



Factors Affecting Consumers' Decision Making in Choice of Service Destinations under the COVID-19 Situation Using MIMIC Analysis

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Abstract

The objective was to develop a causal model and validate the coherence of the destination decision-making model under the COVID-19 situation through variables used in the study that included: Data were collected from the sample group studied in 456 higher education institutions in Bangkok and its vicinity and analyzed by mimic.

The results showed that the hypothesis-developed model was consistent with the empirical data. The positive influencing factors were perception, followed by attitude, ethnography, and hatred, respectively. The decision to use the service or travel each time of the consumer or traveler was the intention of visiting the destination. Intention to visit the destination Correlation with reference groups and the image of the service area.

Keywords: 1) perception 2) attitude 3) Subjective 4) image 5) COVID-19

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Introduction

The overall image of a destination is a very powerful mechanism (Alcocer and Ruiz, 2019, pp. 1-18.) that can show the relationship between tourists and destinations and travel trends of tourists (Kim, et al., 2019). Nazneen, et al. (2021, pp. 184-197.). The overall image of a DOI destination is related to the promotion of tourism demands that will further expand and improve economic system. However, issues in tourism are often influenced by external factors that affect travel decisions of tourists (Wen, et al., 2021, pp.74-87) such as terrorism, wars, natural disasters, financial crises, aviation accidents, and disease outbreaks that will inevitably affect tourist destinations. (Yu, et al., 2020, pp.102-126.) In addition, in several travel events, awareness (Campo and Alvarez, 2019, pp. 182-189.) and the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 has resulted in the global economic downturn and unemployment. Furthermore, with misleading media coverage of the COVID-19 outbreak, tourists are faced with a state of daily life restrictions (Wen, et al., 2020a, pp. 331-336.). However, the decision to choose a service is a complex one (Duran, et al., 2016, pp. 89-110.) that in some situations, the wrong decision can lead to negative behaviors. (Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci, 2020, pp. 209-219). Although there have been numerous studies attempting to understand how attitudes influence decision-making through different variables (Wang, 2020, pp.1-20; Wang, et al., 2020a, pp. 749-763.) that focused on consumer behavior. Therefore, focusing on the issue of decision-making in choosing the service has been given less importance. Thus, it is essential

to study the formation of a theory of service decision making to understand the literature on hospitality and tourism (Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci, 2020, pp. 209-219) including the issue of animosity and ethnicism as the psychological mechanisms involved in attitudes. (Stepchenkova, et al., 2019, pp. 1370-1385.) In addition, negative emotions affect purchasing decisions of foreign products (Al-Hyari, et al., 2012, pp.155-174; Ahmed, et al., 2013, pp. 551-563) Although the influence of animosity and ethnicism on purchasing behavior has been increasingly recognized (Campo and Alvarez, 2019, pp. 182-189; Dursun, et al., 2019, pp. 499-515). The empirical test of several structural correlations involved animosity and ethnicism is an action factor that influences decision-making when choosing a destination service (Campo and Alvarez, 2019, pp. 182-189; Stepchenkova, et al., 2019, pp. 1370-1385) Therefore, in relation to the above mentioned reasons, a study of factors affecting consumers' decision-making in choosing a destination service under the COVID-19 situation in order to be beneficial to the niche market segmentation, especially those studying at the higher education level to identify target groups that must be prepared for perceptions of attitudes, ethnicity, animosity, the revisiting, and an awareness that stems from decision-making on the service, as well as expanding new markets for current entrepreneurs under the epidemic situation. That is, the results of the study will create a competitive advantage for the development of destinations in preparation for future services.



Research Objectives

1. To develop a causal model for consumers' decision-making in choosing a travel destination under the COVID-19 situation.

2. To examine the coherence of causal models that influence consumers' decision-making in choosing a travel destination under the COVID-19 situation.

Literature Review

Animosity

Animosity is the disapproval of past or present events that results from feelings of information exposure or the effects of action on livelihoods (Klein, et al., 1998, pp. 89-100). Based on past studies, issues related to international conflicts have received more attention, particularly in regard to consumer purchasing attitudes and behaviors (Al-Hyari, et al., 2012; Sanchez, et al., 2018, pp. 155-174). For example, (Stepchenkova, et al., 2019, pp.1370-1385) defined animosity as an unappreciative attitude mixed with belief and emotion towards specific elements related to the issue of decision-making (Stepchenkova, et al., 2019, pp. 1370-1385). Although animosity may not influence product evaluation, the purchase decision of products will be greatly affected (Klein, et al., 1998, pp. 89-100). Accordingly, the concept of consumer animosity is new and can be attributed to negative sentiments that affect service decision-making or destination choices (Alvarez and Campo, 2020, pp. 182-189). In 2018, (Sanchez, et al. 2018, pp. 182-189) noted that tourism depends on the characteristics of tourist destinations such as economic stability, safety of the place, and

the quality of the environment in accordance with the expectations of services. From such reasons, animosity affects the behavior of tourists through the influence of emotions. A study by Guo, et al. (2016, pp. 44-52) confirmed that Chinese animosity towards Japanese after the 1937 Nanjing Massacre influenced their willingness to travel to Japan. Furthermore, the issue of animosity may arise from an event, circumstance or the accumulation of situations that has been done by an individual (Sanchez, et al., 2018, pp. 182-189).

From the above-mentioned relationship, the following hypotheses can be made:

H1. Animosity positively influences travel decisions.

Ethnicism

Ethnicism and animosity are clearly structural relationships that influence consumer behavior and result in preference for domestic products, especially local ones, rather than foreign products that have their own ones (Ahmed, et al., 2013, pp. 551-563). Therefore, ethnicism in the definition of consumer is the consumer's belief about appropriateness of purchasing foreign products (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). That is, high-ethnic consumers avoid interactions with foreigners, including a feeling that purchasing products from a foreign country rather than one's own country is undesirable (Ahmed, et al., 2013, pp. 551-563; Kock, et al., 2019, pp. 427- 439). Ethnic groups of consumers have similar psychological mechanisms for attitudes and behaviors towards foreign brands. (Stepchenkova, et al., 2019, pp. 1370-1385). In their study, Stepchenkova, et al. (2019, pp. 1370-1385) defined tourism as

a national export. Therefore, when traveling or using the service, the purchase decision is essential, as well as the decision of choosing travel destinations that will influence the product development of the entrepreneurs based on tourists' purchase intentions (Campo and Alvarez, 2019, pp. 1002-1024). In addition, consumers or tourists who are patriotic or nationalistic will support the domestic tourism economy before giving priority to traveling abroad or using products or services originating from foreign countries (Kock, et al., 2019, pp. 427-439), thus determining the tourist decision making and the behavioral processes. From the above-mentioned relationship, the following hypotheses can be made:

H2. Ethnicism positively influences service decision-making

Behavioral planning theory

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) was developed from the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and is a popular theory for predicting consumer decision-making processes. (Wang, et al., 2019). Although both theories suggest rational decision-making behavior (Wang and Wong, 2020, pp. 749-763) TRA-TBP, there are differences in terms of characteristics, namely, TPB does not consider that consumer behavior depends on factors that influence behavior change (Wang, et al., 2020b, pp. 749-763). Thus, involuntary controls were included as a TPB as a key predictor of cognitive behavioral control through behavioral perception (Perceived) (Wang, et al., 2019, pp. 192-212). This study applied the TPB theory (Ajzen, 1991 pp. 179-211) through the description of structural modifications related to the important

structures (Wang and Wong, 2020, pp. 749-763). Therefore, the application of the TPB theory reflects a larger part than the variance of intention and behavior (Ajzen, 1991, pp. 179-211) namely, this is a study of consumer behavior, including attitudes and norms (Subjective), together with behavioral perceptions (Perceived) (Ajzen, 1991, pp. 179-211) that will affect behavioral intentions to use the service (Wang, 2020, pp. 749-763). In addition, in terms of attitudes affecting decision-making on travelling to use the service is an important issue in the consumer decision-making theory (Cohen, et al., 2014, pp. 872-909; Han, et al., 2011, pp. 45-74) that relates to positive attitudes that affect the decision-making process of travelers and influences re-visit intention (Souiden, et al., 2017, pp. 54-70). From the above-mentioned relationship, the following hypotheses can be made:

H3. Attitude positively influences service decision-making.

H4. Awareness positively influences service decision-making.

H5. Service decision-making positively influences re-visit intention.

Subjective is the perception of social pressures that influences behaviors (Wang, et al., 2020c, pp. 319-345). Additionally, Han, et al. (2011, pp. 45-74) provides useful information that subjective traits arise from an individual who has significant reference to cause the belief, namely, it is an act that the other person can perceive from the behavior. This can be developed into the following hypotheses:

H6. Service decision positively influences individuality (Subjective).



The image of the service area

Nazneen, et al. (2021, pp. 184-197) said that the image of the service area (Destination) is a crucial element for the success of a tourist area that is highly regarded in the literature review. However, the image of the service area (Destination) affects relevance in terms of service decision-making (Ragab, et al., 2019, pp. 1-35). Also, there are definitions of end-image related to using the service to create an impression, such as a location or physical appearance (Hunt, 1975, pp. 1-7; Hung and Petrick, 2012, pp. 855-867; Kralikov, et al., 2020, pp.199-209; Smith, et al., 2015, pp. 113-122; Ragab, et al., 2019, pp. 1-35; Wang, Wong and Zhang, 2020, pp. 749-763).

Normally, the image of the service area can be described from the emotional and cognitive-affecting image (Ragab, et al., 2019, pp. 1-35) that has a strong influence on the decision-making process of a traveler or a service user (Han, et al., 2019b, pp. 549-562.). That will result in their visit intention or the revisit in the future (Han, et al., 2009; Ragab, et al., 2019, pp. 1-35; Wang, Wong and Zhang, 2020, pp. 1-35) This can be developed into the following hypotheses:

H7. Service decision positively influences the image of the service area.

Methods

1. The population used in this study were students studying at the university level in Bangkok and its vicinity. The researcher used non-Probability method as a sample selection by using the technique of selecting a specific sample (Purposive Sampling), in order that the

characteristics of the sample can be diversified and consistent with the research objective of the structural equation model analysis. The sample size of the structural equation model analysis with a sample size of not less than 400 people should be applied in order that it will be able to accept discrepancies in data analysis. In this study, the research team collected data of 400 students from universities in Bangkok and its vicinity in order to cover the topic and to be in accordance with the objectives of the study; also, the sample size determination was consistent with Sekaran and Bougie (2010), who stated that only 200 samples were sufficient for hypothesis testing and could be referenced as a large population. For this reason, the research team collected data from a total of 400 samples to be used in the research.

2. The variables used to analyze the causal model in the decision-making regarding consumer choice of service destinations under the COVID-19 situation were 1. Animosity 2. Ethnocentrism 3. Attitude 4. Perceived. Observable variables affecting returning to use the service were: 1. Referral group conformance (Subjective) 2. The image of the service area (Destination) 3. The intention of visiting the destination (Visit intention)

Research Tools

The data collection tools are the questionnaires, based on the basic theoretical concepts of the animosity and ethnocentrism, the study of Huang, et al. (2010, pp. 909-937) and Dursun, et al. (2019, pp. 499-515.) (Attitude, Subjective and Perceived), applied issues in the

study of Han, et al. (2011). Destination and visit intention applied issues in studies of Ragab, et al. (2019, pp. 1-35) and Alcocer and Ruiz (2019, pp. 1-18) based on a study of Han, et al. (2011, pp. 45-74). The questionnaire used in the study was divided into 3 parts as follows: Part 1 General information of the respondents consisted of gender, age, and education level which is a closed-ended question form to answer the questions choosing only 1 answer, according to the facts of the respondents. Part 2 Questionnaire on travel decision of the sample under Covid situation with closed-ended form. The criteria for determining the assessment weighting consists of 6 levels: Extremely satisfied,

very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, and extremely dissatisfied, using the Interval Scale for 25 items. To Verify the accuracy and reliability of information, the observed distribution is desirable that for the normal distribution of data, the values of skewness and kurtosis should be near to 0 with skewness measurements from - 2 to + 2 and kurtosis from -7 to + 7 (Byrne, 2016). The results showed that the skewness ranged from 0.81 to +0.43, while the kurtitude was in the range of -0.369 to +2.56, indicating that the data has a normal distribution (Normality).

Table No. 1 Discriminant validity and the relationship between variables

Variable	AVE	CR	MSV	ASV	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Animosity	0.58	0.74	0.36	0.30	0.76						
Ethnocentrism	0.53	0.71	0.30	0.21	0.103	0.784					
Attitude	0.63	0.77	0.44	0.36	0.105	0.029	0.80				
Subjective	0.61	0.79	0.42	0.24	0.026	0.023	0.073	0.854			
Perceived	0.65	0.83	0.49	0.39	0.045	0.07	0.061	0.011	0.727		
Visit intention	0.62	0.87	0.44	0.36	-0.016	0.038	0.071	0.065	0.05	0.796	
Destination	0.67	0.77	0.34	0.18	0.034	0.023	0.022	0.004	0.002	0.044	0.788

Data Collection

The primary care data was collected from November 2021 to January 2022. Data was collected using questionnaires consistent with the sampling method, from a sample of 400 people for objective data analysis in the next step. However, from the data collection, 456 respondents returned, resulting in more than the specified number of samples, the researcher performed data cleansing to remove invalid data entries from the data set which is the core of the database. If there is incomplete

information, inaccuracy, or any non-correlation with other data, it would affect the findings and then all the obtained data will be taken into the data analysis process in the next step. In addition, we have achieved a reduction in the occurrence of common method bias (CMB) (Hulland, et al., 2018, pp. 92-108) by using pre-test try-out with all 40 respondents representing 10% of 400 people. This is to ensure that the tools are suitable and applicable and to prevent potential data quality issues that would affect experimenting with each struc-



ture for the accuracy of the content, including reliability and accuracy to minimize CMB impact.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this research involves the following steps:

1. Basic statistics that describe descriptive data obtained from data analysis and provide conclusions consisting of mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage.

2. The correlation coefficient between the causal variable and between the dependent variable was determined by using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient formula and was tested for significance with a t-test.

3. The MIMIC model was analyzed with an advanced statistical data analysis program with a data analysis method using the Correlation Matrix and parameter estimation using the Maximum Likelihood method, as a procedure for analyzing essential data with the following steps: 1. Determining model-specific data, 2. Determining the feasibility of the model, 3. Estimating model parameters, 4. Verifying model consistency, and 5. Adjusting the model to be consistent with the theory and the data collected for using in the study.

4. The causal relationship analysis of causal variables positively influenced the hypothesis analysis to verify the consistency of hypothesis-based models with empirical data which is an analysis of the direct influence of the causal variable. The maximum likelihood estimates (ML) parametric estimation method was used to analyze the model based on the

given hypothesis and to verify the coherence of the hypothetical model with the empirical data.

Results

The results of model consistency verification of the developed MIMIC model revealed that the hypothesis model was consistent with the empirical data with the following statistical values: $X^2 = 32.853$, $df = 8$, $p < 0.001$, $X^2/df = 4.106$, $RMSEA = 0.068$, $CFI = 0.964$, $AGFI = 0.934$, increased fit index (IFI) = 0.965 and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.907, as shown in Picture No. 2 and Table No. 3. According to the results of previous studies, Wong, and Teoh (2015) had identified three levels of the results as follows:

Minor impact had an analytical result of less than 0.1, a moderate impact of 0.3, and a large impact equal to or greater than 0.5.

The results of the analysis revealed that

H1. Animosity positively influences travel decisions ($b = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$) (minor impact), H1 is acceptable.

H2. Ethnicism positively influences service decision-making ($b = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$) (minor impact), H2 is acceptable.

H3. Attitude positively influences service decision-making ($b = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$) (moderate impact), H3 is acceptable.

H4. Perception positively influences service decision-making ($b = 0.79$, $p < 0.001$) (high impact), H4 is acceptable.

H5. Service decision positively influences revisit intention ($b = 0.77$, $p < 0.001$) (high impact), H5 is acceptable.

H6. Service decision positively influences individuality (Subjective)

($b = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$) (moderate impact), H6 is acceptable.

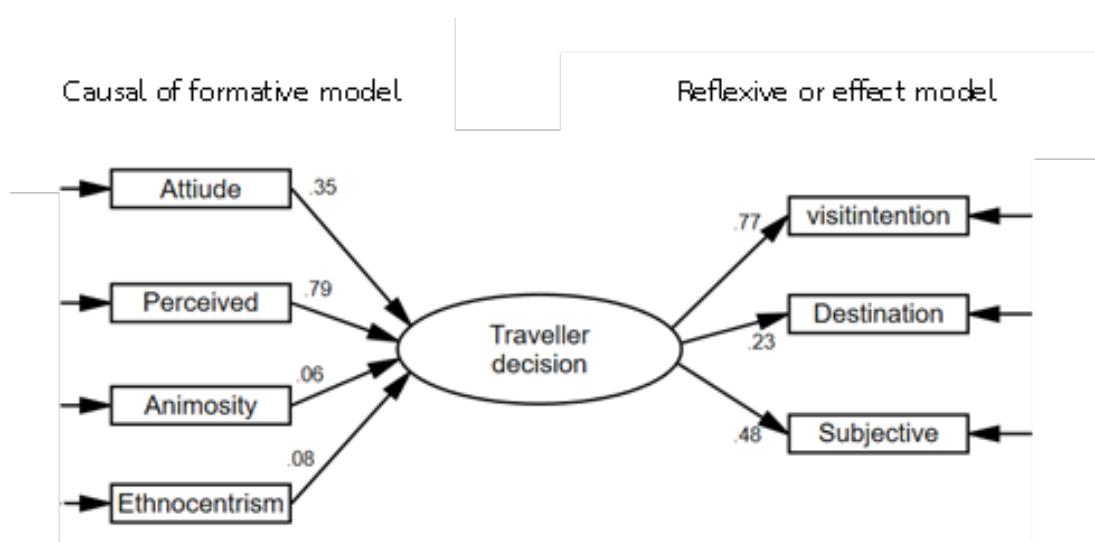
H7. Service decision positively influences the image of the service area ($b = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) (low impact), H7 is acceptable. As shown in Picture No. 2.

Table No. 2 The results of the data analysis based on the hypotheses

Variable		B	C.R.	Sig	Result
Traveller_decision	<---	Attitude	0.042	7.579	*** accepted
Traveller_decision	<---	Perceived	0.031	18.136	*** accepted
Traveller_decision	<---	Animosity	0.04	1.384	*** accepted
Traveller_decision	<---	Ethnocentrism	0.042	1.787	*** accepted
Subjective	<---	Traveller_decision	0.049	9.71	*** accepted
Destination	<---	Traveller_decision	0.041	4.731	*** accepted
Visitintention	<---	Traveller_decision	N/A	N/A	N/A

When considering the influence of variables in the developed MIMIC model, it was found that the variables that influenced the consumer or traveler decision were prioritized from highest to lowest, which was Perceived, followed by Attitude, Ethnocentrism, and Animosity, respectively, with the influence

coefficients of .79, .35, .08 and .06, respectively. In addition, each consumer or traveler's decision to use the service or travel is the intention of visiting the destination (Visit Intention), the reference group (Subjective) and the image of the area (Destination), respectively, with the influence coefficients of .77, .48 and .23



Picture No. 1 Analysis of the Multiple Indicators and Multiple Causes Model



Conclusion and Discussion

The results of the study show the factors affecting consumer decision-making in choosing a service destination under the COVID-19 situation that can be discussed as follows: Perceived, followed by Attitude, Ethnocentrism, and Animosity with a direct positive influence on the positive thinking regarding the consumer decision-making in choosing a destination which implied to be a direct cause that effects the idea of choosing a destination with statistically significant of 01, as a result, consumers have a sense of intention to revisit (Visit intention). Additionally, this depends on individual decisions (Subjective), related to the image of the service area (Destination).

The findings of this study focus on consumer travel destination decisions in the context of COVID-19 which is consistent with the results of the empirical testing, in accordance with the theory. This may be because the perception of the samples who travels to use the service are an overall assessment of the consumer's perception of products and services, especially the perception of service under the COVID-19 situation. This is because when using the service, consumers or tourists need to know the processes and procedures for personal safety. In some cases, it is essential to be aware of the risks involved in sharing the service area with others. This is reflected through the psychological and emotional benefits, namely, it is a desire to engage with others while using the services with different types of consumption. This will be passed on through the synthesis process leading to the formation of different attitudes that are either

positive or negative and that will affect the intention to perform behaviors of different kinds when using services in the future. In this regard, it is consistent with the study of (Cohen, et al., 2014, pp. 872-909; Han, et al., 2011, pp. 45-74) which stated that attitudes affecting travel decision-making by consumers is related to positive attitudes affecting the traveler's decision-making process that will influence their intentions to revisit.

From the consumers or tourists' perspectives on the issue of ethnocentrism and animosity towards the country of origin where the news is presented as the cause of the epidemics has little impact on the attitudes of travelers or a person whose nationality is presented with information that is understood to be an epidemic country; this is possibly due to the common habits of people in the country of the sample who are compromising and have good moral foundation. Thus, for the sample used in the study, animosity or any incidents that reflect dissatisfaction with ethnocentrism did not cause negative feelings. Also, it can be said that Thailand still needs to earn revenue from tourism, especially tourists who come from countries where the news is presented as the cause of the epidemics. However, this aspect is inconsistent with or contrary to the findings of (Wang, Wong and Zhang, 2020, pp. 210-222) which provide interesting information on the issue that Chinese students show high level of animosity and ethnocentrism towards Western countries because there are reports of Western media trying to offend China, for example, the news published said that, "For Chinese people, the government has not

allowed millions of Chinese citizens to enter the country and without prior notice is required". Such presentations cause misunderstandings and the information presented is deviated from reality that actually occurs in the area, thus causing negative emotions and negative images to Western countries. In addition, the results of the study were positively correlated with consumers and travelers choice of destination which can be explained that, in several cases, because of the basic lifestyle practices and habits that resulted in the formation of the synthetic cognitive processes of the sample used in the study, consequently, the negative news or what is perceived in each event does not create concern for consumers who are willing to visit or travel to use the service in different areas. This is because, at times, the nature of perception or the clarification in the form of synthesis of issues is an individual nature rather than believing in the clarification in a holistic way that will create credibility from a single perception of the news without looking for additional synthetic experience data. In addition, another interesting point from the researcher's point of view which is consistent with the research results is the image of the area that travelers travel to use the service, which is considered to be an essential part of perception of consumers or tourists, that is, the image of the area will influence the decision to use the service (Ragab, et al., 2019, pp. 1-35). Specifically, the image of the destination to which the service is used creates an impression, such as a location or physical appearance (Hunt, 1975, pp. 1-7; Hung and Petrick, 2012, pp. 855-867; Kralikov, et al., 2020, pp. 199-209;

Smith, et al., 2015, pp. 113-122; Ragab, et al., 2019, pp. 1-35; Wang, Wong and Zhang, 2020, pp. 749-763) that will influence the intention to visit or revisit in the future. Therefore, it can be concluded that the importance of the tourist's decision to travel to use the service in terms of Perceived and Attitude is crucial. This will result in decision making on visit intention combined with perception and interpretation regarding the characteristics of the individual (Subjective).

Recommendations for applying research results

The results of this study showed that the factors affecting medium and large enterprises consisting of Perceived, Attitude, Visit intention, and Subjective. Therefore, entrepreneurs who provide services such as restaurants, hotels, travel agencies and businesses that provide services, especially student groups, who are considered an important group that will change their behavior in the future. Additionally, building a good awareness of the importance of self-care to stay safe while traveling during the current situation should be concerned. Moreover, providing the correct information from the entrepreneurs especially the private sector, along with related policies, standards and guidelines from the government sector will help reduce consumers or tourists' anxiety when traveling to use the service.

Practical suggestions

Practical recommendations stakeholders can study and apply in the development as follows:

1. Strengthen awareness of the service



process, especially the safety standards of service in order to make people travel. Come to receive the service to be confident in safety and to introduce useful information to consumers, which will increase the publicity of the situation of the establishment that provides services to various groups of consumers in order to create a good attitude first. Traveling to receive services of consumers under the current epidemic situation, such as creating publicity photos through various channels that reach customers that if many, especially online media channels nowadays.

2. Improve the atmosphere of the property to create an element related to the willingness to travel with the service again. This will help make people who come to receive services in an area that needs to focus on services that are different according to the characteristics of the individual. Provide services to samples that show the uniqueness of the service area, such as food differences or the development of animated presentations through a design that is suitable for the target

audience or leading the cook or serving as food science, such as explaining the ingredients through the image of the service area, or the cooking process that is presented and is consistent with food items offered for sale, etc.

Suggestions for the next research

1. The results of this research were for the study of the population who studied at the higher education level in Bangkok and its vicinities only. Therefore, interested persons should study additional samples by A multi-level causal analysis was conducted to understand the interactions between different variables at different levels

2. Consumers under the study of COVID-19 situations in 7 variables that may not cover other areas or different nature of service. Therefore, researchers who are interested in studying Decision-making factors can be applied to other aspects that affect decision-making, such as the aesthetics of physical appearance, advertising, public relations, price, to make the model analysis completer and more comprehensive.

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