

A Research Study to Identify the Post-Pandemic Key Success Factor (KSF) of Hoteliers in Bangkok



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ABSTRACT: The resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the dramatic decline of the hospitality business operation, with over 74% decline in revenue amidst global hotel owners. As of 2021, 20% of the hotels in Thailand experience severe effects of COVID-19 pandemic, and 55% reporting moderately severe effects. Highlighting this challenge, this report attempts to address the research problem by exploring and identifying the KSFs that hoteliers in Bangkok should emphasize on to improve their competitiveness and business performance. An exploratory-qualitative approach is employed in this paper, with the data collected from 4 senior executives and managers of hotels in Bangkok, Thailand. A thematic analysis is approached. The findings of the study indicated that, the key success factors in the post-COVID-19 environment includes (i) health and safety, (ii) technology and digitization, (iii) operation and management, (iv) sustainability and CSR, and (v) guest experience and engagement. Compared to the KSFs prior to the pandemic, new factors are associated with contactless technology, health-screening for guests and staffs, social distancing measures, food-safety and hygiene, crisis management, and health and wellness offerings as dominant factors to achieve competitive advantage in the field.

KEYWORDS: Pandemic, COVID-19, Key Success Factor, Hotel, Thailand

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Background to the Study*

The global pandemic-led effects have reportedly led to a decline of 74% of the global hospitality firm's performance [1], as measured by their financial output. Led by the global pandemic, the rise in the death-toll of up-to 2.6 million, throughout March 2021, and the rapid spread of the disease had negatively affected the world's economy, with travel restrictions, closed borders, and business lockdowns [2]. The effects had severely impacted the travel, tourism, and hospitality industry, including hotel, airlines, restaurant, special events and convention venue, as restrictive actions were undertaken by the government in controlling the spread of the pandemic. In addition to the economic effects, the findings proposed by Lee et al., (2021), Gossling et al., (2020), and Seyitogly and Ivanov (2020), stated that, the effects had rippled across social domain, with changing consumer behaviour and its effects on the consumer consumption patterns [3,4,5]. The reverberated effects had further increased the challenges for the hospitality firms, with the need for new strategies oriented towards the hospitality firms. Hence, the key success factors are expected to be established as information through exploratory process contributing to the understanding of how hospitality business models can attain sustainable competitive advantage among their competitors.

B. *Aims, Objectives, and Research Questions*

This research paper aims to explore the post-pandemic key success factor (KPI) for hoteliers to improve their competitiveness and business performance in Bangkok, Thailand. The objectives of this study are (i) to explore the KSFs for hoteliers in Bangkok, (ii) to identify the relevant KSF's in the post-pandemic environment among hoteliers, and (iii) to recommend the KSFs that hospitality managers should emphasize on to improve their hotel performances. The findings of this study will address the research question – "How has the KSF's of hoteliers in Bangkok, Thailand transformed after the COVID-19 pandemic?"

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Theoretical Research*

The theory on key success factors, although had been historically prominent, it had been theorized in latter research by Grunert [6]. The paper by Grunert theorized KSF as an element of success and has since been acknowledged as a concept in strategic

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management and organizational theory that suggests certain factors are critical to the success of a business or project. In further developing research, KSFs are granted as a key factor that also contributes to the allocation of resources effectively, and prioritizing activities that have the most significant impact on success [7, 8]. However, the KSFs tend to vary based on corporate factors [9], industry or sector [10], as well as the lifecycle of the business. Underpinning this strategic management concept, this study explores and attempts to identify KSFs for hoteliers in Bangkok in the post-COVID-19 pandemic.

B. Empirical Research

A summary of the empirical research papers, comparing the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic KSF's has been illustrated in the following table below.

Table I: Empirical Research – Summary

No.	Title of Research	Author	Methodology	Findings (KSF)
1	Application of MCDM approach to evaluate the CSF of TQM in the hospitality industry	Jusoh et al., (2018) [11]	Fuzzy Delphi Method and Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process	External co-operation, customer focus, leadership quality
2	Identification of factors for success in the hotel sector.	Alvarez-Ferrer et al., (2018) [12]	Qualitative Secondary Research	Management System, Quality Management, Environmental Management, CSR, Location and Position
3	CSF in hotel companies: A managerial perspective.	Carlo (2021) [13]	Qualitative Meta-Analysis Approach	Managerial Experience, Performance Management Systems
4	KSF to increase value proposition in the hospitality industry	Klebler and Volkova (2018) [14]	Quantitative Research focusing on Close-ended Questionnaire	Attend to existing and potential future demands of the customer/guests, which can act as a key value-creation factor
5	Assessment of CSF of TQM culture in hospitality sector in Kosovo	Zylfijaj and Pira (2017) [15]	Qualitative Approach – Interview Study	Leadership, Customer Focus, Training and Communication, Staff Empowerment
6	CSF of a business tourism destination: supply side analysis.	Marais et al., (2017) [16]	Qualitative Approach – Interview Study	Finances, Human Resources, Product and Customer-Centricity
7	The key changes to the hospitality business model under COVID-19	Youssef et al., (2022) [17]	Qualitative Approach – Interview Study	Offer Innovative Products, Digitalization, Health-Safety Systems, Better Quality and Individualized Experiences
8	Assessing the internal CSF of service quality in Boatels: A case of Egypt.	Moussa et al., (2023) [18]	Qualitative Approach – Interview Study	Senior Management Experiences, Human Resources Management, Customer focus Service culture, Management Information System, and Social Responsibility
9	The impact of SERVQUAL on customer satisfaction in hospitality.	Ali et al., (2021) [19]	Quantitative: Correlation and Regression Analysis	Empathy, Responsiveness, Assurance and Tangible

C. Research Gap

Despite existing research that identifies, explores, and revisits the KSFs of hoteliers in both pre-pandemic and post-pandemic levels, such research is not only scarce but, not available in the specific context of hoteliers in Bangkok, Thailand. Thus, the findings of this paper will enhance the knowledge of hotel managers of Bangkok on post-pandemic KSFs.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The constructivism ontology is adopted in this study, which emphasizes on the notion on how individuals tend to actively construct their own notions of reality through their cognition [20]. Developing from the objective of this research, this paper emphasises in identifying the key constructs associated with the success of hoteliers in Bangkok, Thailand. The assumption retained in this paper is that COVID-19 pandemic transformed the perceived KSFs that are relevant for the success of hoteliers in

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Bangkok, Thailand, and hence, exploring those factors requires an anti-positivism (interpretivism) paradigm and an inductive approach. Hence, this study is further informed by the belief that, the scientific research can be informed through non-numerical/textual approach (qualitative study). Therefore, the findings of this study grounds over the use of premises emerged from the interviewees and aims to construct a suitable framework that identifies the relevant post-COVID-19 KSFs. Hence, this study approaches a qualitative methodology.

B. Data Collection Process

A phenomenological approach is employed in this study, focusing on the use of semi-structured interviews. The study is informed using a thematic framework, comprising of a total of 10 questions (illustrated in the table below). The interview structure has been developed over the thematic framework that relates service quality, guest experience, and the key success factors significant for the hoteliers in Bangkok, Thailand.

Table II: Interview Questions for Research

<i>Interview Questions</i>
How has the pandemic affected the hospitality industry in Bangkok, Thailand?
How has your hotel adapted to the changes in terms of guest service experience?
What new customer expectations have emerged because of the pandemic?
How have you incorporated these into your service delivery model?
In your opinion, what are the most important SERVQUAL factors that customers are looking for in a hotel after the pandemic, and why?
What measures has your hotel taken to ensure the safety and health of your customers and employees?
How have these measures affected your service delivery?
How do you monitor and measure guest satisfaction in your hotel, and how have you adapted your approach to account for the changes brought about by the pandemic?
What strategies have you implemented to address guest complaints and concerns related to the guest service experience during the pandemic? Examples during the pandemic
In what ways do you see the future of the hospitality industry in Bangkok, Thailand evolving in terms of the guest service experience in the post-pandemic environment?

The sample respondents for this study comprised of senior hotel managers, and executives from Bangkok, Thailand. A total of 4 respondents were interviewed due to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although Guest et al., (2006)'s research recommends the use of 6 respondents for *qualitative* data collection [21]. However, due to the constraints of COVID-19 pandemic, the number of samples were limited to 4 respondents. The data were collected through e-mail response and in-call interview responses. An approximate time of 15 to 25 minutes was required for in-call interviews, and an average of 2-days per e-mail response.

C. Data Analysis Process

In this research study, a thematic coding analysis has been adopted. In doing so, the interview transcripts are coded manually. The manual coding allowed identification of key themes that support the identification and interpretation of key success factors that are relevant in the context of Thai hoteliers. The coded interview transcripts are grouped based on relevant themes. Each of the themes are used in identifying the KSFs. The thematic coding analysis is presented in the following section of the report.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study begin with the preliminary coding of the key findings. The key codes that were highlighted are grouped and presented in the following table below (Table III). Each code is presented with a corresponding 'x' based on the respondent that mentioned the code.

Table III: Coding of Interview Statements

<i>Key Codes</i>	<i>Interviewee's (Number Ranked from 1 to 4)</i>			
	1	2	3	4
Contactless check-in and check-out		x	x	x
Flexibility in cancellation policies	x		x	
Health and wellness amenities		x		x
Local experiences and tours	x	x	x	
Outdoor spaces and activities		x		x

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Room cleanliness and sanitation	x	x	x
Social distancing measures		x	x
Technology and digital amenities	x		x
Virtual events and meetings		x	x
Sustainability and eco-friendliness	x	x	x
Health screenings for guests and staff		x	x
Enhanced room amenities	x		x
Improved ventilation and air quality		x	x
Food safety and hygiene	x		x
Staff training and development		x	x
Contactless technology	x		x
Flexibility and adaptability		x	x
Sustainable practices	x	x	x
Local experiences		x	x
Reputation management	x	x	x
Crisis management		x	x
Guest communication	x		x
Food and beverage offerings		x	x
Technology infrastructure	x		x
Local regulations		x	x
Loyalty programs	x		x
Digital marketing		x	x
Health and wellness offerings	x		x
Revenue management		x	x

Each of the 29 codes are further grouped together, that provides an overview of key success factors that contributes to the success and achievement of competitive advantage. The thematic grouping of the 29 codes is presented as follows.

Table IV: Thematic Coding

Health and Safety:	<i>"Health and wellness amenities," "Room cleanliness and sanitation," "Social distancing measures," "Health screenings for guests and staff," "Food safety and hygiene."</i>
Technology and Digitalization:	<i>"Contactless check-in and check-out," "Virtual events and meetings," "Contactless technology," "Technology infrastructure," "Digital marketing."</i>
Sustainability and Environmentalism:	<i>"Sustainability and eco-friendliness," "Enhanced room amenities," "Sustainable practices."</i>
Guest Experience and Engagement:	<i>"Local experiences and tours," "Outdoor spaces and activities," "Improved ventilation and air quality," "Guest communication," "Food and beverage offerings," "Loyalty programs."</i>
Operations and Management:	<i>"Flexibility in cancellation policies," "Flexibility and Adaptability" "Staff training and development," "Local regulations," "Crisis management," "Reputation management," "Revenue management."</i>

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Based on the thematic analysis, it can be concluded that, the pre-COVID-19 factors that contribute to hotelier success included guest experience and engagement and operations and management. These findings were highlighted in the past papers, that suggested that guest experience and engagement could be improved through the inclusion of personalized service, attention to detail, and creating an enjoyable atmosphere. Guest satisfaction and loyalty were important for maintaining a competitive edge [22]. Similarly, an effective management of hotel operations, including efficient processes, staff training, and organizational structure, was identified as a pre-COVID-19 KSF. Strong management practices helped ensure smooth operations, cost control, and overall customer satisfaction [23, 24]. On the other hand, the post-COVID-19 KSFs included prioritizing health and safety of the guests, embracing technology and digitization, and promoting sustainability and environmentalism. With increased awareness of health risks, hotels need to prioritize the health and safety of guests. Implementing robust hygiene protocols, maintaining cleanliness standards, and following health guidelines are essential for gaining customer trust and confidence – that can be applied in the context of the hoteliers in Bangkok [25]. In addition to health and safety guidelines, embracing technology including the implementation of contactless services, mobile check-ins, digital payments, and using technology for communication and guest engagement [26, 27], and approaching sustainability practices through measures like energy efficiency and eco-friendly initiatives can improve the competitive advantage for the hotel.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study aimed at exploring the the post-pandemic key success factor (KPI) for hoteliers to improve their competitiveness and business performance in Bangkok, Thailand. Qualitative research was adopted in this study, with an interview acquired from a total of 4 respondents. A thematic review was performed, and the findings of this study revealed that, the key success factors in the post-pandemic environment amidst hoteliers included health and safety prioritization, technology and digitization, sustainability and environmentalism, guest experience and engagement, and operations and management. Although the studies on success factors in a post-pandemic environment has been explored to certain extent, findings associated with the post-pandemic KSF's for hoteliers, and particularly in the context of Bangkok, Thailand is lacking in the current context. Hence, this contributes to the originality of this paper. However, there are limitations of this study. One of the limitations is the bias in the research design emerging from the researcher's bias or the respondent's bias. Secondly, the study has been conducted with a minimum sample size of 4 respondents and risks the generalizability of the findings. Based on the limitation, future work can increase the sample size to 6 or more respondents [] and expanding the scope to a broader region comprising of different hotel types and regional groups.

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