Thainess in airlines services strategy: a case from Thailand

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Abstract. The Thainess is embedded in Thais. And, it is more clearly can be seen when a person was cultivated in the school system. In this academic paper highlights the symbiosis of Thainess in hospitality industry, as such hotel comparatively to the air transport as strategy. The authors have studied researches, books, and airlines’ website strategies. Thainess is a unique customer experience offering, specifically the full-service airline “Thai Airways” as national flag carriers propose the service ‘Thai Touch’ through human six senses namely; seeing, smelling, savoring of taste, sounding, touching, and heartfelt feeling. While, Bangkok Airways represents the uniqueness of Thai culture symbiosis with products and services, such as airport terminal, aircraft decoration, and snack serving in all its lounges. On the other hand, low-cost carriers are commonly practicing the Thai culture in welcoming passengers as “wai”. Additionally, the low-cost carriers are presenting and blending their organizational culture in service, for instance fun, energetic, and friendly. Besides, low-cost airlines stress on price competition rather than Thainess. As an illustration, ThaiVietair excels on keen and dedicated workforces, prompt, reliable, and competitive price. As well as, Thai Lion Air presents the kebaya uniform which was originally from Indonesia. Keywords: Thainess, Airlines Services, Customer experiences, Strategy, Innovation.

1 Introduction

Service-based organization has to remain highly standard in any circumstances, and respond to customer needs and expectation. As refer to Samanci et al (2021) the airlines shall remain the service standard that meets the expectation of customers. Nevertheless, operating air transport profitably is hardy since it is highly competitive and vulnerably to the unpredictable environments. As well as, the emerging of low-cost carriers that offered the destructive price mechanism. This situation results many air carriers disappeared from the market except those national flag carriers that the government embrace liquidity to

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remain for the nation pride (Kankaew, 2022).

There is, presently, a new air transport business model was emerged namely (Bauer et al., 2020) the ‘Ultra Long-Haul -ULH.’ It refers to the flights that fly 14.5 hours or more with minimum circle distance 12,842 kilometers. The aims to connect remote cities directly, take an advantage capability of modern aircraft, capture time-sensitive passengers.

And it sounds outstanding perform in the air transport market that passengers are willing to pay for more comfort (Law & Lin, 2022).

Thence, competing in the aviation industry airlines in particular the national flag carriers offering the sense of their unique hospitality culture through the services. This study aims to examine the Thainess in airlines services chiefly the national flag carrier of Thailand.

2 Literature Review

Nowadays, we are living in the service economy era. Yet to confirm, there are 80 percent of service in the USA, and it portrays 80 percent of the USA gross national product. However, the exceptional service is still rare (Frei & Morris, 2012). As we are all in the digital era where the world is interconnected, people could share easily through cyberspace by the word of mouse if experienced poor service. This would result to bad reputation on organization, individual, and unsuccessful business (Timm, 2011). He, then, created the meaningful acronym ‘LIFE’ for the service. That stands for “little thing, insight, feedback, and expectation”.

According to Frei & Morris (2012) cited the organization could not be good at everything. Therefore, the service strategy should be analyzed and planned in consistent to the customer needs.

The airline uniquely offered the services comparing to the bus and full-service air carriers. It is the prototype of numerous low-cost airlines in today’s market. As a result, this strategy became common in the airline industry, specifically among low-cost carriers.

Subsequently, the air carriers excel on the price and service innovation. In general, the services (Rothkopf & Wald, 2010) mentioned the service traits including; simultaneous, perishability, intangibility, and heterogeneity.

This can be attributed that the services are produced and take at the same time, unable to keep inventory of unused service offerings, cannot be touch or seen, and variety of customers directly involve during the service delivery processes. Hence, the scholars proposed the innovation framework in the airline industry including; airline operations innovation, airline product and service innovation, and organizational and airline business model innovation. Given as example, the introduction of the novel processes, IT system, aircraft technology; the improvement of ground and on-board experiences, and change strategy or management concepts.

Though, Sengur et al (2022a) introduced airlines implementing corporate strategies. Yet, the strategy is the integration and coordination of commitments and actions formulated to utilize the core competencies for competitive advantages. The corporate strategy divided into four levels consisting of CEO level, business management level, functional level, and operational level.

Since the air transport is one of the intense competition industries, it is essential to consider the position against competitors during continuous activities. The long-term action plan should be defined as competitive strategy by investigating, and bench marking strengths and weaknesses against competitors (Sengur et al., 2022b; Ushakov et al., 2017; Isaeva, 2016).

The differentiation strategy was introduced uniquely of the airlines’ characteristics, products and services creating loyalty customers. This strategy aims at greater returns in all value-creation business activities.
Regarding the strategy, Thainess was used by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) since 2015 as a marketing tool promoting the tourism of Thailand. Its objective is to create the Thainess experiences to travelers through the products and services. The Thainess was also implied in hotel services for the uniqueness (Suksutdhi & Boonyanmethaporn, 2022). Conceptually Thainess still has no specific definition, thus (Kongpolphrom, 2018; Zakharchenko et al., 2019) advised to capture its root from Thai culture reading; "way of life, thoughts, beliefs, norms, customs, traditions wisdoms that society created, accumulated, transferred, learnt, adapted, and changed mentally and physically.” As refers to Renard (2006) cited that Thainess was cultivated in primary and secondary school regardless of ethnic.

The children were embedded the Thai history, manners, etiquette, and being Thai. From these statements, it can be inferred that Thainess was incorporated in each individual innately, and it became clearly visible when one was educated and shaped individual being Thai. Then, Thainess was carried everywhere with the Thais.

The Thainess behavior was too investigated on political concern (Tejapira, 2009; Ushakov & Chich-Jen, 2018; Dudukalov et al., 2020). Over and above, Thainess (Kongpolphrom, 2018) was used to evaluate the travel websites selection identified by three key components; personal, spatial, and temporal. That is the combination of Thais’ identity showing heritage, beliefs, and life span. The originality and authenticity could be a sales attraction (Kerdarunsuksri, 2015) and income generating to the country.

The southern Thainess was blended in English education for cultural awareness (Kanoksilapatham, 2020). Kerdarunsuksri (2015) excel on the Thainess associate in a creative contemporary show delivering interesting arts on international stage, and it can be a selling point. Thainess was extended in the study of Pruksorranan et al. (2017) by integrating with food supply chain in tourism. It allows tourists experience Thai way of life, nature, and art through the sense of food testing. Further (Yasothornsrikul & Leruksa, 2017) specified rice is not only considered as the foundation of life, mottos, but including culture and traditions representing the Thainess. As prior stated, (Suksutdhi & Boonyanmethaporn, 2022) Thainess influence positive experience, satisfaction, and intention to return using the services. It is blended in hotel operation both tangibly and intangible.

Therefore, the scholar (Suksutdhi & Boonyanmethaporn, 2022) extracted Thainess by using factor analysis and found three key components as shown in Fig. 1 below.

Fig. 1. The Components of Thainess Affecting Hotel Guests (Source: Suksutdhi & Boonyanmethaporn 2022).

From fig. 2, the highest element affecting customers’ satisfaction almost 70% is
Thainess Experience Service consisting of 12 variables namely; Thai aroma, herbs and personal care, herbs products, knowledge of Thai food, food decoration, uniform, eye contact, smile, greeting with Wai, and serve the guest gently from staffs. It is followed by 5% of Thainess atmosphere with the scholars explained by warm service, attentiveness, respectfulness, feeling thanks, politeness, facilities, art, the decoration of Thai identities, the present of local products and services, and the room decoration.

The last attribute is Thai hospitality accounted for 4 percent, it is including sincerity service, enthusiasm, friendliness, humble. In sum, the three components are influenced hotel guest around 80% out of other service contexts.

Associating the Thainess to the air carriers, definitely, all airlines having Thainess that embedded in their employees as welcoming passengers with ‘wai’ is commonly practicing. Among other things, the competition is based on pricing and promotional strategies that leads to repurchase intention (Law, 2017).

Nevertheless, each airline represents its distinct position as such Bangkok Airway (PG) excels on boutique service airline. PG defines its Asia’s Boutique Airline with five pillars with (1) boutique lounge for both economy and business, (2) decorates its external aircraft exceptionally and provide lounge for both economy and business classes namely boutique lounges and blue-ribbon club, (2) boutique airports with its beautiful Thai architecture style airport, (3) appetizing menu producing from the organic farms, and (5) exclusive service with friendliness and care (Bangkok Airways, 2022).

Regarding low-cost carriers, Thai Air Asia (FD) the biggest low-cost in the country, proposed 5 service touch points on board compose of professional service by heart, serve attentively, communicate politely, and sincere thank you with smile (Asia Aviation, 2022 Oct 12). While, Thai Lion Air is one of the Lion Air Group from Indonesia so that the kebaya uniform was used representing the airline originality (Thai Lion Air, 2022).

Seeing that, Thai Vietair (2022, Oct 13) with its headquarter in Vietnam highlighted its keen and dedicated staff, prompt, reliable and competitive price. The airline focuses on meeting and exceeding the passengers’ expectation. Thai Airways, a preference airline among Thai customers (Sooksatit et al., 2018), moreover the researchers suggested the airline promoting its service culture attracting foreign customers. Undoubtedly, Thai Airways International (TG) as the national flag carrier promoted Thainess through three pillars; (1) high Trust, (2) World Class, and (3) Thai Touch (Leetian, 2020).

Particularly, Thai touch is offering the airline products and services through six senses, as such smelling, tasting, hearing, seeing, touch, and heartfelt feeling. These senses were implemented as Thai Airways service centric (Thai Airways, 2018 Oct 17). As an example, in fig. 2 Thai in-flight and lounges uniform made of Thai silk.

Fig. 2. Thai Cabin Crew Uniform (Source: www.thaiairways.com).

Synthesizing with the study of (Suksutdhi & Boonyanmethaporn, 2022) three components on Thainess in hotel operation; Thai experience service, Thai atmosphere
value, and Thai hospitality in airline operations. The authors concluded into tab. 1 as follow:

**Table 1. Comparative Thainess in Hotel to Air Transport.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience service</th>
<th>Offerings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TG: spa &amp; Thai massage in its lounges, the tastes of Thai food herbs and aroma, Thai style uniform, smile, greeting with wai, and gentle &amp; glamorous service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG: unique Thai snack in lounges, Thai architecture airport terminal, organic food from its own organic farm, smile, greeting with wai, and gentle &amp; boutique service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-cost: fun lively and friendly service, smile and greet with wai</td>
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| Atmosphere | TG, PG and Low-cost providing warm service, attentiveness, respectfulness, feeling thanks, politeness, but the facilities, art, the decoration of Thai identities are more obviously can be seen in TG & PG than low-cost airlines. Whilst, low-cost carriers decorated their offices and facilities in accordance with their gimmick colors and theme. |

| Hospitality | Both premium airlines and low-cost airlines deliver sincerity service, enthusiasm, friendliness, humble service. However, premium service airlines (TG & PG) are more humble service especially in business and first class. |

### 3 Discussion and Conclusion

In the final analysis, Thainess is the norm, culture, tradition, artifacts that accumulated and representing the Thais identities. It can be used as strategy in hospitality services allowing customers savoring and experiencing a unique Thai culture and hospitality through the symbiosis of the products and services. It is influencing the positive experience, satisfaction, and intention to return using the services. In the meantime, it can create the image value affecting the choice on the airline (Worasuwannarak & Kankaew, 2022).

It is significant that the airlines, specifically, the full-service airline and the national flag carrier have represented the Thai hospitality blending through its various products, services, and people where the passengers can see, smell, savour, and sense from the beginning of their journey. Comparing to low-cost carriers, it is slightly differed from full-service airlines and not significantly can be seen.
However, to implement the Thainess service as strategy, airlines shall practice throughout organization from corporate, business, and function level. Among other things, the commitment and action continuously as the core competencies are essential. The organization should not only communicate, but cultivate the strategy to all organization level. Referring to the resource-based view theory (Barney & Clark, 2009) the Thainess is hardly imitable because it is the uniqueness of each country embedded in the people. According to Kankaew et al (2021) stressed on the organizational structure development model on the role of human resource professional and leader cultivating the organizational culture building the high competence employees for competitive edges and airlines’ efficiency in service quality.

All the same, the processes of practicing should be assessed and feedback from both internal and external customers. What is more, the employees’ engagement is greatly vital to the success of implementation plan in delivering the customer experiences.

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