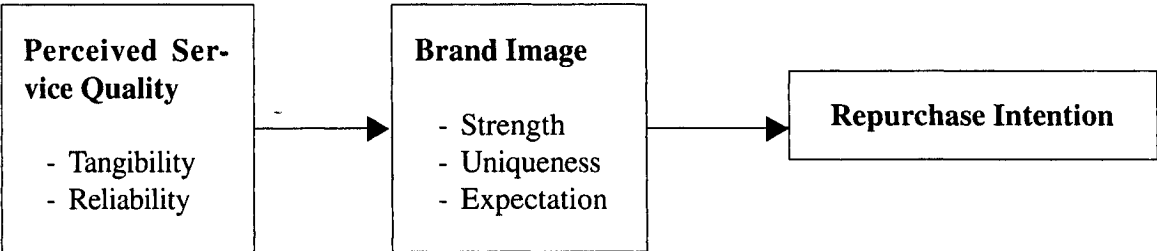


Figure1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sampling frame of the study was Thai passengers traveling on any LCCs, who had arrived at Suvarnabhumi International Airport. Because of their recent flying experience with LCCs, they were able to provide more accurate answers to the survey questions.

The questionnaire was developed based on previous researches and literatures. It is comprised of three main parts; the traveling information, passengers' perception and passengers' personal data. The second section was developed to assess the opinions and perceptions of Thai passengers to-

wards the three main constructs of the study using a 5-point Likert scale.

The perceived service quality was assessed using 22 question items used in a standard SERVQUAL assessment. Besides, the researcher adopted some items from the airline study on service quality in Australia by Park, Robertson and Wu (2005). Respondent's perception towards the brand image was assessed using six operational components following Han (2006)'s study. For repurchase intention, the single question item was adapted from Nadiri, Hussain, Ekiz and Erdogan (2008). (Table 1)

Table 1: Question Items Used for Constructs' Evaluation

Perceived Service Quality
1. The airline has modern aircraft.
2. Physical facilities are visually appealing. (e.g. Seat, Toilet, In-flight entertainment system etc.)
3. Airline employees have a neat appearance.
4. Service materials are visually appealing. (e.g. Leaflet, Banner, Ticket, Meal Utensils etc.)
5. When airline promises to do things at the certain time, they will do so. (e.g. Reservation, Ticketing, Baggage Handling etc.)
6. The airline shows sincere interest in solving problems.
7. The airline performs the service right the first time.
8. The airline provides on-time performance.
9. The airline maintains error-free records.
10. Airline employees will tell the passenger exactly when the service will be performed.
11. Airline employees offer prompt service to passengers.
12. Airline employees always have a willingness to help.
13. Airline employees are never too busy to respond to passengers' requests.
14. The behavior of airline employees instills confidence in customers.
15. Passengers feel safe when flying.
16. Airline employees are consistently courteous to customers.
17. Airline employees have the knowledge to answer passengers' questions.
18. The airline pays passenger's individual attention.
19. The airline provides convenient flight schedule.
20. Airline employees give passengers personal attention.
21. The airline has the passengers' best interest at heart.
22. Airline employees understand specific needs of their passengers.
Brand Image:
1. Airline possesses strong brand image.
2. The brand is unique and different from other airlines.
3. Airline brand image meets my expectation.
4. The brand reflects the high quality airline service.
5. I acknowledge this airline has a positive brand.
6. I evaluate this airline brand as a valuable one.
Repurchase Intention:
1. In the future, I will consider this Low Cost Airline as my first choice for air travel.

Pilot Study

Prior to the survey, a pilot study was implemented to confirm the reliability of research measures. The pilot survey was conducted with 30 sets of questionnaires, distributed to passengers arriving LCCs at Suvarnabhumi International Airport during May 21st - 30th, 2012. (Table 2)

Table 2: Reliability Test Result of Percieved Service Quality

Service Quality Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient α
Tangibility	0.7517
Reliability	0.7920
Responsiveness	0.8550
Assurance	0.8546
Empathy	0.9071

Each brand image dimension was assessed with single question item. As Cronbach's alpha represents a scale's reliability of multiple question items, the reliability test is not required for Brand Image's dimension. However, the Cronbach's alpha of the Brand Image construct, determined by six question items, was performed. (Table 3)

Table 3: Reliability Test Results of Brand Image

Bran Image Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient α
Strength	n/a
Uniqueness	n/a
Expectation	n/a
Perception	n/a
Experience	n/a
Evaluation	n/a
Total (6 question items)	0.871

Reliability test was performed and all relevant values of Cronbrach's alpha coefficient are more than 0.7, confirming the reliability of measurement scale (Sekaran, 2003).

The survey was expedited during the day time in September and October 2012. Considering the flight chart, the researcher was able to standby at the arrival area at the appropriate timing. The convenient sampling technique is considered most appropriate for the study. Since the population consisting of Thai passengers flying LCCs was diffi-

cult to estimate, and for which no known list was available, the sample size of this study was determined by using the statistical formula of Berenson and Levine (1999). This resulted in the 385 sample; however, researcher distributed 400 sets of questionnaires to gain a higher degree of accuracy.

The data was analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The descriptive statistics was used to describe the respondents' data and their traveling information. The multiple regression analysis is used to investigate an impact of tested variables.

FINDINGS

The descriptive information of 400 respondents is summarized in table 4.

The information from the 400 respondents was also used in the regression analysis for hypotheses testing. The hypotheses results are shown in table 5.

For H1o, the significance value less than 0.05 called for the hypothesis rejection. Consequently, it is able to approve that the perceived service quality, as a whole, has a statistically significant impact on the brand image of LCCs.

To inspect each individual dimension of the tested factor, the coefficient significance values are indicative. From analysis result, the coefficient analysis yielded the significant value (Sig.) of service quality dimension. The summarization regarding the influence of each service quality dimension on the Low Cost Carrier's brand image is shown in table 6.

As all significant values are less than 0.05, it can be explained that each individual dimension of service quality also has a statistically significant impact on brand image. Empathy is the most influential factor to affect the LCC's brand image.

For H2o, significance value of less than 0.05 called for the hypothesis rejection. Thus, the brand image, as a whole, has a statistically significant impact on the repurchase intention of Thai passengers traveling on LCCs. To inspect each individual dimension of the tested factor, the coefficient analysis yielded the significant value (Sig.) of brand image dimension. The summarization regarding the influence of each brand image dimension on the passengers' repurchase intent is sequenced in table 7.

Table 4: Summarization of Respondents' Data

Demographic Information		Number of Respondents	Percentage
Gender:	Male	224	176
	Female	56.0	44.0
Age:	Less than 20	7	1.8
	20-29	113	28.3
	30-39	94	23.5
	40-49	104	26.0
	50-59	57	14.3
	More than 60	25	6.3
Education Level:	Below Bachelor	59	14.8
	Bachelor	238	59.5
	Master and Above	103	25.8
Occupation:	Government Officer	43	10.8
	Company Employee	210	52.5
	Business Owner	63	15.8
	Students	42	10.5
	Retired	26	6.5
	Others	16	4.0
Monthly Earning:	Less than 20,000 Baht	92	23.0
	20,001-40,000 Baht	184	46.0
	40,001 and Above	124	31.0
Traveled LCC:	Air Asia	183	45.8
	Nok Air	144	36.0
	Orient Thai	32	7.8
	Others	42	10.5
Traveling Purpose	For Business	150	37.5
	For Leisure	196	49.0
	Visit Friends/Family	53	13.3
	Others	1	0.3

Table 5: Hypotheses Testing Results

No.	Null Hypotheses	Levels of Significance	Result
H1o	Service Quality, in dimensions of Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy as perceived by Thai passengers traveling on LCCs has no statistically significant impact on airline brand image.	0.000	Rejected
H2o	Airline brand image, in dimensions of Strength, Uniqueness, Expectation, Perception, Experience and Evaluation as perceived by Thai passengers traveling on LCCs has no statistically significant impact on their repurchase intention.	0.000	Rejected

Table 6: Ranking of the Influence of Service Quality Dimension on Brand Image

Rank by magnitude of impact	Service Quality Dimension	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	Statistically Significant
1	Empathy	0.262	Yes
2	Assurance	0.225	Yes
3	Reliability	0.189	Yes
4	Responsiveness	0.146	Yes
5	Tangibility	0.141	Yes

Table 7: Ranking of the Influence of Brand Image Dimension on Repurchase Intention

Rank by magnitude of impact	Service Quality Dimension	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	Statistically Significant
1	Evaluation	0.416	Yes
2	Experience	0.215	Yes
3	Expectation	0.164	Yes
4	Strength	0.113	Yes
5	Perception	0.042	No
6	Uniqueness	0.001	No

Evidence from the statistical values allowed us to accept that the airline brand image measured from its six dimensions has a statistically significant impact on the repurchase intention of Thai passengers traveling on LCCs. It is found that the brand image dimensions of brand evaluation, brand experience, brand expectation and brand strength have statistically significant impacts on repurchase intention; the brand evaluation provides the highest influence on repurchase intention. However, when considering each dimension of brand image as a separate entity, the uniqueness and perception of brand image only contributed trivial support to airline brand image, earning a small value of Beta. In turn, they both are not accountable for the statistically significance impact on the passengers' repurchase intention.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Among a stream of criticisms regarding LCC's service standard, this research's outcome is in agreement with those findings that support the importance of LCC's service quality. Thai passengers value service quality when they assess an airline brand image, and the perceived service quality provided the significant influence. This finding suggested that airline managers are able to promote its brand image through the service quality improvement.

The statistical data showed that the empathy dimension provided the greatest impact on airline brand image. Hence, the empathy of staff is a prime touch point that an airline should emphasize. An airline should explore its customer's demand and offer the provision of individualized attention. A convenient flight schedule and accessible services need to be made available and seasonally readjusted. Following empathy, the aspect of assurance

should be raised. Reliability and responsiveness are scored the third and the fourth to impact LCCs' brand image, and tangibility dimension has the least effect on airline brand image. Considering the first four influential dimensions, human resource management is critical to an airline's service quality. LCCs require qualified employees to project professionalism, competency and the airline's individualized attention. A carrier's strategy towards effective recruitment and training to enhance its service quality and favorable brand image is also warranted.

As for the brand image's impact on repurchase intention the results indicated that airline brand image has a statistically significant impact on Thai passengers' repurchase intention. Airlines can create a positive brand image in customers' minds to encourage passengers' repeat patronage. The finding is similar to several previous researches which revealed that the brand image positively affects the repurchase intention (Huang, Li & Chan, 2011; Lin, Hs-Li, 2008; Ogba & Tan, 2009; Silwa & Alwi, 2006 and Wu, 2011). The aspects of brand evaluation, brand experience, brand expectation and brand strength significantly influence repurchase intention. Still, the brand uniqueness and brand perception have a very weak role and they are not considered statistically influential. While brand image, as a whole, has proven to affect the passenger's repurchase intention, the evidence suggested that airline managers may consider the four dimensions that an effective brand measures. Brand evaluation should be preliminarily promoted due to its greatest impact on a repurchase intention. LCCs have to ensure that the customers interpret and evaluate airline brand positively. To create brand evaluation, brand experience, brand expectation and brand strength, effective brand communication and brand promotion are necessary. This stresses the importance of the design of LCCs'

brand media and marketing communication.

Overall, the findings suggested that there are factors to promote airline service quality, its brand image and repurchase intention. There is a critical role for airline management to determine the credence factors and weigh them to suit the situation and company's strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Brand image's framework and scale require further development and refinement. Though brand image has received profound attention, it lacks a well-constructed framework and dimensionality. There is little agreement on which models are standardized measures of brand image and repurchase intention. An establishment of a reliable measurement model for these two constructs by future researchers would make future studies firmer and more reliable.

It is essential to note that some travelers are uncertain whether the airlines they flew with are considered LCCs. Future airline researchers should ensure accurate information regarding the airline categories and ensure the correct target respondents. While the studies in LCCs plead for more academic attention, repetitive studies can strengthen the knowledge or otherwise propose reasonable debate and comparison. Other researchers may apply this conceptual framework on other categories of carriers; for example, full service carrier and charter airline. The specific study on domestics or international sectors, or short and long haul routing will enlighten our understanding of differentiated markets. Comparative studies would be ideal for future research in the aviation industry.

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THE INTENTION OF THAI CUSTOMERS TO ADOPT RESTAURANT WEBSITES IN BANGKOK

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the intention of Thai customers to adopt restaurant websites in Bangkok. Specifically, it aimed to examine the influence of the perception of innovation toward this intention to adopt. The target population of this study was internet users in Bangkok with the sample size totaling 407 respondents. The researcher chose nonprobability sampling method (purposive sampling) in analyzing the data. The results indicate that only the unstandardized regression weights of Trialability and Observability are significantly related to Intention to Adopt; P-values of the two constructs are less than 0.05 & 0.01, respectively. The relationships are positive. However, Relative Advantage, Complexity and Compatibility are not significantly related to Intention to Adopt; their P-values are greater than 0.05.

Key words: innovation, website, perception of innovation, online, adopter

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาความตั้งใจของผู้บริโภคในการยอมรับเว็บไซต์ร้านอาหารในกรุงเทพมหานคร โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งมุ่งวิจัยอิทธิพลของการรับรู้นวัตกรรมที่มีผลต่อการยอมรับเว็บไซต์ร้านอาหาร การวิจัยนี้ใช้วิธีสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจงได้กลุ่มตัวอย่างจำนวนทั้งสิ้น 407 คน ซึ่งเป็นผู้มีประสบการณ์ในการใช้อินเตอร์เน็ตที่อาศัยในกรุงเทพมหานครจากผลการวิจัยพบว่าปัจจัยที่ทำให้เกิดความตั้งใจในการยอมรับเว็บไซต์ร้านอาหารของผู้บริโภคในกรุงเทพมหานคร คือการสามารถนำไปทดลองใช้ได้ (Trialability) และการสามารถสังเกตเห็นผลดีได้ง่าย (Observability) ซึ่งทั้งสองปัจจัยมีอิทธิพลต่อความตั้งใจในการยอมรับเว็บไซต์ร้านอาหารที่ระดับนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ 0.05 และ 0.01 ตามลำดับ

คำสำคัญ: นวัตกรรม, เว็บไซต์, มุมมองด้านนวัตกรรม, ออนไลน์, ผู้ตอบรับนวัตกรรม

INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ISMED) reported that many of the small medium enterprises (SMEs) are dealing with insufficient resources in running their businesses such as the needed business knowledge, enough funding, manpower, technological skills and management skills (ISMED, 2012). Thus, many industries try to cut down unnecessary expenses by looking for new alternative tools such as the internet. It is undeniable that using websites in boosting up a business poses several advantages to business operators. This is especially true in terms of its advertising, publicity and promotion. With attractive web design, customers are attracted

to visit the virtual restaurant and order food from there in the convenience of their home. However, to attract consumers to visit the restaurant websites is not simple. The perception of innovation also plays an important role towards the intention of Thai customers to adopt restaurant websites in Bangkok.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovation

According to Grewal and Levy (2010) innovation is the process by which ideas are adapted into new products and services that will help firms

grow. If firms want to increase sales, they can venture into two possible choices, which are to continue to market current products to current customers, technically called, market penetration or they can take the same product to another market with similar customer which is called market development. This is where innovation can take place, since the firms have to consider some changes to the product to suit the needs of the new market (Grewal & Levy, 2010).

Diffusion of Innovation

The process by which the use of an innovation, whether for a product or for a service, spread throughout a market over time and over various categories of adopters, is referred to as diffusion of innovation. The theory surrounding diffusion of innovation helps marketers understand the rate at which consumers are likely to adopt a new product or service. It also gives them a means to identify potential markets for their new products or services and predict their potential sales, even before they introduce the innovations. This theory was first published by Everett M. Rogers in 1962. These adopters can be divided into five groups namely the innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards (Grewal & Levy, 2010).

Perception of Innovation

Rogers (1962) claimed that the rate of adoption of an innovation categorically depends on how its characteristics are perceived in terms of its relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Relative advantage means that if a product is perceived to be better than substitutes then the diffusion will be relatively quick, while compatibility refers to the occasion when the product or service closely matches the individual's needs, the innovation can be considered highly compatible with the consumer. On the other hand, complexity means that if the innovation has a high level of complexity, it will have a lower level of adoption. Trialability occurs if customers have a chance to try new product or service before the actual buying the product adoption rates will rise substantially. Finally, observability means the more positive effects are observed, the higher effects this will bring to the consumers

(Grewal & Levy, 2010).

In the study conducted by Xu and Quaddus (2010) as cited in Chaffey (2010), they found that relative advantage is perceived to be a benefit if a company decides to go through e-commerce adoption. Compatibility on the other hand, is assumed as the range of innovation that is perceived as consequent with existing benefits, past experiences and needs of potential adopters. Thus, they claimed that business processes and adaptation of new technologies are compatible. Complexity is another technological factor which illustrates the degree to which an innovation is perceived as comparatively difficult to understand and use. As Xu and Quaddus (2010) in Chaffey (2010) reiterated the perceived complexity of e-commerce applications limit the possibility of adoption.

However, Hsu et al. (2007) found that compatibility plays a role in Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) adoption for the early-majority and late-majority groups but not for innovators and early-adopters. The perceptions of trialability, measured for four groups, were also found to be not meaningful predictors of adoption intention (Hsu et al., 2007). But the relative advantage in MMS use was found to be essential as innovators/early-adopters, early-majority, and late majority groups viewed that relative advantage highly affected their intention to use MMS. However, there were no important relationships found among laggards (Hsu et al., 2007).

Li (2013) revealed that most people are familiar with the advantages of digital television and realize that it is an inevitable development in technology. This may explain why this study did not find that relative advantage and compatibility played a major role in the intention to adopt both digital terrestrial television and digital cable.

Hill et al. (2011) commented that relative advantage is one of the strongest components to explain broadband adoption in rural Australia. One special finding that drew attention was the connection between the three internet usage factors, namely, frequency, daily length of usage, and number of household users. Broadband users generally use the internet more frequently and longer everyday than non-broadband users. The more people within households use the internet, the more likely are those households to have adopted broadband.

Martins et al. (2004) pointed that observability

and trialability were the ones that better support the acceptance of the internet as an educational tool in Brazilian language schools, while Joo (2011) stated that trialability had a positive impact on its adoption; the lack of examples and lower trialability had a negative consequence on its adoption. Complexity made users feel insecure about the result of system adoption.

Kim et al. (2004) confirmed that a new product's performance, or its relative advantage, help successful market penetration. Moreover, it was observed that backward compatibility lowers the level of resistance and thus facilitates successful market entry. Unlike performance, however, compatibility enhancement became more effective when the customer base is quite small. Furthermore, when forward compatibility of the incumbent product increases, the probability of new product's successful entry drops, and the drop is steeper as the number of customers is high.

Moore and Benbasat (1991) and Wei (2006) found that relative advantage and compatibility were not distinguishable from each other in empirical studies of technology adoption and suggested a revision of Rogers' five attributes (Zhou, 2008).

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: Relative advantage influences the intention to adopt restaurant websites.

Hypothesis 2: Complexity influences the intention to adopt restaurant websites.

Hypothesis 3: Compatibility influences the intention to adopt restaurant websites.

Hypothesis 4: Trialability influences the intention to adopt restaurant websites.

Hypothesis 5: Observability influences the intention to adopt restaurant websites.

Study Design

Exploratory research was done to gain background information about the topic at hand and to clearly define the term innovation and diffusion of innovation. A secondary data analysis was also performed to clarify the research problem and to develop the research hypotheses. A questionnaire was used as a research instrument to gather relevant data. Descriptive statistics were utilized to ana-

lyze the data.

Population and Sample Size

The researchers chose nonprobability sampling method (purposive sampling). Since the purpose of the study is to analyze how perception of innovation of consumers plays a role on the intention to adopt restaurant website in Bangkok, respondents must be internet users, who are familiar with websites. According to Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1973), the minimum sample size which can be considered acceptable to represent the minimum sample size of populations is equal to 400. The data was gathered using an online questionnaire from 106 respondents and paper questionnaires from 301 respondents who are consumers in Bangkok with the sample size totaling 407 respondents.

Study Instrument

The instrument used in this study is a 7-point Likert scale questionnaire, on a scale of 1- 7 (1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree) which was developed to attain the research objectives and is based upon the conceptual framework that presents how perception of innovation plays a role on the intention to adopt restaurant website in Bangkok. Developing the questionnaire was made possible by collecting data from the respondents who live in Bangkok to measure the level of agreement towards the research questions. Modification to the questionnaire was then made following theories on adoption and innovation, with referrals to some dissertations, academic articles and books.

Statistical Treatment

The research framework was analyzed primarily using Structural Equation Model (SEM), supported by AMOS 21.0 software.

FINDINGS

Name of the favorite restaurant websites. Most of visitors cannot remember the exact domain name of their favorite restaurant websites. Therefore, they type what they can remember in search en-

gine to find out. Usually internet users visit restaurant website through search engines such as google.com and pantip.com. Meanwhile people who search for special offers always visit famous websites that offer best-deals such as aroi.com, tripadvisor.com, wongnai.com, EDTguide.com, aroihere.com, BKKmenu.com and Teenee.com. They also look through social networking sites such as facebook.com.

Reasons for liking the favorite restaurant websites. Twenty-four percent of respondents prefer their favorite restaurant websites because the sites can fulfill their information needs, while 22 percent of them said that they prefer the website because of the reputation of the restaurants. Nineteen percent of the people click on the website because of special deals, while 14 percent of visitors are convinced by beautiful pictures. Eleven percent of respondents click on the website because of its attractive design, among other reasons such as online reservation and combo set special offer.

Reasons for visiting favorite restaurant websites. Thirty-seven percent of respondents who visit their favorite restaurant websites do so to search for information and privileges, while 34 percent want to view the menu. Fifteen percent want to place an order and 8 percent want to reserve the table. In addition, 4 percent have other reasons to visit such as to look for maps, phone numbers, locations and other details. Only 2 percent of them want to share their comments.

Recommendations. The research found that most people want to see updated information with full details of price and food. The design of website should then be well organized, and the needed information easy to find. The customers also want to view beautiful pictures of special dishes and restaurant scenery. Some of them who are not regular customers want to get contact numbers, maps and read reviews of other guests. Exclusive special promotion online, application on smart phone and the link with social networking sites could be good way to get attention of people. Finally they request that the restaurant should be ready for advance reservations and food order.

The result of the study from Structural Equation Model

The intention of Thai customers to adopt res-

taurant websites in Bangkok

Absolute Fit Measure Chi-square = 359.596
Degrees of freedom = 120 Probability level = .000
The result indicates that the hypothesized model did not fit the data well by the Chi-Square because the null hypothesis is rejected i.e., there is a significant difference between the actual and predicted variance-covariance matrices. However, the Chi-Square is sensitive to sample size. The use of Chi-Square index provides insignificant support in determining the extent to which the model does not fit.

Baseline comparisons

Although the hypothesized model did not fit the observed variance-covariance matrices well by the Chi-Square test, the Baseline comparisons fit indices of NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI are all above 0.9. A widely applied guideline for a good fit of these incremental fit indices is 0.09; therefore, it can be concluded that the possible improvement in fit for the hypothesized model is less than 0.1 which is too small to be practically significant.

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model) - unstandardized

The result indicates that only the unstandardized regression weights of Trialability and Observability are significantly related to Intention to Adopt, P-Values of the two constructs are less than 0.05 and 0.01, respectively. The relationships are positive. Therefore, it can be concluded that Trialability and Observability positively influence the intention of Thai customers to adopt restaurant websites in Bangkok.

Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

Thus, it implies that the greater the Trialability and Observability, the more Intention to adopt the restaurant website.

Squared Multiple Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

The squared multiple correlations, which is similar to R^2 , show that 81.9% of the variance of intention to adopt the restaurant website is accounted for by the variance of the 5 latent constructs i.e. Relative advantage, Complexity, Compatibility, Trialability, Observability. It can be concluded that the model can explain 81.9% of the variance of Intention to adopt the restaurant

website. The remaining 18.1% of the variance of Intention to adopt the restaurant website cannot be explained by the hypothesized model, and is thus attributed to the residual (error term).

DISCUSSION

The results show that Trialability and Observability influence the intention of Thai customers to adopt a restaurant website. This is in contrast to what Rogers (1962) claimed that the perception of innovation: relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, trialability, and observability all play important roles in the intention to adopt (Rogers, 1962). Xu and Quaddus (2010) in Chaffey (2010) found that relative advantage, compatibility and complexity are more important than the rest of the group. Hill et al. (2011) commented that relative advantage is one of the strongest components to explain broadband adoption in rural Australia. Hsu et al. (2007) stated that relative advantage and compatibility influence MMS adoption but trialability has no influence. Kim et al. (2004) mentioned that the relative advantage is important clue to penetrate the market and compatibility increases the chances of successful market entry.

However, there are some researchers that found different aspects. Moore and Benbasat (1991) and Wei and Lo (2006) as cited in Zhou (2008) found that relative advantage and compatibility were not distinguishable according to their studies of technology adoption. Martins et al. (2004) pointed that observability and trialability were the ones that better support the acceptance of the internet as an educational tool in Brazilian language schools. This is supported by the study of Joo (2011) who stated that trialability had a positive impact on adoption. Moreover, Li (2013) revealed that when people are familiar with the advantages of digital television and its technology, they do not find that relative advantage, and compatibility played a major role in their intention to adopt. This study may explain why the findings show only trialability and observability as the influencing factors on intention to adopt. Nowadays, people are familiar with the benefits of the internet and it has become part of their daily lives therefore they perceive that trialability and observability are more important than other characteristics.

Recommendations

This study has the following recommendations for practitioners running a restaurant business. Firstly, according to the result of the study, trialability is an important factor in stimulating customer intentions to adopt restaurant website, therefore restaurants should give their customers the opportunity to access them by linking their websites to famous search engines. It is the simplest way to let customers click on to their websites, and check what is in there. This process will help increase the number of visitors later on. The results of the study also showed that only few people could remember the exact domain name of their favorite restaurants therefore famous search engines are important tools in order to find restaurants easily. Secondly, observability is an essential variable for the customers' intention to adopt a restaurant website, thus many customers will adopt when they observe that the websites show attractive pages. Restaurant websites are found to be attractive if they provide more information about restaurants such as details of food, locations and special deals. Therefore, the owners need to present important information about the website, keeping them up-to-date, and offer privileges to attract customers' attention. Thirdly, because trialability and observability are vital for the intention to adopt, it is strongly recommended that restaurants find the space to show their websites on tourism promotional web sites such as Bangkok travel guide websites. This can help visitors to find easily the restaurant website they like because those travel guide websites are well-known, and some of them even provide reviews from the visitors. Fourthly, internet users mainly spend time online because of social contact and information, some of them spend long time on social networking sites, hence, facebook.com is a good place where restaurants can connect to people. If restaurants pay more attention to social network sites, trialability and observability can be more applied in their lifestyles. This is especially significant as smart phones have become an important tool for communication. Thus, entrepreneurs should apply mobile applications to make it easy for customers to directly track restaurant sites. Finally, some websites need to undergo further redesigning as people criticize some websites which are hard to understand, difficult to navigate and are not up-to-date.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Firstly, future research can use different methodologies, such as focus groups and interviews to examine the influences on customers' intention to adopt a website. Secondly, the growth of the internet and online shopping will continue, and future researches can be replicated that deal with online shoppers, measuring actual purchase behaviors instead of intentions. This procedure is designed to understand if there are any significant difference in the perceptions of innovation of internet users and internet purchasers. Thirdly, researchers might consider developing more elaborate scales to measure the agreement of the intention to improve quality scales. Finally, findings of the intention to adopt restaurant website may differ across cultures. Thus, the study can be explored in different cultures to view cross-cultural comparisons.

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