

**THE EFFECTS OF INTEGRATED MARKETING
COMMUNICATION: THE CASE STUDY
OF THREE TO FOUR STARS HOTEL**



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Thematic paper
entitled
**THE EFFECTS OF INTEGRATED MARKETING
COMMUNICATION: THE CASE STUDY
OF THREE TO FOUR STARS HOTEL**

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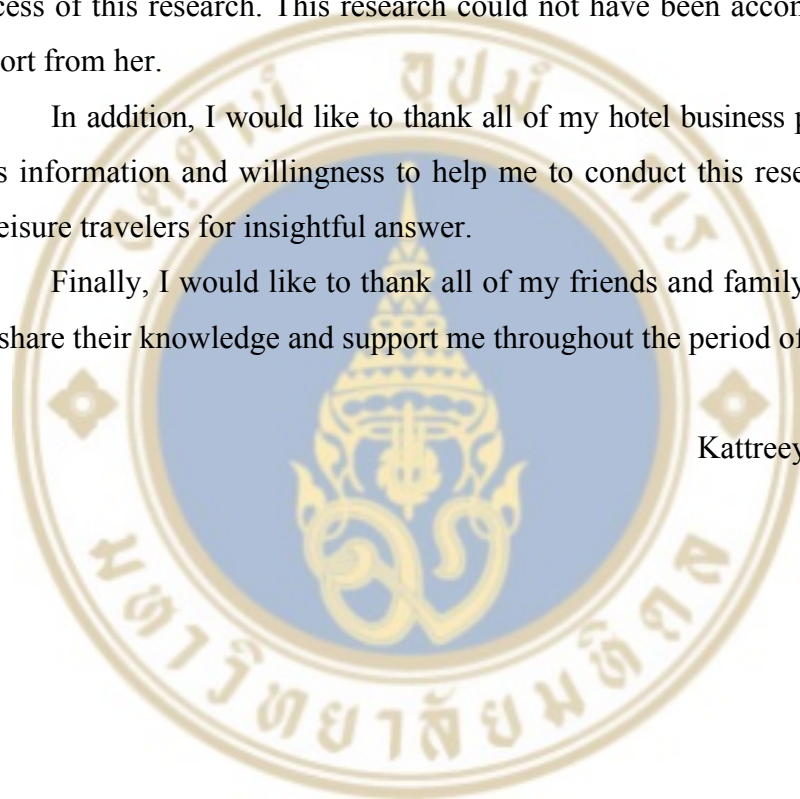
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ABSTRACT

This research purposed to know how the integrated marketing communication could affects and benefits to medium size hotel, which are three to four stars hotel. According to the report of tourism showed that Thailand became a major center for tourism in the world, and Thailand is one of the top destinations in the Asia Pacific region, among China, Hong Kong, and Malaysia.

In the high competition of business, the concept of integrated marketing communication has been applied. The objective is to gain the sustainable profit of hotel through the effective way of marketing communication.

The research utilizes the qualitative approach using the in-depth interview. The interview was conducted in term of hotelier from who is the owner or sales manager of the hotel including Bangkok area, Southern Thailand and Northern Thailand with 13 respondents. As well as 13 respondents of the leisure travelers including Thais and foreigners who have been traveling in the accommodated in three and/or four stars hotel(s).

The variables are brand awareness, perceive quality, purchasing behavior, brand loyalty and engagement and relationship. This study revealed that “purchase intention” was considered as the most effective result from applying integrated marketing communication. The accommodation knowledge and attitude (Perceive quality), brand awareness, brand loyalty and engagement and relationship are viewed as second, third, fourth and fifth rank accordingly. The leisure travelers emphasize on similar direction but different in detail. “Perceive quality” is the most consideration effect of integrated marketing communication followed by engagement, purchasing behavior and brand loyalty.

KEY WORDS: Integrated Marketing Communication / Three Stars Hotel / Four Stars Hotel / Leisure Travelers

40 pages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been a major industry in the developed economies since the mid-nineteenth century (Feifer, 1986). One of the dream destinations of many travelers around the world is Thailand. Tourism industry in Thailand has been growing each year, as Thailand is always on the bucket lists of voyagers around the world since it offers exotic food, unique culture, intriguing attraction and friendly local people. On top of that, Thailand is considered as a travel paradise to those travellers with a tight budget. This makes Thailand even more worthy place to visit

Figure 1.1 shows that in year 2004 - 2014, Tourism industry generates a lot of revenue to the country.

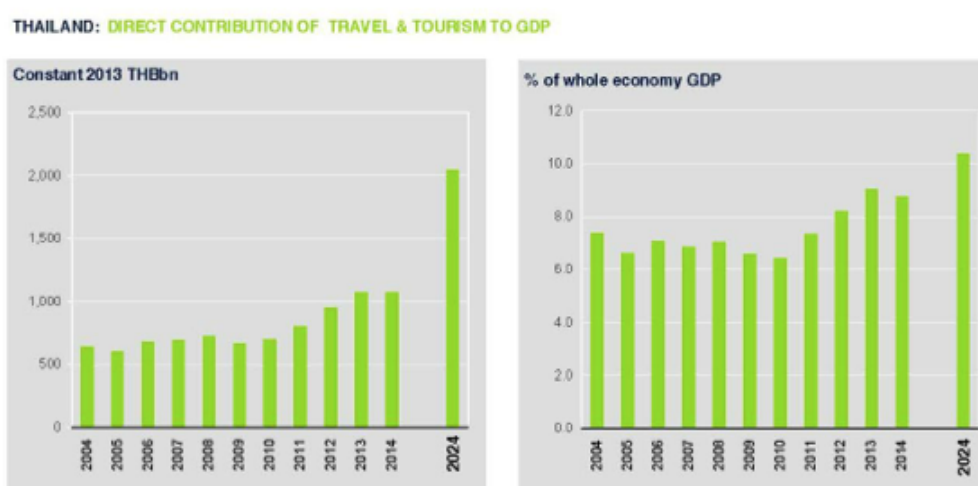


Figure 1.1 Thailand- Travel & Tourism Total Contribution to GDP

There are more than fifteenth millions tourists visited Thailand per year during the past 5 years. The number of tourists is slightly increasing every year; however, the number insignificantly dropped in some years. For example in 2009 for reason of recession riots, and in 2014 due to the political crisis.

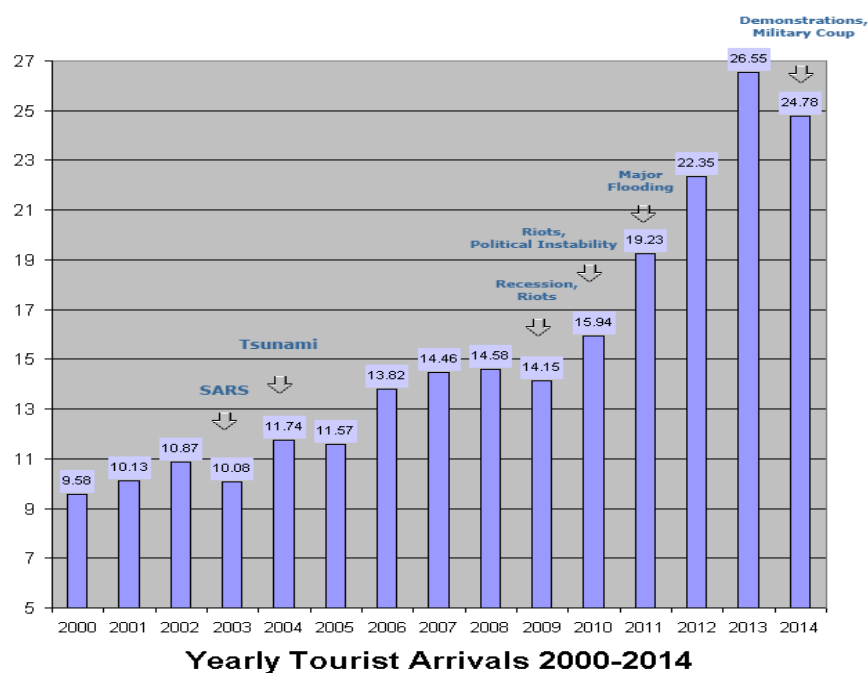


Figure 1.2 International tourist arrivals to Thailand during 2000 – 2014

1.1 Problem Statement

According to Figure 1.2, it shows that the positive trend of tourism in a big picture inspires SME's investors to enter and invest in hotel business. Because many new hotels and resorts is launched every year, the hotel industry in Thailand become more competitive. Most of the hotels in Thailand are 3-4 stars hotels which own by local investor.

Moreover in many parts of Thailand, there are seasons for traveling that can be divided into low season, high season and peak season. Most hotels are likely to have high occupancy rate during peak season followed by high season while there are many available rooms during low season. Therefore, the owners need to understand the business and situation of their territories in order to avoid the loss of availability.

Marketing strategies are the major concern for the hotelier to increase sales and to be a survivor, especially during low season. In order to gain the biggest piece of market share, each hotel has to come up with special strategies to compete with other competitors. The application of marketing communication becomes crucial success factor in hotel industry. The marketing and sales department of each hotel has to work

on their strategy to follow the world of marketing. Nowadays, marketing communication has been shifted to integrated marketing communication (IMC) as results of the movement of business.

1.2 Research Objective

Thereby, this study intends to analyze the effect of the usage of IMC in three to four stars hotel in different parts of Thailand. This research aims to find out how the marketing communications that are used in several hotels is an effective strategy in hotelier perspective. At the same time, the marketing communications that can influence leisure travelers' decision in choosing a hotel will be discovered. Since leisure travelers usually plan their trip and select the hotel according to their own preference unlike business travelers who usually have less power in choosing hotel. In order to comprehend the insightful advantage of IMC in hotel industry, the research will emphasizes only on leisure travelers choosing the hotel.

The result of this study will help the hotel investor to understand more about the effect of marketing communication in consumers' perception. In addition, compared to the variety of marketing communication that applied in different hotel to achieve the hotel's goal. The right understanding of the hotelier will lead them to manage the effective IMC.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Emergence of IMC

Over the past decades, the previous generation of marketing communication was become the academic theory that is unpractical compared with the new generation of marketing communication called “Integrated Marketing Communication” Global business confront the three movement that derives the demand of IMC composes of (Schult, 2003);

1. The development of technology across the business operations.
2. The emphasis on branding to create differentiation in its product.
3. The third major factor drove the emergence of IMC is the globalization era that support organization spread their market outside home.

Those three shifts occurred in the middle of 1980s and there is another recent key factor that support IMC, which is the demand for value-based business. The valued based business naturally leads to the notion of added value, (Brandenburger and Stuart, 1996). It returns to the marketing communication activities to IMC approaches that is a value-based strategy to the business.

Many of marketing communication becomes an essential tool to enhance attention from consumers. For the practitioners, IMC becomes widely agreed since the early 1990s after it has been developing since the late 1980s. The IMC also know as relationship marketing. The core concept of IMC is aligning the communication objective with the company goal by using specific individual message through exact media channel.

2.2 The Definition of IMC

IMC definition has been developed from time to time as follows;

The American Association of Advertising Agencies (1993) developed the definition of IMC as *“a comprehensive plan that evaluate the strategic roles of a variety of communication concepts and combine these concepts to provide clarity, consistency and maximum impact”*

The American Marketing Association (2001) defines IMC as marketing communication tools designed to reach customers or prospects by assuring that they consistently received all brands contacts and be able to relate with the brand, product, service, or organization.

Kitchen and Schultz (1999) proposed the definition of IMC as a concept of marketing strategy that is applied to create an effective communication that is evaluable and measurable towards consumers, customers, potential customers and other correlative audiences.

According to Bennett’s Stirolgy (2013), the true IMC refers to the progress of marketing strategies and creative marketing campaign that are executed across variety of media that is suitable for the particular objective of the brand in order to generate the greatest impact to the brand and conveys to be outstanding in the market by creating brand value and generating cost efficiency.

The conclusion of IMC plan concept can be concluded as the idea of effective communication plans that blend the variety of promotional tools to maximize the benefit of marketing investment (Carlson, Dorsch, and Grove 2007)

2.3 The Tools for IMC

The promotional mix is the tool to accomplish communication goals of organization. The basic IMC tools consist of 6 elements (Trehan. 2009-10):

1. Advertising that helps organization reach a wider audience in a short period of time. It is one of the most effective ways of brand promotion since it can create brand awareness and motivates the audience to purchase product.

2. Direct marketing use for communicating directly with potential customers. It is designed to generate transaction between the company and prospect by using two-

way communication and a variety of activities such as product testing, sampling or visiting guests. The strength point of direct marketing is the retaining of good relationship with current customers and attracts new targets in effective way (Duncan, 2005)

3. Sales promotion can be promoted through coupons, discount, attractive packages or membership etc. The sales promotion assist to generate more profit and speed up the decision processes. It is the inducement program that offers extra value of product or service and motivates customers to purchase larger quantity. Sales promotion mostly used for maximizing sales volume from current customers rather than engaging new users.

4. Publicity/Public relation; Publicity used for announcing the product, service and/or the company. Publicity reaches mass audience similar to the advertising. However unlike advertising, it requires less investment as the company is not buying a space in mass media communication. While it can be done by the organization runs a preferable story to create awareness in the public. Public relations refers to a program that motivate public interest and earn more understanding towards publicity and includes a variety tools for instant; sponsorship of special event, participation in community activities or activities that related to the brand image (Neff, 2002). Publicity and Public relation are good to present or promote brand into public eyes and it can shape brand attitude among the audiences.

5. Personal selling, marketer or sales representative sell the product or service to end-users directly. Personal selling involves face-to-face contact or telecommunication contact. The advantage of personal selling is the relationship between organizations and end-users. Besides the seller is able to see potential customer's reaction.

6. Interactive/ Internet marketing; the improvement in technology leads the way of marketing communication changed. It has greatly accelerated the ability of marketing communication to easily reach the target customers particularly generation Y consumers (Fill, 2002).

According to the change in the market and one single marketing communication tool is unable to reach the marketing communication goal by itself (Kitchen et al., 2004). Therefore an emergence of IMC appears as an effective way of marketing communication in this sophisticated market (Kim et al., 2004) and the acceptance of IMC is growing significantly (Strasser, 2009; Kitchen and Schultz 2009). Shimp (2007) found that in

the tourism and hospitality industry, there is not many researchers laid their interest on the IMC whereas the IMC has been proven to be as important in other industries.

2.4 Determinants of IMC in tourism industry

After reviewing many IMC studies, I have found the positive result of the IMC impact in several business as well as in tourism industry. As Elliott and Boshoff (2008) interviewed 316 managers in small tourism organizations in South Africa studied whether the IMC produces good impact. The findings showed a positive impact directly to the market orientation, the ownership orientation and the competitor orientation. The previous study that focus on the same assumption of IMC as follow.

2.4.1 Brand awareness

A variety of tools are used to fulfill creativity and strategy of multiple media options to reach the consumers at different contact points. This integration approaches the consistent core product benefits and brand image in consumers' eyes, furthermore it touch the consumers' mind. The firms pay more attention on a strategic integration of their marketing tools. As they notice the significant emergence of IMC, which involves correlating the different promotional components combine with other marketing activities. The objective of this latest type of communication aims at communicating directly with a firm's customers. In the past years, marketing communication is considered as a key benefit of building strong brand (Keller, 2009). However Keller (2009) stated that the marketing communication message have to be blended to convey a strong message and accomplish the strategic positioning of brand.

Mccabe (2010) claimed that marketing information reflects the brand itself and a strong communication message has become a key success factor in the tourism marketplace and hospitality services.

Grey research in 2010 asked 1500 Australians and found that marketing communications assist to create brand equity and sales come afterward. The key for effective IMC, awareness of brand has to be easily and quickly linked in memory.

2.4.2 Perceive quality

Hotel and hospitality industry are intangible service as the buyer is unable to experience the service until they buy it or prior to their arrival time. Mittal and Baker (2002) emphasized on the intangibility of the way to communicate the abstract benefits. They argued that the service organization confronts four key challenges;

1. Abstractness, which are the difficulties in communication of service.
2. Generality, difficulties in conveying the outstanding of organization from the others.
3. Non searchability as customers is unable to test the service prior to purchase.
4. Impalpability, a need to understand and communicate the physical experience of the service to potential customers.

They supported that the IMC is used to creating brand identity, positioning of the brand and creating demand, which are the key objective of communication. In addition, the hospitality firms must communicate the distinct characteristic of the service and provide useful examples to create the trust among consumers.

Therefore the marketing communication plays a key role of visual imagery, which is very important to tourism and hospitality industries (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997)

2.4.3 Purchasing behavior

In recent years, the marketing has been moved across the integrated way (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005). The IMC produces from the consistent approach of marketing through the variety of channels and it obviously benefits to the marketers, as it helps to reduce cost of marketing and maximize the effectiveness. A concept of IMC evaluates the strategic roles of communication disciplines and blends them together to maximize the result. One of the major points of the applicant IMC is to influence purchase behavior, which is a customer-based concept. The communications that meet desired behavior affecting customers' correspond to sales volume (Shimp, 2010).

The ultimate objective of IMC is to affect the demeanor of the message receive. Prior to purchasing a new brand, consumers generally aware of its benefits therefore they tend to seek information about it. Communication efforts directed at

accomplishing these pre-behavioral are justified. Therefore, the message sender or marketer must do more than just influence brand awareness or enhance customer attitudes toward the quality of the product. Shimp, 2007, found that the effective IMC produce the purchasing intention. As a result, the impulse of strong message encourage people to purchase the product.

2.4.4 Brand loyalty

Wang et al. (2009) interviewed 197 visitors of Lukang for heritage destination choice. The authors discovered that the IMC through public relation, advertising, direct sales and promotion influence of each factor different within different demographic groups. The groups tend to loyal to the brand they have experience before and recommend to their relatives and friends.

The organization has to adjust to the change of the whole marketing picture. Understanding target consumer insight and seeing things the way they sees them. On purpose of delivering the right message touch relevant target's feeling by carefully blending different marketing tools. The effective marketing program can significantly help firm to maximize the profit in long term and the loyal customer align in long term benefits.

The implementation of IMC has been a topic studying for various researchers. However, not many of them focus especially on IMC in tourism sector while none of them covers the IMC in leisure tourist. Thereby in this study, I intend to fill the gap in literature of the perceived IMC on implement of sales and brand awareness, specifically on the dimension of leisure travellers within the hotel industry.

2.4.5 Engagement and relationship

Nowadays, the Internet provides space for greater interaction between marketers and consumers. In some industries, the marketing programs can be completed within online components. In addition, Shimp, 2007, stated that the successful IMC requires building relationship between brands and consumers. The relationship considers as a key to modern marketing and the relationship can be built through IMC. Successful relationship between customers and brands lead to the purchase intention even to the repeat purchasing followed by loyalty towards a brand. The relationship can generate

the growth of the firm. It is more profitable to engage customers and build relationship than continuously spend on marketing cost to search for new customers.

The ability of a company to engage consumers could produce positive effect on business. Customers' engagement is more likely to go on participating in the community, the more satisfaction the higher trust toward the community (Wirtz et al. 2013).

Thereby, customer engagement significantly impacts on longevity of customers' participation and; increase satisfaction and brand loyalty. This . In turn, increases eWOM (word of mouth) in the community and enhances further community engagement. Besides those members are likely to improve positive attitudes and behavior toward firm, hotel brand and product. The customers who engage to the brand can become loyal customers and increase purchase (Sheth, 2002).

2.5 Conceptual Framework

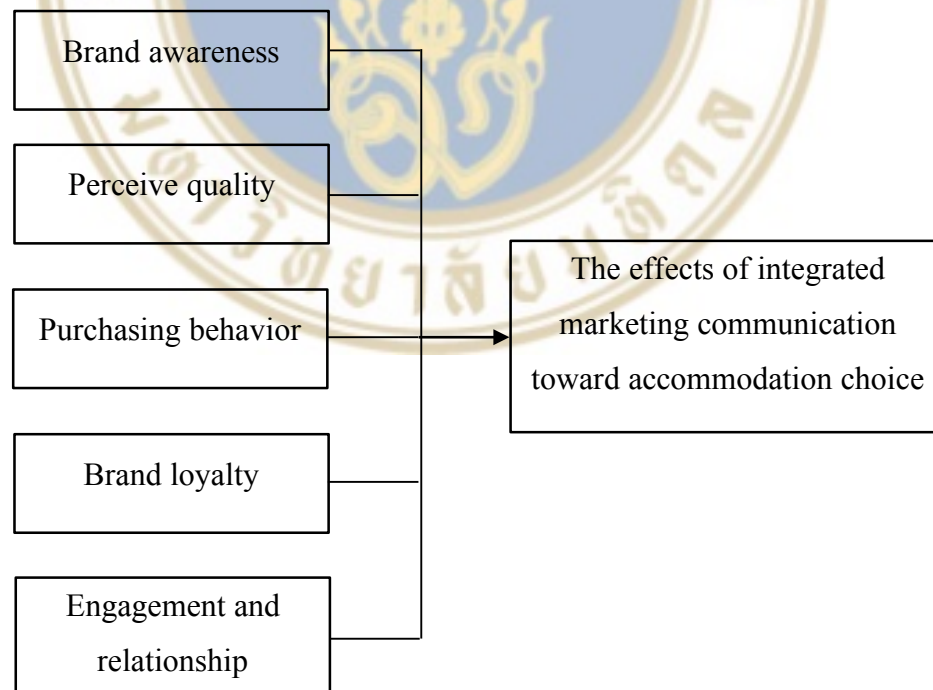


Figure 2.1 The effects of IMC toward accommodation choice

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in this study is described in 4 sections consist of the study design, population and sampling followed by data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This research aims at finding the effects of IMC in three to four stars hotel. The research focuses on leisure tourism in terms of accommodation, which could leads to factors of hotel selection and awareness of leisure travellers. The research also intends to identify the IMC's benefits in hotelier's point of view. To answer the research question, the informal face-to-face in-depth interview in a form of conversation (Burgess, 1982a, 1984; Lofland, 1974) will be used for interviewing target groups.

A qualitative research that produce finding in non-statistical procedure (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) was selected as research method. Qualitative design uses words as data thereby it does not provide simple answer and truths or precise measurements (Brennen, 2013). However, it can be insightful and address real concerns (Tracy, 2013). The flexibility of qualitative research of open-ended questions allow greater naturally interact between the researcher and the study participant (Denzin, 2000). In addition the participant have opportunity to explain in greater detail compared to quantitative research. In turn, researcher has a great opportunity to instantly respond to what participants informed by asking following questions to information that participants provided. Those advantages allow researcher to interpret and better understand the complex reality of the effectiveness of applying IMC.

3.2 Population and Sample size

The population of this study will be separated in two groups composed of hotelier who is a marketer or owner in 3 to 4 stars hotel and leisure travelers who has been travelled in the recent year. The sample groups were chosen by non-probability sampling techniques in types of purposive sampling method which were engaged to share their experiences. Purposive sampling is widely used as a common method, in qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009). This means that participate are selected because they are likely to present beneficial data.

There is no specific rule for the number of interviews. However the qualitative has several influences on how many interviews to be done to meet research objectives:

1. The sampling techniques that are used (Patton, 2002).
2. Resourcing of the study on what sampling is practical. A several limitations of researcher for instance; a geographical limitation as interviewer can travel within a limited area. The graphical limitation enforces on a sample.
3. The saturation point (Glaser & Strauss, 2012), the point when the themes starts to re-occur; the researcher discovers patterns in the interviewees and more interviews confirm what the researcher has already sensed. Guest et al. (2006) found that 12 interviews of homogenous are all needed to reach the results of one study in one particular context. However, if the researcher fines the different point of view regards to the topic, the number of interviews will take more in order to reach trustworthiness and rich data.

The researcher desired the saturation as an end point of data collection, the 26 participants can be divided into two groups; 13 hotelier participants and 13 leisure traveler participants. All 13 hotelier participants have been experiencing the hotel marketing or facing the marketing task of how to promote his/her hotel into public eyes. By focusing on small sampling size, it would broaden some important insights, which barely found in quantitative studies. All 13 leisure traveler participants have been traveling within this year and staying in 3-4 stars hotel(s). The age range between 25-44 years old because this sample group categorizes in the major of Internet user worldwide; the statistic portal (2014) gives information of the age distribution of Internet users that 47.1% of global Internet users were between 25-44 years old. Therefore this age range

tends to generate information toward online and offline marketing communication that affect their accommodation choice.

In-depth interview will be adopted to explore and evaluate their perceptions and experiences towards IMC of the hotel. The researcher maximizes the variation sample of in order to ensure that sample is credible and covers entire target group. The hotelier participants come from owners and marketer of the hotel around Thailand, at the same time, the leisure traveler participants consists of Thai travelers and foreigners. The pattern of interview likely to be conversational than the formal interview, and the subsequence conversation related to participant's answer not interviewer (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

3.3 Data Collection

In-depth interview is one of the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research where in depth and insight answer are required. It is optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, experiences and perspectives (Glaser & Strauss, 2012).

To be able to identify the effect of IMC in the hotel industry, the researcher will conducted semi-structured interview in order to get the effectiveness of the answer.

The introduction of IMC will be providing to participants before starting the question. The open-ended questions and free-flow of conversation will be used during the interview in the purpose of gaining real experience and the respondent are encouraged to talk and share their opinion. The interview session will be arranged in informal place and atmosphere.

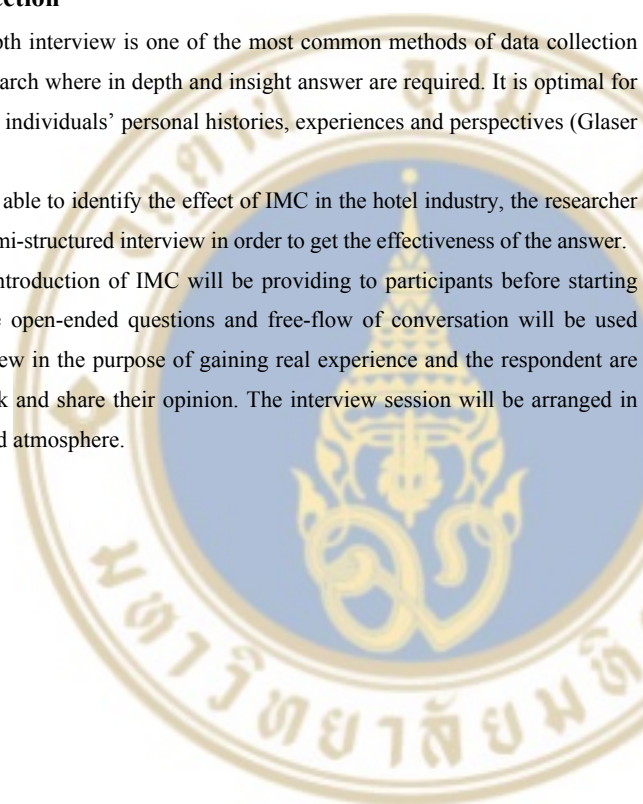


Table 3.1 Sample of open-ended questions to be used during an hotelier interview

QUESTIONS
1. The main features that make your hotel/resort become a choice of travellers? a. How do you communicate your main features to target audience? b. How do you make your main features become selling point?
2. Have you ever used IMC? a. Why do you apply those marketing communication channels?
3. What are the IMC that used to apply to your hotel? a. What is the reason of choosing that kind of communication?
4. How integrated marketing communication influences on target audiences? a. Does it success to promote your hotel into public eyes? and how? b. Do the prospects receive hotel information, features and other updated news through your communication? and how? c. Does the target audience reserve the hotel because of the marketing communication? and how? d. Does the IMC creates brand loyalty? and how? e. Does the IMC benefit to build engagement and relationship with the brand? and how? f. How IMC influence customers' attitude toward the hotel ?
The benefit and/or drawback of marketing spending?
What is the future plans for IMC?

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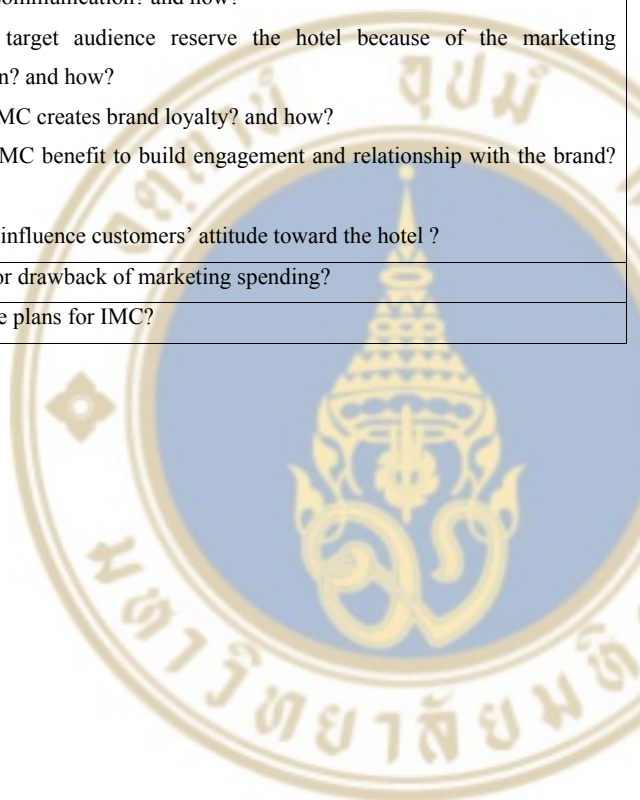


Table 3.2 Sample of open-ended questions to be used during a leisure traveller interview

Have you ever make travel plan on your own? a. How do you gather information?
What are the reasons of hotel selection?
Which channel do you normally use to book the hotel?
IMC of the hotel influences on leisure travelers. a. How do you get to know the hotel? b. How receive hotel information, features and other updated news? c. Please specify the most influence of that hotel communication to your decision? d. Does those communication or advertising encourage you to return to that hotel again or recommend your relatives and friends to stay? e. If the hotel would like to encourage you to revisit the hotel, how could you recommend them to do? f. Does the hotel's marketing communication benefits to build engagement and relationship with the brand? and how? g. How IMC influence customers' attitude toward the hotel ?
Does the reputation of hotel brand matter to your decision? a. How do you perceive the positive or negative attributes of hotel?
What do you feel after knowing the hotel through those communications?
If the hotel would like to communicate to you, could you please recommend the tool of communication that can easily reach you?

3.4 Data Analysis

As per the informal conversational approach of interview with open-ended questions, the data for a qualitative study will be recorded and note down during an interview. The relevant comments, observations, nonverbal communication has to be noted and then highlighting a significant message relevant to the research topic (Seidel, 1998). After selecting the significant message, the analysis section of this research includes an interpretation in an essential way. The connections or differentiate information between respondents will be mention in the interactive interview.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first part of this chapter begins with the results and analysis of demographic of respondents, followed by the general information of respondent about travelling experience and hotel during the past year. The research continues to discover the effect of IMC for the hoteliers in different part of Thailand.

After that the research discusses about the marketing communication that can influence the traveler decision making in hotel selection that were collected by in-depth interviews from 13 respondents who have been traveling in the past year and staying in 3-4 stars hotel.

4.1 Hotelier

4.1.1 Demographic profiles of respondents

Demographic characteristics of the hotelier respondents took from informal in-depth interviews through phone call. The participants composed of seven male (53.8%) and six female (46.2%). Almost all of the respondents are the owner of hotel (92.3%)¹ Over 76.9% of the hoteliers interviewed were ranged in the age group of 25-34 years old while 23.1% are in the age group of over 35 years old. Regarding to the number of hotel owned by respondent, 30.8% of participant manage more than one property and 69.2% manage one accommodation.

Table 4.1 Demographic backgrounds of respondents classified by gender, designation and age range.

Demographic Background	Quantity (n)	Frequency Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	7	52.8
Female	6	46.2
Total	13	100.0
Designation		
Owner	12	92.3
Sales and Marketing Manager	1	7.7
Total	13	100.0
Age range		
25-34	10	76.9
35 and over	3	23.1
Total	13	100.0
Number of hotel(s) management		
1 hotel	9	69.2
2 or more	4	30.8
Total	13	100.0

4.1.2 General information of hotel

The data were analyzed and presented in Table 4.3. The participant operates their hotel in the southern and middle of Thailand including Bangkok which is 46.2% or six persons while only one of the participant is the owner of hotel in the north of Thailand. Among the hotels participants, there are six hotels categorized as 3 stars hotel, four hotels classified as 4 stars hotel and 3 boutique hotels.

Table 4.2 General information of hotel classified by number of hotel location and hotel type

General Information		Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Hotel Location	Middle Thailand	6	46.2
	Northern Thailand	1	7.7
	Southern Thailand	6	46.2
Total		13	100.0
Hotel type	3 Stars	6	46.2
	4 Stars	4	30.8
	Boutique Hotel	3	23.0
Total		13	100.0

4.1.3 Effect of IMC in hotelier's perspective

According to the conversation on the phone call with 13 hoteliers, researcher found the familiar objective (effect) of IMC in hotelier's perspective as lists below.

4.2 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the major concern for communication objective of hoteliers' respondents. This is mostly the purpose for promotion-like messages rather than the case for advertising-like messages (Percy, 2014). The stimulation of the brand purchase intention reinforces the strength of the promotion. The hoteliers create the promotion in order to moving sales forward and they do this by encouraging immediate brand purchase intention.

Many participating hotels provide various discount promotions, including early bird promotion, last minute deals and special discount offers for minimum night and special package rate etc. Those kinds of discount promotion are designed for target audience. Some example from hoteliers' respondents regarding to the purchase intention can be seen as below.

“Dynamic price strategy is used to generate more sales during the low season. The higher price will be set during high season especially weekends. During low season, there are the discount promotion offers as well as last minute promotion whenever the hotel has room available” (owner of a hotel in Hua Hin, Prachuab Khiri Khan).

“The online market offers visible space to invest in marketing. The hoteliers are able to see competitors' rate plan therefore it is easy to set the price more competitive. Promotion will be set up by online team sales base on season. Sometimes the promotion needs to fulfill what customer's need not only offer the discount but also provide other convenient complimentary. For instant; free transfer service, free massage or gather free lunch for guests. Our resort is not only focus on individual traveller but also group traveller. The more number of Pax in a group the less price will be charged” (Director of Sales of a hotel in Kanchanaburi).

This finding is in line with the previous studies that one of the main interests of marketing communication is a specific result due to a specific communication activity.

Shah and D'Souza, 2009 stated that there are four categories of results; the promotion recognition, the promotion recall, the persuasion and the ultimate outcome is purchase behavior as it used to measure if the promotional campaign has an effect on brand purchasing.

4.3 Accommodation Knowledge and Attitude (Perceive Quality)

Hotelier gave this variable as second mainly since they intend to communicate with the prospect about hotel's selling point(s). Advertising and public relation are more likely to affect knowledge, attitude and preferences of customers (Shah & D'Souza, 2009). In a short-term, the advertising and public relation can increase market share, whereas a long-term results in terms of brand strength. Some of respondents mentioned about the effect of IMC in accommodation knowledge and attitude as below example.

“The resort is located in a far distant area which offers opportunity for us to have a huge unique landscape and serene atmosphere that makes us differ from other resorts. We also put some budget on social media like Facebook, Instagram, and travelling website to get the name of the resort out there. Moreover, Panvaree resort has been always participated in Thai Tiew Thai fair twice a year to promote the resort's selling point in the public eyes” (owner of a resort in Kao Sok, Surat Thani)

“Strong message and consistency at advertising helps to illustrate the abstractness of the hotel in customer's perspective since it is unable to experience the hotel prior to arrival, marketing communication and past experience sharing is the greatest way to provide knowledge, attitude and affect preferences of customers. Hotel website, tourism websites and social media is considered as a channel to communicate hotel's selling point. The resort uploaded professional photos of the resort and short descriptions on those websites. Not only is the resort's building presented on the marketing communication, but also family-liked service, location and other additional activities. According to the prospects which are mostly from European, the resort therefore advertises on the popular website for European travellers such as Holiday Check. As well as travel fare, resort's team participates TTM fair that occur in Germany every other year to present our resort to German Travel Agencies and

strengthen the tie of relationship with our partners” (owner of a resort in Koh Phangan, Surat Thani)

Furthermore, 92.31% of hotelier respondents apply OTA (online travel agencies) as another channel to promote. The commission considers as advertising fee. They normally pay approximately 15%-17% deducted from room rate while some hotel accept to pay more to get higher ranking on the website.

4.4 Brand Awareness

The role of IMC plays in the creation brand awareness to brand equity from the customer perspective (Ballester et al., 2012). The finding shows that brand familiarity generates relationships between IMC and brand awareness.

Moreover, the consistency of the brand message improves their recall and creates more favorable responses and brand attitudes. Some example of respondents toward brand awareness can be seen as below.

“Once the team figure out what communication tools and media to use, it can calculate the budget of marketing investment. This is challenging because management team have to decide how to reach the target audience to maximize the result. The hotel focuses only on the online form of advertising since our targets are young to middle age couples who usually serf the internet for travel information. The key is to link the right brand image in consumers’ memory by using Hotel name align with room concept. Hotel concept is presented through social media, social Ads, tourism web review and online blog. One of the most effective channels is online blog while it barely require payment. Some bloggers ask for free room stay in order to promote and write reviews on their blog. Hotel owner consider this as a free advertising or low cost advertising. Furthermore, our hotel put the hotel brand on photo spot to function brand remarkable. Visitors will find similar photo shoots in different means, the photo spot visibly creates awareness of the brand” (owner of a hotel in Bangkok)

The role of IMC plays in the creation brand awareness to brand equity from the customer perspective (Delgado Ballester et al., 2012). Moreover, the consistency of brand message improves their recall and creates more favorable responses and brand attitudes.

4.5 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to the relationship between the product and the target. The repurchase of a brand based on favorable and reliable past experiences (Blakeman, 2015). Brand loyalty is the objective that respondents gave significantly when they apply to IMC as can be seen from their perspective toward brand loyalty as follows.

“This hotel has been operating for 34 years as one of the strongest pioneers of Koh Samui who serves Thai style resort with home-liked service on Lamai beach, one of the most beautiful beaches in Koh Samui. The objective is retaining customers because customers’ satisfaction is the highest concern. The privilege for ex-customers encourage them to come back to the resort. They will receive 10 percent discount for returning guests to book directly through the hotel. In total, 20-30 percent of occupancy rate comes from repeating guests. Those loyal customers help to promote our resort by WOM as well” (owner of a hotel in Koh Samui, Surat Thani).

“If asking local people, our hotel will be one of recommended hotel in Prae province. Phoom Thai garden hotel has operated for many years and maintained the quality of the room and service. Sustainability of the business comes from quality control and marketing, we, therefore, apply both the online and offline marketing to touch the customer's memory. The marketing communication, WOM that affects the loyalty of the brand, though they never experience by themselves” (owner of a hotel in Prae)

Brand loyalty is considered as a brand’s achievement when applying IMC to three-four stars and boutique hoteliers. The IMC also enhances brand loyalty by maintaining brand equity; creating awareness, association and good image through relatable messages to audiences’ think and feel.

These interviews indicated that the IMC was able to bring meaning to the brand loyalty over time. According to the owner of Had Yai Palace, she advised that some guests might have excellent experiences toward the accommodation and service. In addition, they received better prices when they return to the hotel because they have stayed for several times while they visited Hadyai. However after few years, the popular area of the city moved, the travellers then change the accommodation choice rapidly. The location influences the customer's decision in choosing the hotel stay.

4.6 Engagement and Relationship

From the interviews, respondents usually utilize online channel and social media to build interest and engagement with the consumers. They shared their perspective as below examples.

“Half of our guests come from online booking channels. Thus, this hotel team utilises free advertising on social media to impact those prospects. The social media does not have quick add-ons like other advertising ads such as TV ads. Thus, the social media must engage and build the relationship with the customers. The marketers have the right to impress customers by talking to them in an informal manner and give the right offer that interests them” (owner of a hotel near Suvarnabhumi airport, Bangkok)

This research has helped acknowledge and point out many of hoteliers concerns about the drawbacks of social media. The 76.92% of respondents also mentioned that the social media is used for free advertising. Even though it helps to simplify the intention to interact between customers and sellers, the customers voices are more powerful and they can create communication for business. To a point where it is no longer controllable. Therefore, the IMC must evolve and be more engaging and become more powerful and influential for the customers.

4.7 Leisure Traveler

4.7.1 Demographic profiles of respondents

Demographic characteristics of the traveler respondents obtained from in-depth interviews were analyzed and presented in Table 4.1. The studies of 13 participants, including eight Thai travelers (61.5%) and five foreign travelers (38.5%) with regards to the gender, 53.8% or 7 people were men and 46.2% or 6 people were women. Over 76.9% of respondents were ranged in the age group 25-34 years old. The main occupation of respondent is employee for 61.5% and business owner is 23%.

Table 4.3 Demographic backgrounds of respondents classified by Nationality, Age range, Gender and Travel destination

Demographic Background	Quantity (n)	Frequency Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	7	53.8
Female	6	46.2
Total	13	100.0
Age range group		
24-34	10	76.9
35-44	3	23.1
Total	13	100.0
Occupation		
Employee	8	61.5
Business owner	3	23.0
Housewife	1	7.7
Unemployed	1	7.7
Total	13	100.0

4.7.2 General Information of respondents

The majority of participants have been traveling within Thailand (69.2%) during the past year while 30.8% have voyaged abroad. More than half of the interviewees have travelled more than 4 times during the past year (61.5%).

Table 4.4 General information of respondent about traveling experience and hotel during the past year

General		Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Times of travelling in the past year	1-3 times	5	38.5
	More than 4 times	8	61.5
Total		13	100.0
Travel destination	Thailand	2	15.4
	Aboard	6	46.2
	Thailand and aboard	5	38.5
Total		13	100.0

4.7.3 The effect of IMC in leisure traveler's perspective.

In-depth interviews is a way to gain information and gain understanding from individuals about a chosen topic. The respondents were interviewed on their travel experience of hotel choice toward IMC.

The results for this study comes from 13 participants who have been travelling in the past year on their own and the list(s) of their hotels are 3-4 star hotels or boutique hotels. The participants do not concentrate on the hotel chains or 5 star hotels; but instead they prefer to stay at hotels that offer great value for less money. The respondents travel to different destinations for instance: Pattaya, Phuket, Koh Samui and some of them travelled abroad to Malaysia, India and Hong Kong. However, the result revealed that the majority of participants received familiar effects from IMC hotel's; perceived quality is the 1st rank from 11 respondents out of 13 respondents, followed by engagement with the hotel through IMC (8 out of 13 respondents) and purchasing behavior (7 out of 13).

4.8 Perceive Quality

Almost all respondents agreed that IMC have high influence on the quality of hotel. According to the unknown brand of 3-4 star hotels or boutique hotels, the travelers tend to pay their attention to the quality of hotel through marketing communication as can be seen from sharing respondent's experience as follows.

“Sometime there is no idea about that hotel's brand; however, we believe that the hotels has high quality for less money because of the reviews on social media such as Facebook and weblog” Man, 32 years old.

“I saw the picture of hotel that appeared on the online travel agents and it looked very nice, so I read some more reviews before reserving the hotel room” Woman, 26 years old.

Marketing activities impacts consumer perceptions of the product including service thus a sustained creative communication of a brand benefits to the value that customers place on product (Koekemoer, 2004).

4.9 Engagement

Respondents paid attention on this as a dominant effect since they were engaged themselves with the hotel through different types of communication. The two-way communication attempts to create interactions, long-term relationships and customers'

engagement. In particular, social media application easily creates relationships with consumers (encouraging long term relationship and loyalty) and prospect (awareness).

Here are a few conversation that took place with thirteen leisure travellers, some of them mentioned here below for example.

“I was choosing the hotel in Koh Phuket and there were so many nice hotels to choose from. I finally selected the one that exist on Pantip.com, this channel allows you to ask the question about restaurants or nearby hotels and make sure that the beautiful pictures the hotel shows on website is similar to the reality” Man, 38 years old.

“My friends and I went to India 3 years ago and stayed at the hotel called Snow Valley which is approximately a 3 stars hotel. To be frank, the cleanliness of this hotel did not meet our expectation; therefore, we decided to leave a review on Agoda.com, the channel we booked through. The managing director of Snow Valley responds to our review. He claimed that according to our constructive feedback, the cleanliness would be improved. Two moths ago, I had a chance to travel to India with another group of friends. I reserved 2 nights at Snow Valley directly to the hotel email and received special 10% discount as I mentioned on the email that I used to visit this place before. I experienced very clean room and excellent service during my trip. It’s obviously that the improvement of hotel comes from customers’ comments to maximize customers’ satisfaction and I was also impressed with the development of hotel” Man, 31 years old.

Social media allows travel suppliers the opportunity to build emotional context and intimate relationships with customers to engage both customers and prospects. Social networking offers several channels to setup networkorking pages for example; corporate blogs, content communities and interaction to online reviews etc. The graph below displays how social media approaches networking.

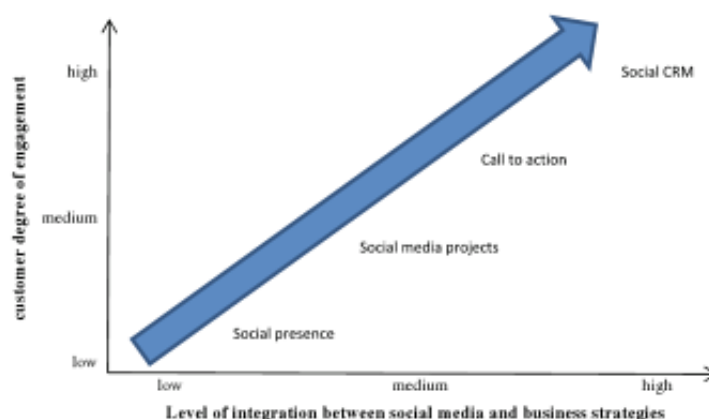


Figure 4.1 Social media impacts on Tourism industry

4.10 Purchasing Behavior

The return on marketing investment (ROMI) simply notices from sales revenue or occupancy rate of hotels. Therefore the tourism companies aims to shorten customers decision processes by applying variety of marketing communications. IMC significantly affects the customer's' purchasing behavior as following preview.

“The Hong Kong trip was another trip that I searched for information and plan the trip myself. I stayed at Guangdong hotel for 4 nights, I came to know this nice hotel from website that contained the information about Hong Kong and places to visit. This is the recommendation hotel on the website as they claim that the hotel is located at the center of Hong Kong and it is easy to find restaurants and nightlife nearby the hotel. As a consequent, I search the hotel name on booking.com and instantly booked this hotel with a discount offer from booking.com” Woman, 25 years old.

“I love to experience the local ways. The reason why I travel to Thailand every year and spend more than 1 month in Thailand is because of prices and promotions that allow me to save which is my major concern. I usually book through online travel agents such as Ago da, and check for hotels with the best value for less money. Cleanliness of the hotel is another matter, follow by standard facilities and quiet location. I check the promotions on websites and book through the cheapest channel offer” Woman, 24 years old.

One respondent, however, advises that he has his own criteria on hotel reservations. He showed concerns on the location of hotel, so he searched according to his preference location through Google map and found the hotel surrounding that area. The hotel price can to be varying from 2,500 to 3,500 Thai baht. The location of the hotel is a huge factor on whether or not I choose to stay. This matters the most.

4.11 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty appears to have the least effect from IMC. From the interviews, it found that most respondents seem to have a great experience from the hotels they have been to or the hotel they have read reviews on well known bloggers or recommended hotels. Respondents mentioned in the following examples.

“I have been to the same hotel when I travelled to Pattaya. The hotels brand is still carved in my memory ever since I was there with my parents many years ago. We went there during Songkran (Wan Lai) and the hotel gave us a premium guest card. We received free room upgrade once we checked in with this card. The card made me feel special; therefore, I also recommend my friends to stay there also” Man, 39 years old.

“Few months ago I went to Malaysia with my cousin and chose to stay at a hotel that was recommended by a relative who gave me positive feedback on the hotel. Before making a reservation, I’ve search for information on the Tripadvisor website and found out many good reviews. I accessed the hotel web link directly from Tripadvisor’s review page and I received 10% discount from the Tripadvisor link to the hotel’s direct email” Woman, 27 years old.

“I have two small children and normally during vacation or long weekends, my husband and I always take our boys travelling around. Since our boys are still young, we selected somewhere not far from Bangkok that offer many activities for children. Hua Hin is one of our choices as we travel to this place 2-3 times a year. We stay at the same hotel almost every time we visit this place because we have received an impressive thank you email from the hotel after we checked out. The email detail asked for short feedback and the hotel also attached a few photos of our moment in the hotel. My family didn’t even notice when we were there that they took those pictures.

Anyways it made a good memory during our short period stay and this is another major reason why I prefer to return to this hotel” Woman, 32 years old.

However, 38.5% of respondents prefer to experience the difference.

“I stayed in a very nice hotel named Sawan Resort while I travelled to Koh Samed and at the following time I went to Samed Villa. Both hotels were amazing. I would definitely return to Koh Samed, but I ultimately found a new place to stay at. Concerning my personal opinion, I think different hotels offers their own unique style of service; therefore, it would be more interesting to experience a new thing” Man, 30 years old.



CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussion and Conclusion

Table 5.1 The effects of IMC to hotelier respondents compared to leisure traveler respondents

Effect Of Integrated Marketing Communication In 3-4 Stars	Number Of Hotelier Respondents	Number Of Leisure Traveler Respondents
Purchase Intention	13	9
Accommodation Knowledge And Attitude (Perceive Quality)	12	13
Brand Awareness	10	0
Brand Loyalty	9	7
Engagement And Relationship	8	10

The effect of IMC in hotelier's perspective composes of:

1. Purchase intention
2. Accommodation knowledge and attitude (Perceive quality)
3. Brand awareness
4. Brand loyalty
5. Engagement and relationship with the customers

Those five variables are congenial with the literature review that the application of IMC has a positive result to the tourism industry. It is interesting that the respondents emphasizes on the same direction once they apply the IMC. While the effect of IMC among the leisure travelers includes:

1. Perceive quality
2. Engagement
3. Purchasing behavior
4. Brand loyalty

This finding can be advocated from the brand concerning of leisure travelers who prefer to gather the information of the hotel rather than pay attention to the brand. These interviews reveal that the IMC has an effect on short term decision. Leisure travelers acknowledge the marketing communication of hotels in their own way. They normally find the hotel from its location and the facilities preferred. The criteria of selecting the hotel are in the customer's' mind while the brand is meaningless to these groups of travellers.

According to the number of three to four star hotels and boutique hotels, they have more quantity compare to luxury hotel or low cost hotel. The confusion within the brands is found during the conversation with the leisure travellers as well. The IMC in medium class tourism industry during the oversupply period must consider the way to communicate instantly to the bookers, not the target audience who might have an opportunity to travel to the hotel in the future. The IMC must be done through the booking process, rather than investing on creating a strong brand for customers' awareness for the purpose of gaining long term benefit.

5.2 Practical Implications

According to the interview session, in qualitative method, the research concludes that the IMC has had positive influence on three to four star hotels and boutique hotels. The IMC efforts has proven the product to work in customers' eyes. Thus it is important to understand the product and services' making it unique and positioning the product directly against the competitor and make the product stand out from the crowd.

For the hoteliers, the IMC is considered as a bridge that leads to the successful zone. The major objectives of IMC application for a sample group of hoteliers is to generate the sales by stimulating the purchase intention followed by informing the information of accommodation to clients' that perceive quality in the product. The

result reveals a relatively high perception of IMC, obtaining the accommodation knowledge and attitude prior to experience the product. The abstractness of service industry forces the firm to apply marketing communication in order to talk to the prospect clearly about their product. The hotelier expects to create brand awareness among the targeted audience while the result reveals that leisure travellers who have been staying in three to four star hotels or boutique hotels did not mention any relationship toward the marketing communication on brand awareness. Therefore the hotelier should invest on communicating on touch points of the booking process. The relationship with the customers has high effects on brand loyalty and customers tend to repeat purchase if they have favorable experience. The sustainability of hotel business must focus on terms of interaction in some positive way before arriving to the accommodation, during their period stay or after they leave from the hotel.

This study's findings will benefit directly to hotel marketer and/or hotel owner and any investors who are interested in tourism industry including three star hotels to four star hotels and boutique hotels in order to develop the IMC program matching with customer's needs and helping to equip initial information for making marketing decision. The marketing communication of medium to medium-high level hotels would rather focus on online channels to communicate to the targeted audience. Most of traveler respondents can remember the hotel that they seen on offline advertisements or selected hotels from offline channels. The hotelier should concern the visual imagery of the communication that will be released to customers' that build relationships through social media or other online tools. According to the plenty of Thailand's travel destinations and high competition in hotel business in Thailand, the hotel investors must provide the unique selling point of the hotel and service to retain customers and help the guests choose to become loyalty guests. One time service on site definitely is not enough to encourage customers to come back, however the hotel must post service or special offers to repeat guests in order to remind their memory and persuade them to revisit the hotel.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

There are three main limitations in this research,

Firstly, the small amount of sample size of participant in using an in depth interview (N = 13). Therefore the research may not fully represent a total perception of travelers and hoteliers precisely.

Secondly, the scope of respondents. Most of participants are Thai and European. The small scope of respondents may not able to represent all traveler's perception. As well as the hotelier participants, majority of them operate the hotel in central and southern Thailand. These two regions may not be able to cover the ideas from the other part of Thailand.

Lastly, the interference from several sources such as the car stereo, a phone ringing or the interruption from the others during the conversation and also several biases could emerge during the interview. The way of answer come from the respondents' experience and expectation.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Moreover the researcher would like to propose to collect more samples to offer to the study's results and add more integrity and escalate sampling framework. The researcher may examine the effect in different age groups of leisure travelers. The results will be compared to the current IMC that is used to communicate to the group of audience and develop those strategies to cover all potential customers. Also, the developer should research more from other hotel ratings such as luxury hotel or five stars hotel in Thailand for comparison. Besides, the questionnaires, you can distribute to both Thai and international travelers to understand the difference in their comments.

In addition, all the process in the proper place should be arranged for the future research and the participants should be asked for allowance to switch off the phone or gadget before the interview begins.

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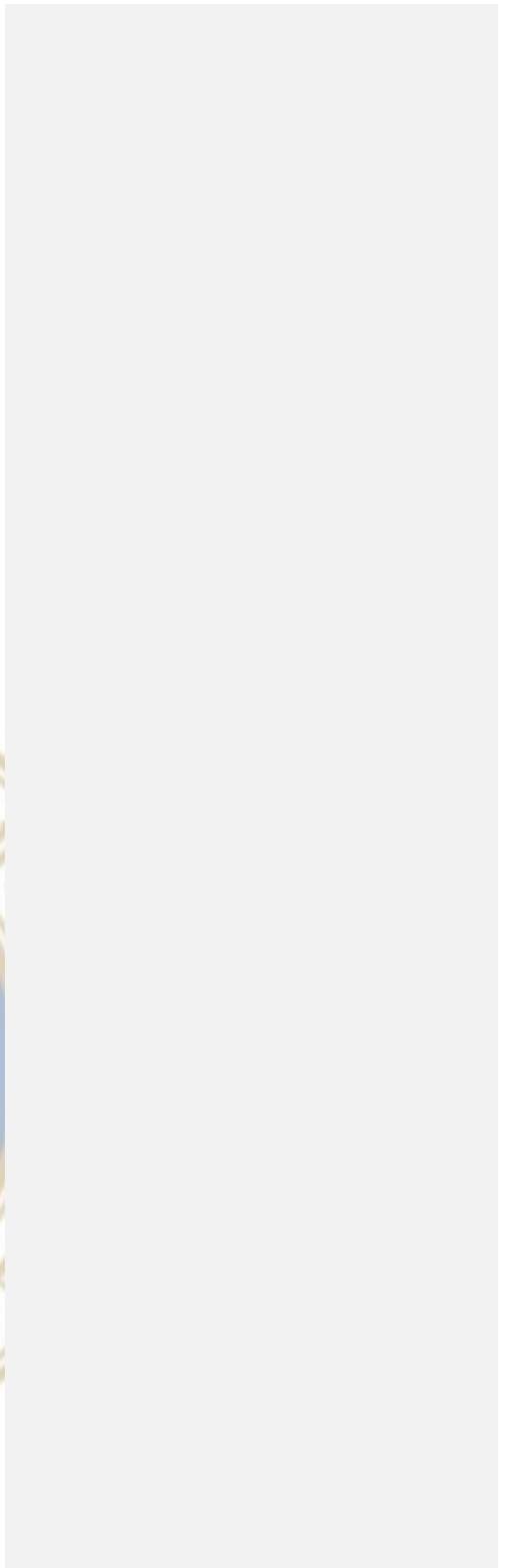
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APPENDICES



Appendix A: The Interview Guide

Introduction

This interview is the part of research in order to study the effects of integrated marketing communication of three to four stars hotel. The effect of Integrated Marketing Communication for this study compose of purchase intention, accommodation knowledge and attitude (Perceive quality), brand awareness, brand loyalty, engagement and relationship with the customers.

Objective

To investigate and prioritize the effect of IMC on three to four stars hotel.

Length of interview

20-40 minutes approximately.

Interview guide questions

QUESTIONS
1. The main features that make your hotel/resort become a choice of travellers? a. How do you communicate your main features to target audience? b. How do you make your main features become selling point?
2. Have you ever used IMC? a. Why do you apply those marketing communication channels?
3. What are the IMC that used to apply to your hotel? a. What is the reason of choosing that kind of communication?
4. How integrated marketing communication influences on target audiences ? a. Does it success to promote your hotel into public eyes? and how? b. Does the prospects receive hotel's information, features and other updated news through your communication? and how? c. Does the target audience reserve the hotel because of the marketing communication? and how? d. Does the IMC creates brand loyalty? and how? e. Does the IMC benefit to build engagement and relationship with the brand? and how? f. How IMC influence customers' attitude toward the hotel?

Comment [1]: ใช้คำนี้หรือเปล่าคะ

Comment [2]: Check grammar ka.

QUESTIONS
How IMC influence your brand in total?
Please explain the reason of investing in marketing communication?
The benefit and/or drawback of marketing spending?
What is the future plans for IMC?

The questions to be used during a leisure traveler interview.

How often do you travel in the past year?
What kind of place do you love to travel?
a. Please provide some example of the hotel you have sojourned?

The following questions will be continued in case that some lists of hotel are three to four stars hotel

Have you ever make travel plan on your own?
a. How do you gather information?
What make you select the hotel?
Which channel do you normally use to book the hotel?
IMC of the hotel influences on leisure travelers.
a. How do you get to know the hotel?
b. How receive hotel's information, features and other updated news?
c. Please specify the most influence of that hotel communication to your decision?
d. Does those communication or advertising encourage you to return to that hotel again or recommend your relatives and friends to stay?
e. If the hotel would like to encourage you to revisit the hotel, how could you recommend them to do?
f. Does the hotel's marketing communication benefits to build engagement and relationship with the brand? and how?
g. How IMC influence customers' attitude toward the hotel ?
Does the reputation of hotel brand matter to your decision?
a. How do you perceive the positive or negative attributes of hotel?
What do you feel after knowing the hotel through those communications?
If the hotel would like to communicate to you, could you please recommend the tool of communication that can easily reach you?