

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TOURISTS' VIEWS ON TAT
E-MAIL COMPLAINT HANDLING MANAGEMENT

A MASTER'S PROJECT

BY

KRITAYAPORN SOSOTHIKUL

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of
The Master of Art degree in Business English for International Communication

At Srinakharinwirot University

April 2007

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AN ABSTRACT

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Kritayaporn Sosothikul. (2007). *An Exploratory Study of Tourists' Views on TAT E-mail Complaint Handling Management*. Master's Project, M.A. (Business English for International Communication). Bangkok: Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University. Project Advisor: Dr. U-maporn Kardkarnklai

The most competitive strength in building customer retention and relationship is the quality of complaint handling management. For tourism industry, Internet has become a popular medium that tourists use in complaining to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). This research aimed to investigate the tourist satisfaction on TAT e-mail complaint handling management and to explore tourists' views on the existence and timeliness of TAT e-mail complaint response. The instrument employed in gathering data was questionnaires distributed to 50 inbound tourists who had experienced in complaining via e-mail to TAT from September to December 2006. The results revealed that most tourists were dissatisfied with TAT e-mail complaint handling management on the response existence, timeliness, and content. The tourists viewed that TAT spent much time in responding to e-mail complaints (1week) as well as frequently transferred the complaints to tourism organizations. The results indicated that tourists expected TAT to respond their e-mail complaints within 48 hours. Tourists still required TAT to continue offering an e-mail option, even though TAT cannot respond the complaint at the time they expected.

การศึกษาเชิงสำรวจความคิดเห็นของนักท่องเที่ยวต่อการจัดการเรื่องร้องเรียนทางอีเมลของ ททท.

บทคัดย่อ

ของ

กฤษฎพร ซอใสตฤกุล

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา
ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาการศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการสื่อสารนานาชาติ
ลิขสิทธิ์เป็นของมหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ

เมษายน 2550

กฤตยพร โชติโสติกุล. (2550). การศึกษาเชิงสำรวจความคิดเห็นของนักท่องเที่ยวต่อการจัดการ

เรื่องร้องเรียนทางอีเมลล์ของ ททท. สารนิพนธ์ ศศ.ม. (ภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจเพื่อการสื่อสาร

นานาชาติ). กรุงเทพฯ: บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ. อาจารย์ที่

ปรึกษาสารนิพนธ์: ดร. อูมาพร คาดการณ์ไกล.

คุณภาพในการจัดการเรื่องร้องเรียนเป็นความได้เปรียบด้านการแข่งขันในการสงวนและสร้าง
ความสัมพันธ์ต่อลูกค้า ในส่วนของอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยว นักท่องเที่ยวนิยมส่งเรื่องร้องเรียนผ่านทาง
อินเทอร์เน็ตมายังการท่องเที่ยวแห่งประเทศไทย (ททท.) สารนิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษา
ความเห็นของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติต่อการจัดการเรื่องร้องเรียนทางอีเมลล์ของ ททท. โดยการศึกษา
มุ่งเน้นเพื่อ (1) ประเมินความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติต่อการจัดการเรื่องร้องเรียนทางอีเมลล์
ของ ททท. และ (2) สำรวจความคิดเห็นในแง่ของการตอบกลับและระยะเวลาในการตอบเรื่องร้องเรียน
ทางอีเมลล์ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการศึกษาคือแบบสอบถามโดยใช้วิธีส่งไปยังอีเมลล์ของนักท่องเที่ยว
ชาวต่างชาติที่เคยส่งเรื่องร้องเรียนมายัง ททท. ระหว่างเดือนกันยายน ถึง ธันวาคม 2549 การศึกษา
พบว่า นักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติส่วนใหญ่รู้สึกไม่พึงพอใจการจัดการเรื่องร้องเรียนทางอีเมลล์ของ ททท.
โดยให้เหตุผลเกี่ยวกับการไม่ได้รับการตอบกลับ ความล่าช้าของการตอบกลับ และเนื้อหาของอีเมลล์ ทั้งนี้
นักท่องเที่ยวยังเห็นว่า ททท. ใช้เวลานานในการตอบกลับ (1 สัปดาห์) และมักจะส่งเรื่องต่อไปยังหน่วยงาน
อื่นๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยว ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่านักท่องเที่ยวคาดหวังให้ ททท. ตอบอีเมลล์
เรื่องร้องเรียนกลับภายใน 48 ชั่วโมง อย่างไรก็ตาม ถึงแม้ว่า ททท. จะยังไม่สามารถให้บริการตอบเรื่อง
ร้องเรียนทางอีเมลล์ได้ในระยะเวลาที่นักท่องเที่ยวคาดหวัง นักท่องเที่ยวยังคงเห็นว่า ททท. ควรคงบริการ
ส่งเรื่องร้องเรียนทางอินเทอร์เน็ตไว้

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. U-maporn Kardkarnklai, my advisor, for her guidance, valuable comments and encouragement throughout the study. My gratitude is also expressed to Asst. Prof. Dr. Amporn Srisermbhok and Ajarn Sopin Jantahkloy, my committee, for their insightful literary comments and suggestions.

I also would like to extend my thanks to all my friends at Tourism Authority of Thailand for providing me with not only friendship but constant access to valuable information.

A special thank goes to my parents, whose teachings, support and caring inspire me to keep achieving; my husband for his profound understanding and encouragement during my study, and my precious daughter who keeps me grounded and enriches my life.

Kritayaporn Sosothikul

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Tourism is a particular information-intensive industry, which conducts many important business activities by means of telecommunication. Tourism business sectors use Internet not only to provide their service information but also to establish a new channel for requests and feedbacks, especially complaints from customers. Nowadays, the quality of complaint handling management has become a major source of competitive strength in building customer retention and relationship. In the field of tourism, complaint handling management plays a significant role in preventing negative word-of-mouth and unfavorable publicity of the destination countries.

With the ongoing diffusion of Internet technology, e-mail has become a common medium of communication that tourists frequently use in complaining to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the destination management organization, which is responsible for the management and marketing of the country's tourism. Through e-mail, TAT can communicate with the tourists effectively, efficiently, and more personal because TAT can receive tourists' suggestions and complaint 24 hours a day and will respond the e-mails directly and personally to tourists' e-mail addresses. As e-mail is a fast medium, people who complain via e-mail expect to receive their e-mail complaint responses faster than those who complain via

traditional 'snail' mail. In addition to timing, the working system of the government service is known for its sluggishness. From interviewing the TAT Call Center's authority, TAT usually spends more than one week to be able to provide an appropriate answer to e-mail complaints. In order to serve the rise in the complainer's expectation as well as to maintain Thailand's favorable publicity, TAT has to pay attention to the e-mail response existence or reply and the timeliness or time spent in replying the complaints because these are the two main factors affecting tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Customers' complaint is considered as a useful source of information for improving organizations marketing strategies and services; however, the negative impacts caused by e-mail complaint mishandling are far-fetched. The tourists who are dissatisfied with the TAT complaint handling management may turn to complain via other mediums, in the worst case, complain to newspaper. For example, in the "Postbag" column in Bangkok Post, many tourists wrote letters or e-mails to share their bad traveling experiences in Thailand. From July 2005 to November 2006, five dissatisfaction tourists' notes had been published in "Postbag" as follows:

- "Tourist's arrest scary experience" in July 2005
- "Horrible people live on Samui" in December 2005
- "Lesser-know sites require directions" in January 2006
- "Dark spots in a pleasant holiday" in February 2006
- "Dual pricing is here to stay" in November 2006.

As a result, the tourists' complaints to the newspaper show the inefficiency of TAT e-mail complaint handling service, more importantly, lead to a negative word-of-mouth and unfavorable publicity of Thailand.

With regard to complaint handling management, numerous researchers stated that efficient complaint handling management has a strong impact on customers' views and behaviors (Barbard. 1985; Kelly;& Davis. 1994; Sterne. 1996; Cho, Ferjemstad;& Hiltz. 2001). Organizations with successful complaint handling service can build customers' retention, maximize customers' satisfaction and loyalty, improve profitability, create favorable publicity, reduce the overall number of complaints as well as draw away potential word-of-mouth damage. On the other hand, inefficiency of complaint management can cause a great loss for all types of business. Failure in managing complaint handling may lead to customer dissatisfaction, negative word-of-mouth, unfavorable publicity, and increasing costs (Blodgett, Granbois;& Walters. 1993; Gilly;& Gelb. 1982; TARP. 1986).

Since complaint management is considered as the heart of Customer relationship management (CRM), the organization can create customer satisfaction and loyalty by providing an effective complaint management. Gamble, Stone and Woodcock (1999) proved that if the organization integrates new technology into its operation and can provide a high quality of service to support it, the organization would be able to enhance customers' loyalty. As TAT created a feedback section in both of its official Websites (www.tourismthailand.org and www.tat.or.th) as well as provided the e-mail address:

info@tat.or.th, it is vital for TAT to provide a high quality of e-mail complaint handling service. To achieve this, TAT should respond all the E-mail complaints and decrease time spent in responding to e-mail complaints. Strauss and Hill (2001) concluded that an e-mail existence or reply has a positive influence on satisfaction, the service repurchasing, and perceived company concern and credibility. The timeliness or the length of time that the organization spends in responding to e-mail complaint can also alter the customer satisfaction and perception of the company concern. Less time in responding to E-mail complaint results in higher customer satisfaction.

Although having an effective complaint management provides a fruitful benefit to organization, some organizations still overlook its value and underestimate the negative impact causes by providing inefficient complaint management. According to the Australian research (Colley. 2006), tourism business sector is the worst in e-mail customer service performance. The tourists' e-mail complaints were not responded at all or were responded late. This implies that most tourism business sectors are at risk in creating customer dissatisfaction, which will not only decrease their own credibility, but also create a negative word-of-mouth. It is, therefore, essential for the researcher to investigate the e-mail handling service of TAT as inefficient complaint handling management can be a starting point in generating negative image of the whole country.

To achieve the best result in managing E-mail complaints, TAT needs to know the tourists' views on the present TAT complaint handling service and their expectation on the

respond existence and timeliness. This can be recognized by observing the expectation of the tourists who used to complain via E-mail to TAT. Numerous research has also paid much attention to understand the tourists' views (Sangkum. 1995; Chitaroon. 1997; Wongpan. 2001; Nakjan. 2006). This is because the benefit from understanding the tourists' view can lead the related organizations, such as Thai Hotel Association (THA), Association of Thai Travel Agent (ATTA), and Bangkok Tourist Bureau, to develop their services.

In connection with previous studies on e-mail complaints, Strauss and Pesce (1998) and Strauss and Hill (2001) focused on corporate responses to consumers e-mail complaints, which aimed to examine the timeliness and content of corporate responses as well as the customer reactions to the corporate e-mail responses. This study aimed to explore the tourists' expectation on the e-mail complaint response existence and timeliness. Their affect on the tourists' satisfaction and the perception on TAT credibility will also be observed.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study serves two objectives:

1. To evaluate the tourists' satisfaction on TAT e-mail complaint handling service.
2. To explore the tourists' views on the existence and timeliness of TAT e-mail complaint responses.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How satisfied are the inbound tourists with TAT e-mail complaints handling service?
2. What is the tourists' expectation on TAT e-mail response in terms of timeliness and existence?

1.4 Significance of the study

Understanding tourists' view on TAT e-mail complaint handling service and their expectation on the e-mail complaint response existence and timeliness could be a particular value in improving the service quality of TAT complaint management and other tourism service businesses. Knowledge of how individuals think about the complaint handling service, how the response existence and timeliness affect the credibility of the organization, could offer important benefits to range of tourism stakeholders and to our general understanding of the tourism service business.

Even though information technology and e-mail were used to reach the customers closer and faster than before, little has been done to understand the customers' expectation and to assess the impacts of the e-mail complaint responses existence and timeliness on the customers' satisfaction and perceive of company credibility. In addition, the study on tourists' view on TAT e-mail complaint handling management could be useful element in evaluating and improving the service quality in handling e-mail complaint.

1.5 Scope of the study

This study attempts to examine the relationship between tourists' satisfaction and the e-mail complaint response existence and timeliness. The focus is on (1) tourists' expectation on two aspects of TAT e-mail response: Existence and Timeliness; and (2) a role of TAT e-mail response existence and timeliness on tourists' satisfaction and perception on TAT credibility. Data will be obtained from fifty inbound tourists, which only referred to those foreigners who had traveled in Thailand and had experienced in complaining via E-mail to TAT through www.tourismthailand.org and info@tat.or.th. from September to December 2006. Also, this study includes the definitions of term tourism service marketing, customer retention, and complaint management.

1.7 Definition of Terms

The following are terminologies with their definitions used in this research.

E-mail Complaint	is articulation of dissatisfaction that is expressed toward organizations via electronic mail with the aim of informing the organizations about dissatisfying experiences and asking for the solution from those organizations.
CRM	is Customer relation management that implies marketing operations focusing on creating and maintaining a good relationship. It includes taking good care of customers in terms of

services and equally values every customer without bias to create and maintain sustainable customer satisfaction.

Customer Satisfaction is how customers view an organization's services in light of their experiences with an organization, as well as by comparison with what they have heard or seen before.

Customer loyalty is the condition where customers have the confidence and trust in the services organizations. The customers will keep returning for services without changing to other organizations, even if at times the customer might be dissatisfied with certain given services.

Service Quality is conformance to requirement. The quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy need.

Inbound Tourist is non-resident, visiting Thailand for any reason other than to exercise remunerated activity within the country and staying at least one night.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the general background of e-mail complaint handling process of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is presented. Moreover, in relation to e-mail complaint handling and customer satisfaction, the researcher describes the marketing theories that affect the use of e-mail as a medium in complaining which are defined in three main groups: tourism service marketing, customer retention, and complaint management. Previous studies on corporate responses and customer reaction were also included.

2.1 General Background of E-mail Complaint Handling Process of TAT

The process in handling e-mail complaint of TAT can be divided into three main entry points of the e-mail as follows:

2.1.1 info@tat.or.th

The inbound and domestic tourists can easily communicate with TAT by writing to info@tat.or.th e-mail address. All the E-mail that enters through this entry point will directly go to the TAT Call Center, under the Marketing Services Department, who responsible in responding all phone call, letter and e-mail from the tourists. After receiving the e-mail, the TAT Call Center will respond to all e-mail within 24 hours, especially if it is an e-mail asking for tourism information. However, it takes from two

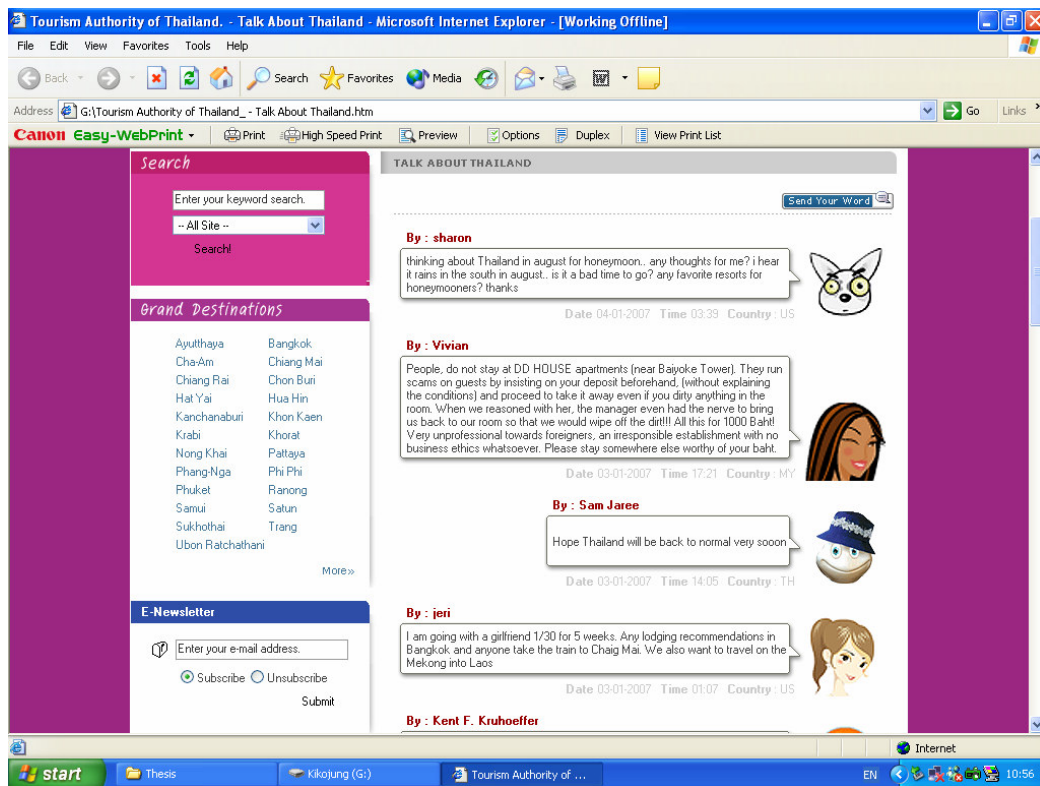
days to one month to respond to more complicated complaints. Moreover, TAT cannot answer some complaints because they involve other governmental authorities; therefore, TAT has to forward those complaints to other responsible authorities. These complaints will usually take more than one month to be responded.

2.1.2 www.tourismthailand.org

The inbound tourists normally complain through “ASK GOVERNOR” section and “Talk About Thailand” Web board. For “ASK GOVERNOR?”, this online complaint is a non-public type source. The tourists will complain directly to the TAT; their e-mail complaints and the tourists e-mail addresses will be kept confidentially. In contrast, “Talk About Thailand” is a direct online complaint type. The complainers can view other complaints and can also response to those complaints. However, from October 2006 onward, TAT has adjusted the feedback sections in this web site by removing “ASK GOVERNOR?”.

The tourists can complain only through “Talk About Thailand”

The questions and complaints coming through this website will be directly sent to the Web Master, who can answer e-mails only in general. For the complicated e-mail complaints, the Web Master will forward them to TAT. Most of the e-mails will be sent to the TAT Call Center who responsible in responding to the tourist phone calls, letters, and e-mails.



Source: www.tourismthailand.org

After receiving the e-mail complaints, the TAT Call Center will then categorize the e-mails and transfer them to the responsible departments. For the e-mail, which entering through “ASK GOVERNOR” and “Talk About Thailand” sections, TAT will respond all the E-mail within 24 hours. For the tourists who asked tourism information, TAT can send the information within the first response (24 hours). But to respond to the e-mail complaints, TAT will send thank you letters and inform the complainers that TAT is in the process of finding an appropriate answer for them.

In case that TAT is not responsible in that area of the complaints, TAT will inform the complainers that their complaints will be transfer to other responsible organizations:

Tourist Police, Thai Hotel Association (THA), Association of Thai Travel Agent (ATTA), Bangkok Tourist Bureau, and Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA).

With regard to the e-mail complaint response timing, it usually takes one week or more for TAT to be able to provide the real or the second e-mail responses. In addition, if the complaints were transferred to other organizations, the response timing is unpredictable.

Based on the TAT Call Center statistical report, the inbound tourists complained via e-mail through info@tat.or.th and www.tourismthailand.org with an average of 10 complaints per month. Most of the inbound tourists preferred to complain through info@tat.or.th, which is more direct to TAT. The topics of the complaints covered the irresponsible travel agencies, inconvenient transportation: dishonest Tuk Tuk drivers, false hotel booking arrangement and services, traveling security, over prices, bad weather: rain or hot weather, cheating touts, fake jewelry, and inefficiency of TAT customer services.

2.1.3 www.tat.or.th

The domestic tourists mostly complain through the “TAT Web board”

(www.tat.or.th/thai/phorum). This online complaint is a direct online complaint type

source. The complainers will post their complaints in the Web board, where they can

view other complaints and can share their opinions with others. The e-mail address of

the complainers will be kept confidentially

การท่องเที่ยวก่อนประเทศไทย

หัวข้อ	ชื่อเจ้าของกระทู้	อ่านต่อ	วันที่ตั้งกระทู้
18204. ช่วงสมัครมีคูปอง	เมเจอร์	28 / 0	14 ก.ย. 49 22:00:46
18183. ช่วงค้นหาสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวจังหวัดเลย	วิศิตา สุทธิโรตง	13 / 0	14 ก.ย. 49 13:18:02
18167. แนะนำที่พักหน้าหนาวนี้	ระเมียงชมพีร์โรตง	71 / 1	13 ก.ย. 49 19:36:08
18157. ขอแนะนำเว็บไซต์ที่รวบรวมเที่ยวกับโรงแรม	อัญชิตา	47 / 1	13 ก.ย. 49 15:32:01
18142. อพเททที่มุดด้วยตัว	อัทธทที่มุดร้านอาหาร	33 / 0	13 ก.ย. 49 10:39:10
18125. รบกวนอืพเทท ข้อมูลที่พักใหม่ด้วยคะ	bb	51 / 1	12 ก.ย. 49 16:42:51
18124. ปีใหม่นี้เที่ยวไหนดีคะ	anna	40 / 0	12 ก.ย. 49 16:03:32

Source: www.tat.or.th/thai/phorum

The complaints in TAT web board will be watched over by the Web site section, under

the Marketing Services Department, which is responsible in handling all the e-mail that

enters in the web board. The Web site section can directly respond to the e-mail asking for information about tourist attraction and services. But for all the complaints, the Web site section has to categorize them and send them to the responsible departments or send them to the TAT Call center to categorize the complaints and transfer them to the responsible organizations.

2.2 Significant Marketing Factors Affecting the Use of E-mail Complaint

Tourism is a service business relying on an effective management in order to succeed. It is vital to have a better understanding about the nature of tourism, how to retain the customer, and how to handle the complaint according to the customers' expectation. The following is a brief explanation of the tourism service marketing, customer retention and complaint management that are considered useful in this research.

2.2.1. Tourism Service Marketing

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is a governmental organization directly provides tourism services. In conducting a research involving TAT, it is essential to understand the basic of marketing, especially on tourism marketing, service marketing and marketing segmentation. Understanding the nature of tourism and service marketing, we can identify what TAT should seriously do with their services to retain tourists. Marketing segmentation helps TAT to know the specific group of tourists who use E-mail as a complaint medium and to be able to reconcile

their service to meet the need of each specific group. The following are tourism service marketing strategies related in this research.

2.2.1.1 Tourism Marketing

Weaver and Lawton (2002) pointed out that tourism marketing involves the interaction and interrelationships among consumers and producers of goods and services, through which ideas, products, services and values are created and exchanged for the mutual benefit of both groups. Successful marketing depends on feedback, for example, customer satisfaction.

2.2.1.2 Service Marketing

Gartner (1993) stated that service marketing is applied to service-sector activities such as tourism and is fundamentally different from the marketing of goods: services have intangibility. This means that customers cannot directly see, taste, hear or feel the services prior to their purchase and consumption. Because of the intangible nature of the service sector, word-of-mouth is especially important as a source of product information, as this involves access to those who have already experienced a particular destination, or know of someone who has. Accordingly, word-of-mouth has a high degree of influence among potential customers as an image formation agent. Rothschild (1984) pointed out that as word-of-mouth is powerful in influencing people when making decision, Zero defects of the organization is the only acceptable performance standard as there is no possibility of undoing the guest's

experience. The concept of “Zero defects” was emerging as a competitive strategic tool.

Rather than building and then maintaining an expensive after sales service network, companies believed it would be cheaper to build defect-free products and services.

2.2.1.3 Market Segmentation

Market segmentation identifies groups of customers and prospects who share sufficient characteristics in common that a product and service can be designed and brought to market for their needs. In knowing a general data of the customers, we can know or predict the customer expectations and the level of service that we must provide. Market segmentation divides the total tourist population into smaller, relatively homogeneous subgroups that can be catered to or managed as separate market segments. When evaluating the utilities of market segmentation, we should consider the following factors: measurability, size, homogeneity, compatibility, actionability, durability and relevance (Weaver;& Lawton. 2002).

In brief, tourism is one of the service sector activities. With the intangible nature of the tourism, word-of-mouth is considered as an important agent in creating both positive and negative image. If the organization lets the customers complain via E-mail, it is beneficial for that organization to adopt the concept of “Zero defects” in their complaint handling services as it mainly eliminates potential word-of-mouth damage.

2.2.2 Customer Retention

In order to build the tourist loyalty, TAT should consider mainly in creating tourist intimacy and satisfaction, as intimacy is the first step to reach to the tourists and to building trust while satisfaction resulting in tourist loyalty. Providing TAT E-mail address and Web site is a kind of inventing tourist intimacy because the tourists can contact with TAT 24 hours a day, their complaint letter and their e-mail address were confidential, and it shows that TAT is willing to help their customers. However, TAT will be successful in building tourist loyalty only if the complaint handling service they provide can satisfy those complainers. The following are details about intimacy, satisfaction and loyalty concerning in this research.

2.2.2.1 Customer Intimacy

Organization should integrate the concept of customer intimacy into their communication with the customers along with service provision. The intimacy concept is used to create customer familiarity resulting in customer loyalty (Stern. 1997: 7-17). This concept is composed of five Cs, which are as follows:

- C1. Communication: Self-Disclosure Showing sincerity and truthfulness in
and Sympathetic Listening: the Service
- C2. Caring and Giving: Warmth, protectiveness and empathy

- C3. Customer Commitment: Sacrifice profits to maintain good relations with the customers such as refund or replace with the new product upon dissatisfaction of customers.
- C4. Comfort or Compatibility: Ready to serve, near or far.
- C5. Conflict Resolution and Trust: Show responsibility by preventing conflicts or solving them

2.2.2.2 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is when the customer is satisfied with a service that meets the customer's needs, wants, and expectations. There are levels of specific satisfaction that define the basic quality. The three levels of customer expectations about quality are as follows:

- Level 1: Expectations are very simple and take the form of assumptions, must have, or take it for granted.
- Level 2: Expectations are a step higher than that of level 1 and they require some form of satisfaction through meeting the requirements and/or specifications.
- Level 3: Expectations are much higher than for level 1 and 2. Level 3 requires some kind of delightfulness or service that is so good that it attracts me to it.

Source: http://media.wiley.com/product_data/excerpt/18/04714595/0471459518.pdf.

2.2.2.3 Customer Loyalty

Satisfied customers are more likely to 'promote' the company, because satisfaction is something people will talk about. Loyal customers however are more profitable because they are more likely to buy additional products, often without shopping around for the best price. On the other hand, dissatisfied customers are a real cost to a company, because they criticize the company to others. Szwarc (2005) proved that dissatisfied customers are likely to tell more people about their dissatisfaction than satisfied customers tell about why they are satisfied. This assumption is relevant to many researchers who concluded that dissatisfied customers are more likely to complain to others. Customers who are dissatisfied tell twice as many people about it as those who are happy with the services. (Blodgett;& Granboise. 1992; Kjellerup. 1998; Ruchti. 1999; Hofmeyr. 2004))

With regard to E-mail communication, many recent researchers focused on the vital benefit of the organization in creating "E-loyalty". From 1990 on, the technology has influenced a change in the way in which marketing is conducted. Many organizations made use of Internet as a medium in serving their customers. Researchers pointed out a potentially powerful of the Internet as a tool for strengthening relationships between firms and their customers. Today's online customers exhibit a clear proclivity toward loyalty, which can be reinforced by the proper use of Web technology. Moreover, establishing effective relationships results in greater customer loyalty and turning dissatisfied customers into loyal repeated customers. (Gardial et

al. 1994; Levesque;& McDougall. 1996; Gamble, Stone;& Woodcock. 1999; Reichheld;& Schefer. 2002; Cho;& Hiltz. 2001)

In conclusion, intimacy is the first step in creating customer familiarity with the organization. By providing services that meet or excess the customer expectation, the organization can build customer satisfaction, which leads to customer loyalty. It is evidenced that maintaining customer satisfaction is cheaper than eliminating a negative word-of-mouth causing by the dissatisfied customers.

2.2.3. Complaint Management and Customer relationship management (CRM)

As TAT provide E-mail address and Web sites that the tourists can send their complaints to the organization, it is essential to understand the importance of complaint management and customer relationship management (CRM) in order that TAT can manage complaints and provide a service that can fulfill the tourists' expectation.

2.2.3.1 Complaint Management

Organizations have to understand that customers making complaint in any situation urgently desire a solution. If firms offer this solution, they are entering into relationship along with the customer and that are taking on responsibility in the relationship. This is an excellent basis for securing trust and commitment on the part of the customer and consequently is the

prerequisite for creating lasting customer loyalty. Customers in return will loyal to the company.

Some researches indicated that a speedy response can add 25 percent to customer loyalty.

Moreover, the company that can resolve complaints on the first contact will be able to save money (by eliminating unnecessary additional contacts) and build customer confidence.

(Kjellerup. 1998; Ruchti. 1999; Stauss;& Seidel. 2004)

Researchers also looked at complaint management as the heart of customer satisfaction. Effective complaint management has a dramatic impact on customer retention, deflects potential word-of-mouth damage, and improves profitability. Therefore, complaint management is an important aspect of online strategic marketing tool – one that has such potential benefits as maximizing customer satisfaction and loyalty, creating favorable publicity, and reducing the overall number of complaints. (Barbard. 1985; Kelly;& Davis. 1994; Sterne. 1996; Cho, Ferjemstad;& Hiltz. 2001)

2.2.3.2 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

CRM is commitments or promises between consumers and an organization. Both customers and the organization shall receive long-term benefits from such relationship. CRM is aimed at psychologically pleasing customers and valuing them, as they deserve (Berry. 1983; Gamble, Stone;& Woodcock. 1999). Stauss and Seidel (2004) concluded that in a time of intensive and global competition, a customer-oriented corporate policy is a critical success factor for firms. Customer relationship management that focuses on customer relationships

offers fruitful insights that lead to a new way of structuring customer-related management functions. In addition, modern information technologies offer new ways of performing these functions with precision and efficiency.

Gamble, Stone, and Woodcock (1999) suggested that whenever an organization chooses to integrate a new innovation into its operation, it must ensure that these innovations are qualified and of high quality for the functions, especially if these innovations are used for customer services. When such management can be obtained, customers will have a positive attitude towards the organization resulting in the facilitation and maintenance of customer loyalty.

2.2.3.3 E-mail Complaint Management

The researchers (Strauss;& Pesce. 1998; Strauss;& Hill. 2001) concluded that an e-mail complaint reply had a positive impact on satisfaction with the response, the likelihood of repurchasing the product, and perceived company concern and credibility. An organization should not offer an e-mail option for Internet users if it cannot respond to incoming mail. This is because an unsupported e-mail links have resulted in negative publicity. The responding speed had a strong impact on both perceptions of the company concern and satisfaction with the responses. It is believed about the responding speed that faster is better. The organization can increase customer satisfaction by sending a quick response to complaining customers. If the organization cannot provide immediate appropriate answer, it can send quick

acknowledgement e-mail or a thank you E-mail in order to buy time while finding the answer in depth.

With regard to the e-mail communication, researchers (Strauss;& Pesce. 1998) suggested that consumers who use e-mail as a complaint vehicle have a strong preference for the medium; therefore, whether or not a response was received had no impact on the consumer preference for e-mail communication with firms.

In summary, it is important for the organizations to have an effective complaint management. It shows that the organizations are taking on responsibility in solving problems. This is the simplest way to enhance customer satisfaction, resulting in customer loyalty. As e-mail is used as a complaining medium, the speed of e-mail affects directly on customer expectation, especially on the timing of the response. This means that if the organization chooses to provide e-mail for customer service, it must ensure that its e-mail complaint handling service is qualified and of high quality for the functions.

2.3 Previous Research

Previous secondary data related to this project in terms of e-mail complaint and complaint handling management will be discussed as follows:

Regarding e-mail complaint handling, Strauss and Pesce (1998) and Strauss and Hill (2001) examined the timeliness and content of corporate responses to genuine consumer

complaint e-mail letters and to examine customer reactions to corporate e-mail responses. The study found that e-mail response rate is lower than the postal response rate. Firms took an average of six days for replying to e-mail complaints. More importantly, an e-mail reply had a positive impact on satisfaction, the product repurchasing, and perceived company concern and credibility. Finally, speed had a strong impact on both perceptions of company credibility and satisfaction with the responses.

With regard to complaint management, Dechakom (2002) studied the design of a customer complaint management system. This study aims to focus on reengineering the complaint management system in the field of engineering management. The researcher chose a steel manufacturing company as a case study in reducing the process time of overall complaint system. The researcher included the complaint investigation process, the corrective action and preventive action process. Finally, the recurrence defects corrective action and preventive action database is implemented in order to handle the recurrence defects. From this study, the company has reduced the process time of the complaint management system of 39.7 days from 69.3 days.

Relating to tourism e-mail handling, Fux, Noti and Myrach (2005) explored the state of response behavior to e-mail enquiries in Alpine tourism destinations by e-mailing a typical room request with some specific questions to a random sample of 65 tourism offices. This research also focused on the quality of the content such as politeness and personally. The results reveal that one third of those e-mail were not answered at all. Not only neglecting their actual

responsibility as an information provider but the tourism organization also often forwarded the enquiry. As a result, the tourism organization obviously lost control of the enquiry process. With regard to the quantity of feedback, 45% of the destinations answered with one e-mail, which is presumably be the best response behavior, from the customer's point of view.

This study differs from other previous research as the researcher studied e-mail complaint handling management, focusing on the tourists' views on TAT e-mail complaint handling management and their expectations on the existence and timing of response. The researcher aims to pinpoint the understanding on the tourists' needs in order to give TAT and other tourism businesses a guideline to improve and provide a suitable service, which directly fulfill the tourists' expectation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology, consisting of subjects, instruments of the study, research procedures, and data analysis.

3.1 Subjects of the study

The target population for this research is defined as follows:

- All of these selected inbound tourists are the tourists who had an experience in traveling in Thailand and using e-mail as a medium to complain to TAT through info@tat.or.th and www.tourismthailand.org from September to December 2006.
- Fifty inbound tourists who had used e-mail as a complaining medium to TAT were chronologically selected as the research samples.
- The researcher sent the questionnaire via e-mail to the sampling's e-mail addresses. All of these e-mail addresses were reserved as private information of TAT.

3.2 Instrument of the study

The instrument for collecting data in this research is a questionnaire, which had closed questions and the 5 Likert type scale to measure the tourists satisfaction. The questionnaire (see Appendix) was divided into two parts: personal information and the tourists' opinion and expectation. For the first part, the answers are the fact of respondents' demographics and for the second part, the tourists had to select the appropriate answer according to their views.

Part A: Personal Data

The tourists were asked about gender, age, country of citizenship, purpose of visit, and length of stay. This part of the questionnaire is to identify types or groups of tourists who use e-mail as a medium in complaining when they have difficulty in traveling in Thailand. The answers in this part indicates the exact group of tourists who prefers using this kind of medium, which will be useful for TAT to be able to improve the websites and services to directly satisfy the target group of tourists in the future.

Part B: Tourists' Opinions and Expectations

This part of the questionnaire consists of 13 questions concerning the tourists' opinions and expectations in 4 dimensions as follows:

1. Tourists' Opinion on their Experiences in using E-mail as a Complaint Medium with TAT.

The questions focus finding out the tourists' opinions on their experiences in using e-mail to complain to TAT. The tourists were asked to evaluate their satisfaction on the TAT response, to identify the factors that affect their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and to select the actual timing that TAT used to respond the e-mail complaint. This is to evaluate the present TAT complaint handling management by the view of the users and to point out the factors that cause customers' dissatisfaction, which will be useful in improving the services.

2. Tourists' Expectation on Existence and Timeliness of E-mail Response:

The questions focus on finding the tourists' expectations on TAT e-mail response whether they expect that TAT will answer their e-mail complaint or not. The tourists were asked to identify the timing of the response that they expected. This is to know the need or the expectation of the tourists who use e-mail in complaining so that TAT can provide their services accordingly.

3. Tourist View on TAT Credibility as a result of the Response Existence and Timeliness:

The tourists were asked to rate how much the complaint response existence and timeliness can affect their perception of TAT credibility. This is to know whether

the response existence and timeliness affect the tourist perception of TAT credibility.

Understanding the tourists' views, TAT has to improve their complaint management or keep an eye on those sensitive areas in order to increase their credibility.

4. Tourist Preference on E-mail Communication

The questions are focusing on finding tourists' opinion in using e-mail as a medium in complaining to TAT. The tourists were asked to evaluate whether the delay of the respond or non-responding will affect their preference in using e-mail or not. The results from this part are vital for TAT and other organizations to learn in order to know how to manage their websites and complaint management process.

3.3 Research Procedures

The researcher conducted a pilot study in September 2006 using the designed questionnaire to examine whether the respondents understand all the questions, whether the respondents were interested in joining the study, and to estimate the time spent in collecting the questionnaire responses. In the pilot study, 40 inbound tourists, who had experiences using e-mail as a medium to transfer their complaints to TAT during May to August 2006, were asked for their views about their experiences in complaining via E-mail to TAT, their expectation on the e-mail response existence and timeliness, their preferences in e-mail communication.

In the pilot study, only 21 tourists responded the questionnaires. The researcher also found that the question asking the sampling to identify the response timing is not clear as TAT often sent "Thank you" letters within 24 hours, which may cause confusion because some respondents chose the timing of the thank you letter not the timing of the response that answer their complaints. The result of the pilot study showed that 43.75% of the tourists were dissatisfied with TAT responses, with reasons related to the response existence and timeliness as well as the answer in the response letter. Up to 60% of the respondents expected to receive their E-mail complaint responses within 24 hours or not later than 48 hours (65.5%). The result of the pilot study also indicated that the existence and timeliness of the response have a high impact on the tourists' satisfaction. However, it was surprising that the tourists still chose to complain via e-mail no matter if they would receive the response or not; or even they would receive late responses.

To assure the result of the pilot study, the researcher selected more sampling and revised some questions in part 2 to reduce the limitation such as misinterpreting the questions that may occur in conducting the study. The questions order was re-arranged so that the subjects would not be confused when completing the questionnaire. In this study, the researcher sent the questionnaires to the 50 inbound tourists, who had experiences in complaining via e-mail to TAT from September to December 2006, via e-mail in January 2007.

3.4 Data Analysis

After receiving all completed questionnaires, the researcher categorized the data into two parts: (1) Personal data of the inbound tourists and (2) inbound tourists' opinions and expectations. The results were presented in percentage in the form of tables, bar charts, data discussion and conclusion.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the research finding. The findings are presented in percentage with descriptive analysis. According to the questionnaire, the presentation is divided into two main parts: general information of the respondents and tourists' opinions and expectations. The results are presented as follows:

4.1 General Information

The questionnaire was distributed via e-mail to 50 inbound tourists who had experienced in complaining via e-mail to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) from September to December 2006. 42 tourists completed the questionnaires and mailed them back to the research e-mail address. Therefore, there were 42 participants in this research.

59.5% of the respondents were female and 40.4% of the respondents were male. The respondents were ranging in age from 18 to 44. 52.39% of the respondents aged from 35 to 44.

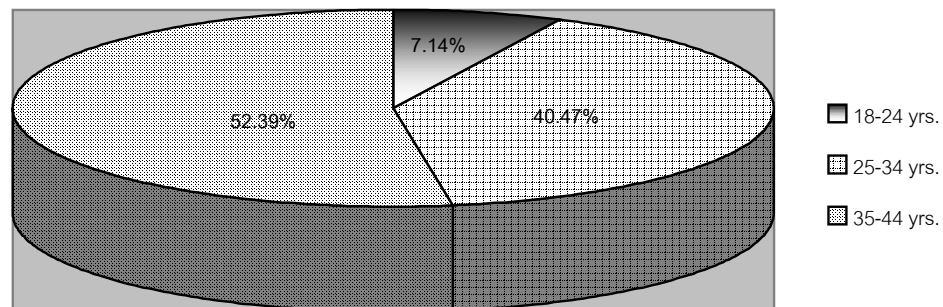


Figure 1 Pie Chart of the Total Respondents Categorized by Age

According to the researcher's intention, all respondents were inbound tourists. 35.7% of the respondents were Asian: 3 Singaporean, 3 Japanese, 2 Malaysian, 2 Taiwanese, 2 Chinese, 1 Hong Kong, and 1 Indian; 35.7% was European: 6 British, 2 German, 2 Finnish, 2 Danish, 2 France and 1 Italian; 26.2% was the Americans: 6 American and 3 Canadian; and 7.1% were Australian. The percentage of all respondents was categorized by country of citizenship as shown in Figure 2.

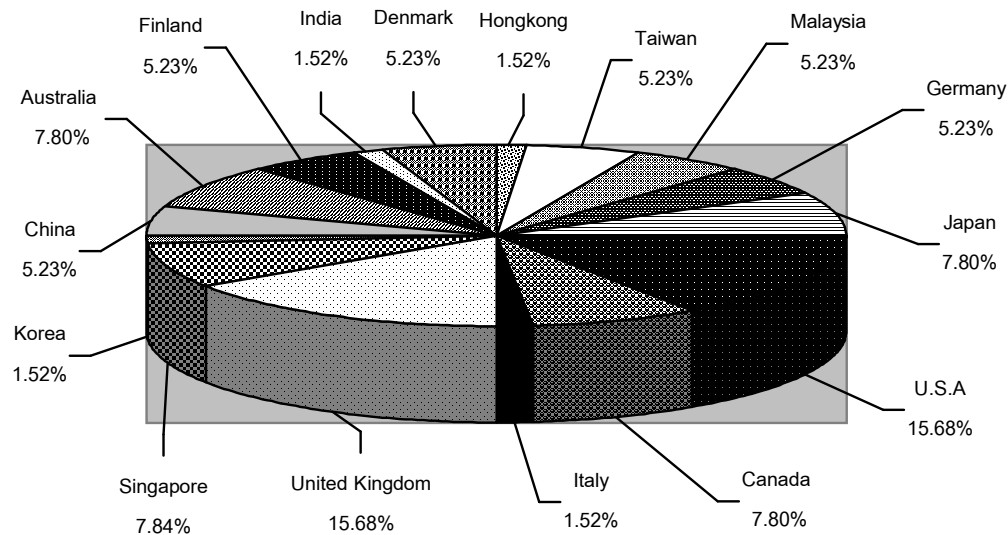


Figure 2 Pie Chart of the Total Respondents Categorized by Country of Citizenship

From the result which indicates that most complainers were Asian (35.7%) and European (35.7%), it may be because these groups of tourists were either those who were the largest group visited Thailand or those who spent the longest length of stay in Thailand. Regarding the statistic report of TAT, there were 7,034,024 tourists from Asia visited Thailand, which is the largest group of international tourist arrivals in 2004, and tourists from Europe

spend the longest length of stay (13.63 days) in Thailand. Therefore, it may assume that these groups of tourist have the highest chance to encounter with problems while visiting Thailand and have a high frequency in complaining to TAT.

The result shows that 88% of the respondents visited Thailand to spend their holidays. Only 9.5% came for attending a conference and/or seminar and 2.3% of the respondents stopped over for transit to another country. Therefore, it may assume that tourists who face with difficulty traveling in Thailand are mostly those who travel to spend their holidays rather than those who come for other purposes.

For the length of stay, 52.3% of the respondents spent 5 -10 days in Thailand, 26.19% spent less than 5 days, 16.66% spent 11-15 days and only 4.76% of the respondents spent more than 15 days. This result implies that the length of stay did not matter with a chance in encountering with problems. Tourists could face difficulty in traveling no matter how long they stayed.

In summary, all of the respondents were inbound tourists. Most of them were female and 52.39% of the respondents aged from 35 to 44. The respondents were Asians, Europeans, the Americans and Australians. Most of the respondents visited Thailand to spend their holidays and more than 50% of the respondents spent 5-10 days in Thailand.

4.2 Tourists' Opinions and Expectations

In the tourists' opinions and expectations part, the presentation will be divided into four parts: TAT e-mail complaint handling service, expectation on e-mail response, TAT credibility as a result of response existence and timeliness, and preference for e-mail communication.

4.2.1 TAT E-mail Complaint Handling Service

With regard to the tourists' experiences in using e-mail as a complaint medium to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), four questions were used to evaluate the tourists' satisfaction and the timeliness of the e-mail complaint responding process of TAT.

As shown in Table 1, the result reveals that 40.47% of the tourists were neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with TAT response, 23.8% were dissatisfied, 19% were very dissatisfied and 16.66% were satisfied.

Table 1 Tourists Satisfaction with the TAT response in their Past Experiences

Satisfaction with the TAT Response	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Tourists Respondents (42 participants)	0	7	17	10	8
Percentage	0%	16.66%	40.47%	23.80%	19.00%

The factors that dissatisfied tourists (42.80%) gave, ranking from the highest score to the lowest score, were (1) TAT did not respond to their e-mail complaint, (2) TAT delivered late responses, and (3) the response contents were not satisfying. In addition, response contents did not answer the respondents' questions because TAT often suggested that complaint notes would be routed to other responsible departments or organizations.

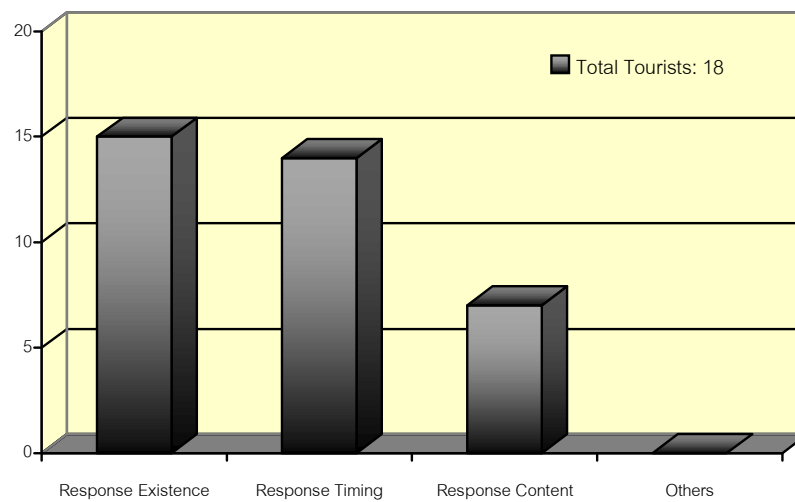


Figure 3 The Factors that Affect the Dissatisfaction of the Tourists

The satisfied tourists (16.66%) gave reasons of their satisfaction on (1) the response content, (2) the response timing and (3) others. The first two reasons are slightly the same as the reasons given by the dissatisfied tourists. However, some of the satisfied tourists added that they were pleased by a full answer that TAT responded to their complaints.

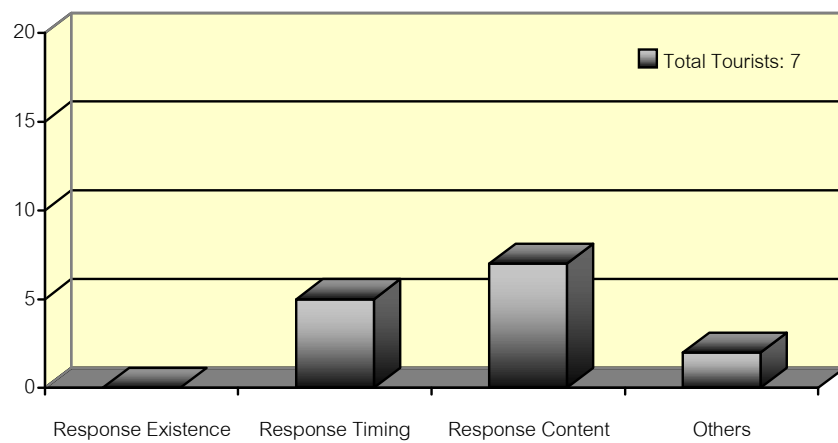


Figure 4 The Factors that Affect the Satisfaction of the Tourists

According to the respondents' experiences, 33.33% of the inbound tourists received the TAT response, excluding a thank you letter, within 1 week; 16.66% more than 1 week and 16.66% within 24 hours. However, up to 33.33% of the respondents confirmed that they never received a real response from TAT.

Table 2 Present TAT E-mail Response Timeliness

TAT E-mail Response Timeliness	Within 2 hours	Within 12 hours	Within 24 hours	Within 48 hours	Within 1 week	More Than 1 week	Receive No Response
Tourists Respondents (42 participants)	0	0	0	7	14	7	14
Percentage	0%	0%	0%	16.66%	33.33%	16.66%	33.33%

From the result, 66.66% of the respondents confirmed that TAT responded to their e-mail complaints from within 48 hours to more than 1 week. This response timing is much longer than what Cooperstein et al (1998) reported in their works that the firms queried by Forrester Research claimed a 28 hours response time goal and the actual self-reported response time averaging 32 hours.

Moreover, the point that 33.33% of the respondents never received any response from TAT shows the inefficiency of the TAT e-mail complaint handling service and/or the error in e-mail routing process between the Webmaster and TAT that may cause the delay in the answering process and the loss of e-mail.

In addition, the factor that can cause the delay of the response timing might be the transferal process. This is because most e-mail complaints were not directly involved with TAT or over the ability of TAT to solve. Table 3 shows the complaint issues that the inbound tourists complained to TAT from September to December 2006.

Table 3 Issues of Inbound Tourists' Complaint from September to December 2006

Complaint Issues	Percentage
Cheating/Touting	16.67%
Travel Agency	14.29%
Hotel	11.9%
Pricing Policy/ Dual pricing	11.9%
Tuk Tuk Driver	9.6%
Travel Security	7.14%
Gem Scam/ Fake Jewelry	7.14%
TAT Service	7.14%
TAXI Driver	7.14%
Airport Custom	2.3%
Weather	2.3%
Plastic Surgery	2.3%

According to the interview given by the TAT officer, who responsible in handling the e-mail complaints, TAT had to transfer those e-mails to other responsible organizations such as Tourist Police, Thai Hotel Association (THA), Association of Thai Travel Agent (ATTA), and Bangkok Tourist Bureau. The response timing of the e-mails, which have to be transferred to other organizations, is unpredictable.

In summary, the 42.8% of the respondents was dissatisfied and very dissatisfied. The important factors that created the dissatisfaction were the existence, timeliness and the content of the e-mail complaint responses. This is because TAT did not answer the e-mail complaints or spent at least 1 week to respond to the e-mail complaints.

4.2.2 Expectation on E-mail Response

With regard to the response existence and timeliness, 71.42% of the inbound tourists expected to receive the e-mail response to their complaints from TAT. Only 28.57% did not expect to receive a response.

Table 4 Tourists' Opinion on TAT E-mail Response Existence

Tourist Opinion and Expectation on TAT E-mail Response	Tourist Respondents
Expect to receive TAT e-mail complaint response	71.42%
<u>Not</u> expect to receive TAT e-mail complaint response	28.57%

Table 4 shows that most of the Internet users who used e-mail as a complaining medium expected to receive the responses to their complaints. According to the fact that 83.33% of the respondents sent their e-mail complaint through "ASK GOVERNOR" in www.tourismthailand.org and info@tat.or.th, which is a non-public type source of online complaint, almost all of the respondents in this group showed their expectations in receiving the responses. This may assume that because this group of respondents could not view their own complaints in the website as those who complained in the Web board "Talk About Thailand". If TAT did not respond to their complaints, they would never know that their complaints reach TAT or not. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the tourists' expectation on e-mail complaint response from TAT is high because they do not want only the answer to their complaints but also want to assure that their complaint reach the responsible authority.

Figure 5 below shows different entry points of inbound tourists' e-mail complaints to TAT from September to December 2006. The 57% of the respondents complained via e-mail through TAT e-mail address: info@tat.or.th, the 25% of the respondents complained through "ASK GOVERNOR", and 17% complained through Web board "Talk About Thailand"

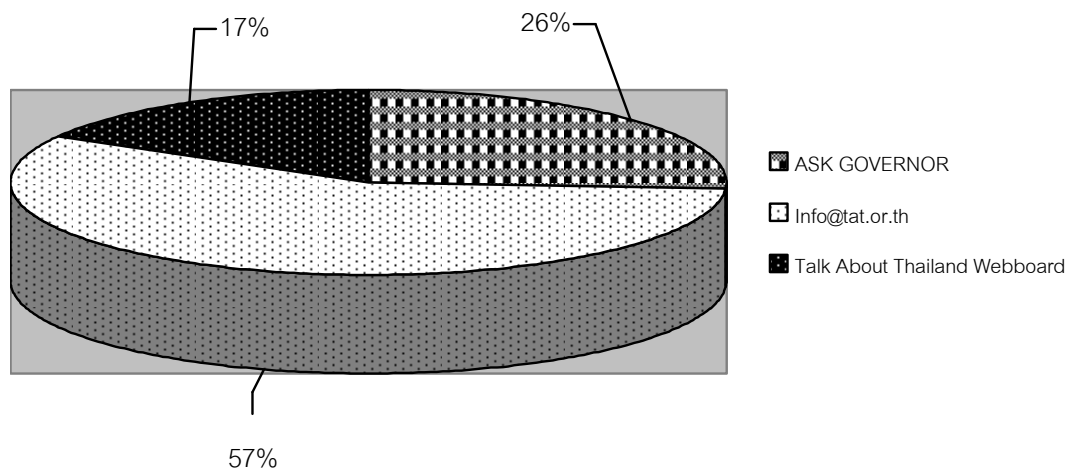


Figure 5 Entry Points of Respondent's E-mail Complaints to TAT from September to December 2006

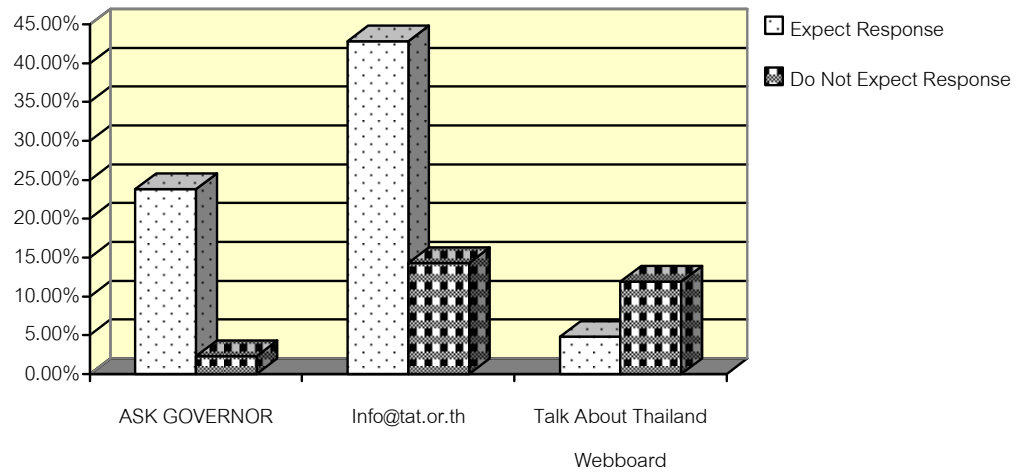


Figure 6 Tourists' Expectations in Receiving TAT Response Categorized by E-mail Entry Points

Figure 6 shows that the number of respondents who complained via e-mail through "ASK GOVERNOR" and info@tat.or.th expected to receive e-mail complaint responses more than those who complained through "Talk About Thailand" Web board. Therefore it is possible to assume that the type source of online complaint has an influence over the expectation of the complainer in terms of response existence.

With regard to the response timing, the respondents expected to receive the e-mail response in the range of the response timing from within 24 hours to within 1 week. 42.85% of the respondents expected TAT to respond to their e-mail complaints within 48 hours. However, up to 33.33% expected to receive TAT e-mail response within 24 hours and 23.8% within 1 week. The respondents' expectation on TAT e-mail response timing is shown in Figure 7.

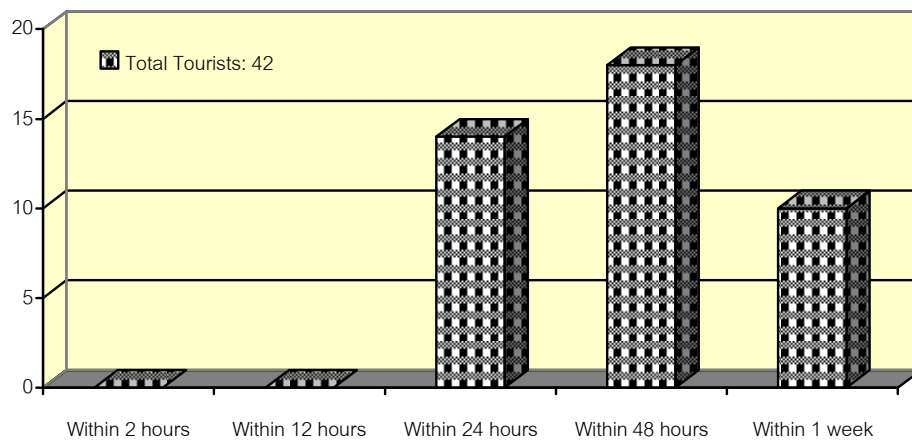


Figure 7 Tourists' Expectation on TAT E-mail Response Timeliness

The result from Figure 7 reveals that the current response timing that TAT provides does not serve the needs of the complainers because TAT responded to most of the complaints within 1 week, while most tourists expected to receive their responses within 48 hours. The reason that most respondents expected to receive a quick response might be because e-mail is a fast medium. Therefore, the tourists who chose to complain via a fast medium might probably want a fast response as well.

From the result, 76.19% of the respondents expected to receive their response from within 24 hours to within 48 hours. This can assume that the faster the complaint medium is, the faster service the organization has to provide, which supports the research of Strauss and Pesce (1998) about the e-mail responding speed that faster is better.

To sum up, regarding expectation on e-mail response, most respondents agreed that they expected to receive TAT response to their e-mail complaints. Moreover, the respondents felt that TAT should provide responses within 48 hours.

4.2.3. TAT Credibility as a Result of Response Existence and Timeliness

In the dimension of tourists' views on TAT credibility, due to the response existence, the result shows that 47.61% of the inbound tourists would rate the credibility of TAT "Low" if TAT does not answer their e-mail complaint. Moreover, up to 45.23% of the respondents rated "Not at all", which means that if TAT did not respond to their e-mail complaint, TAT would absolutely lose its credibility.

For TAT credibility as a result of response timeliness, the tourists were asked to rate the credibility of TAT if they received e-mail response to their complaints later than the timing they had expected. The result reveals that 50% of the tourists also rated "Low" for TAT credibility, 40.47% of the tourists rated "Medium" and only 9.52% of the tourists rated "Not at all".

Table 5 below demonstrates the percentage of the tourists' rating on TAT credibility as a result of e-mail response existence and timeliness.

Table 5 Tourists' Opinions on TAT Credibility due to E-mail Response Existence and Timeliness

Tourist Opinion	Not at all	Low	Medium	High	Very High
No Response	45.23%	47.61%	7.14%	0%	0%
Late Response	9.52%	50%	40.47%	0%	0%

To explain why the percentage of respondents who rate "Low" for TAT credibility is high if TAT does not answer their e-mail complaints or provides a late response, the researcher has to refer to the study of Strauss and Hill (2001) which concluded that speed had a strong impact

on perceptions of company concern and credibility. The longer it took for the company to respond, the lower the credibility of the companies. Therefore, the response speed reflects the organizations concern for their customers. If TAT provides a late response or does not respond to the tourists' complaints, the tourists will understand that they are ignored and TAT is an irresponsible organization, which will absolutely lessen the credibility of TAT.

In conclusion, the result shows that response existence and timeliness affect the respondents' views on the credibility of TAT as most of the respondents would rate "Low" for TAT credibility if they received no response or late response to their e-mail complaints.

4.2.4 Preference for E-mail Communication

Dealing with the last part of the questionnaire in aspect of tourist preference in e-mail Communication dimension, 100% of the inbound tourists, who chose to use e-mail as a complaining medium to complain to TAT, viewed that e-mail is a good way for TAT to communicate with the tourists and TAT should handle customer complaint by e-mail.

From this result, we can analyze why all of the respondents prefer to use e-mail as a complaining medium by looking at the respondents' personal data that 47.6% of the respondents aged from 18 to 34. This result is related to the statistics of the e-mail users all over the world in 2005 that people in the range of age 20 to 30 spend the longest time per day communicating via e-mail (NECTEC. 2005). Moreover, all the respondents are those who had complaint to TAT via e-mail. Therefore, it is common that all of the respondents agreed that e-mail is a good medium in communicating with TAT.

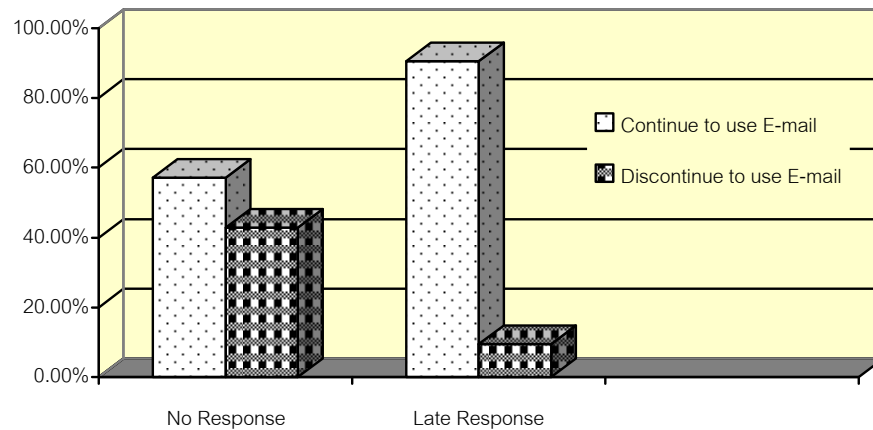


Figure 8 Tourists' Preference in Using E-mail as a Complaining Medium as a Result of Receiving No Response and Late Response

Figure 8 shows that more than 55% of the tourists persisted to continue using e-mail as a complaint medium, even though they would not receive any e-mail reply from TAT. Moreover, up to 90.47% persisted to complain via E-mail with TAT even though they would receive the response later than the expected timing.

Most tourists persisted to continue using e-mail as a complaining medium even though they would neither receive any e-mail response from TAT nor receive a late response might be because most of the respondents are familiar with using e-mail in their daily lives, and they might also ever sent their e-mails to other organizations or to their friends which sometimes they received an answer and sometimes did not. Therefore, not receiving the e-mail response or receiving a late response did not affect their preference in using e-mail as a complaining medium.

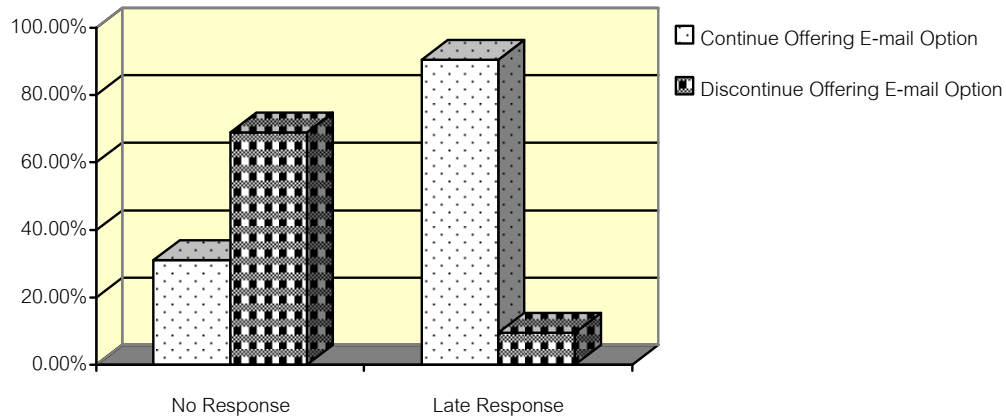


Figure 9 Tourists' Views on TAT E-mail Option for the Internet Users Due to the Ability to Response E-mail Complaint

Figure 9 demonstrates that 69.04% of the respondents felt that TAT should discontinue offering e-mail option for the Internet users if TAT cannot respond the e-mail complaint.

However, up to 90.47% of the tourists felt that TAT should continue offering e-mail option for the Internet users although TAT cannot provide e-mail complaint response in time that they expected.

The finding reveals that up to 69.04% of the respondents viewed that TAT should discontinue offering e-mail option for the Internet users if TAT cannot respond to the e-mail complaint. This result is similar to Gamble, Stone and Woodcock (1999) research that whenever an organization chooses to integrate new innovation into its operation, it must ensure that the innovation is qualified and of high quality for the function, especially if this innovation is used for customer services.

The result of the study is also similar to the study of Strauss and Hill (2001) which stated in their implication of the study that a firm should not offer an e-mail option for the Internet users if that firm cannot respond to incoming e-mail complaint. Providing inefficient complaint handling management can create a negative attitude towards the organization, and conversely, diminish customer loyalty.

Regarding the preference for e-mail communication, all of the respondents viewed e-mail as a good way for TAT to communicate with tourists and TAT should handle customer complaint by e-mail. Moreover, most of the respondents persisted to continue using e-mail as a complaining medium even though they would neither receive response nor late responses. In addition, the respondents viewed that TAT can continue offering e-mail option for the Internet user although TAT cannot provide the responses in time that the tourists expected. However, up to 69% of the respondents suggested that TAT should discontinue offering e-mail option if TAT cannot respond to e-mail complaints.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the main findings of the study with reference to the research questions and considers the limitations and recommendation of the study.

5.1 Summary of Findings

With regard to the first question about the satisfaction of the tourists with the TAT e-mail handling service, the results show that most of the inbound tourists were dissatisfied with the current TAT e-mail complaint handling service as the number of the dissatisfied tourists (42.8%) is more than the number of the satisfied tourists (16.6%). The main factors that affect the tourists' dissatisfaction are response existence (not receiving the response), response timing (receiving a late response), and the content of the response (unable to fulfill the queries). The results indicate that TAT usually spent up to 1 week in responding e-mail complaints. This may assume that because most of the complaints did not involve directly to TAT. The transferring of the e-mail complaints caused a delay in response timing as well as a dissatisfying content.

In addition, the result reveals that more than 33% of the complainers were ignored. This result contradicts to the interview result with TAT officer at Call Center, as he confirmed that TAT will respond to all the e-mail complaints. However, the entry points of e-mail may cause the loss

of e-mail. The Webmaster may overlook some e-mail complaints or the e-mail might be lost in the process of e-mail routing.

Due to the question about tourists' expectation on TAT e-mail response in terms of the response existence and timeliness, 71.42% of the respondents expected to receive the e-mail response. This indicates that the source type of online complaint affects directly on users' expectation on the response existence. Moreover, the result that 42.85% of the respondents expected TAT to respond to their complaints within 48 hours points out that type of medium also affects the complainers' expectation on the timing of the response. The faster the complaining medium is, the lesser patience the complainers have in waiting for the e-mail reply.

Regarding TAT credibility as a result of response existence and timeliness, most respondents agreed that the credibility of TAT would reduce if TAT does not respond to the tourists' e-mail complaints, or provide them late responses. This is because the tourists might feel that they were ignored, or that TAT is inefficient in providing services.

With regard to the tourist preference in e-mail communication, 100% of the respondents agreed that e-mail is a good way for TAT to communicate with the tourists and TAT should handle customer complaint by e-mail. This might be because most participants, aged from 18 to 34 years old, has been spending the longest time per day communicating via e-mail (NECTEC. 2005). Therefore, e-mail communication is commonly used by people in this range of age as it is the fastest medium for written communication in this era.

The result reveals that most of the respondents persisted to continue using e-mail as a complaining medium, even though they would not receive any response from TAT or receive a late response. This explicates the preference of the Internet user towards e-mail communication. However, the result shows that the respondents wished TAT to discontinue offering e-mail option for the Internet users if TAT cannot provide e-mail responses. The result implies that if TAT is incompetent in handling complaints via e-mail, it is better for TAT to withhold e-mail option. This is to lessen the potential in creating tourists' dissatisfaction and to maintain credibility of TAT.

5.2 Limitations of the study

As the subjects of this study were limited to only the inbound tourists who had experienced in using e-mail to complain to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) from September to December 2006, there were 42 tourists who cooperated in this study. The number of participants may be too small to be used as a standard in evaluating the efficiency of the e-mail handling management of TAT.

Furthermore, during collecting data, more than 5% of the e-mail complaints' addresses was not recorded or was recorded incorrectly by TAT officers and the Web Master. When the researcher sent the questionnaire to these addresses, the e-mail could not reach the receivers. Some of the complainers' e-mail addresses were kept by the Web Master. This delayed the

process of collecting subjects of the study because it took time for the Web Master to send complainers' details to TAT.

5.3 Managerial Recommendations

It is beneficial for TAT to act in accordance with the following recommendations in order to improve the e-mail complaint handling management:

- 5.3.1. With regard to e-mail complaint response existence and timeliness, TAT should consider responding to all the inbound tourist complaints as this group of tourists expects to receive TAT response. Moreover, TAT should respond all the tourist e-mail complaints within 48 hours or at least not later than 1 week. Providing responses within this period of time can express the concern and responsibility of TAT to its tourists.
- 5.3.2. Regarding type source of online complaint, TAT should respond all the complaints which enter through non-public type: "ASK GOVERNOR" in www.tourismthailand.org and info@tat.or.th. If TAT cannot provide an appropriate answer within 48 hours, TAT should consider sending a referral e-mail to inform its action and also inform the timing that the complainers will receive the real responses. For the complaints which enter through "Talk About Thailand" Web board, TAT may choose to respond to some of the complaints.

However, it is vital to categorize the complaints and consider which complaints need to be responded.

- 5.3.3. With respect to e-mail complaint handling management, TAT can solve problems about response timing by posting the e-mail addresses of other organizations which involved in tourism business such as the e-mail address of Tourist Police, Thai Hotel Association (THA), Association of Thai travel Agent (ATTA), and Bangkok Tourist Bureau in TAT Web site. In addition, TAT should inform the tourists to send their complaints directly to these organizations. Sending a direct e-mail to the responsible organizations benefits the tourists in the way that it heightens the possibility in receiving the e-mail responses and with satisfying answer. Moreover, for TAT, it can reduce time spent in responding e-mail complaints as TAT does not have to waste time categorizing and transferring e-mails to other organizations.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies

The present study explored the inbound tourists' views on TAT e-mail complaint handling management by examining tourists' satisfaction on current TAT e-mail complaint response. It mainly observed the influence of e-mail existence and timeliness on tourists' satisfaction and expectation on TAT response, perception of TAT credibility and preference on

e-mail communication. For further studies, it is advantageous to follow the following recommendations.

- 5.4.1. There should be further studies on the domestic tourists' views on TAT e-mail complaint handling management. As TAT is stimulating the movement of Thai people to travel within the country by providing official Website for domestic tourists (www.tat.or.th), it is vital to observe TAT e-mail handling service whether TAT can provide an efficient service to serve the domestic tourists' needs.
- 5.4.2. To improve the quality of e-mail handling service, further studies should examine the TAT response content in terms of response characteristics: Referral, Personalization, Apology, Specificity, Explanation, Reinforcement, Future writing encouragement, Signature and Customer redress. Moreover, it would be beneficial to investigate tourists' satisfaction on the quality of the response content.
- 5.4.3. Regarding the efficiency in handling e-mail complaint of TAT, further studies should explore the process of e-mail complaint handling in detail. The system of transferring e-mail and data recording must be observed in order to solve the problem of response timing and the loss of e-mail.
- 5.4.4. To enhance tourism industry of Thailand, further studies should explore tourists' satisfactions in various aspects such as the accommodation, the transportation, the tourist attractions, as well as the quality of information service of TAT.

A personal depth interview should be done with the inbound tourists, especially those who faced with difficulties, in order to understand their views and suggestions that may useful for tourism businesses in improving their services.

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APPENDIX

Appendix: Questionnaire

An Exploratory Study of Tourists' Views on TAT

E-mail Complaint Handling Management

This questionnaire is designed to explore tourists' satisfaction on TAT e-mail complaint handling service and tourists' view on the existence and timeliness of the e-mail complaint responses. Your cooperation in completing this questionnaire would be appreciated.

After you complete the questionnaire, please click "Save" and send it back to the researcher's e-mail address at kritythewitch@hotmail.com.

Part A: Personal Data

Directions: Please mark on the answer based on your actual information.

1. Gender Male Female
2. Age
- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 35-44 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 45-54 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55-64 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65-over |
3. Country of Citizenship
- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asia | <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong | <input type="checkbox"/> Korea | <input type="checkbox"/> Japan |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Taiwan | <input type="checkbox"/> Singapore | <input type="checkbox"/> China |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Malaysia | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Europe | <input type="checkbox"/> France | <input type="checkbox"/> Germany | <input type="checkbox"/> Italy |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> United Kingdom | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Americas | <input type="checkbox"/> U.S.A. | <input type="checkbox"/> Canada | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others | | | |
4. Reason for traveling to Thailand
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business | <input type="checkbox"/> Conference/Seminar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holiday | <input type="checkbox"/> Others |

5. Length of stay

Less than 5 days

5-10 days

11-15 days

More than 15 days

Part B: Tourist Opinion and Expectation

Directions: Please mark on the answer based on your actual information and your view.

TAT E-mail Complaint Handling Service

1. Regarding your experience in complaining via E-mail to Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), how satisfied are you with the response from TAT?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very Satisfied	
<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfied	Please do no. 2.1
<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	
<input type="checkbox"/> Dissatisfied	
<input type="checkbox"/> Very dissatisfied	Please do no. 2.2

2.1. Which of the following factors affect your satisfaction in complaining via E-mail with TAT?

(You can choose more than one answer)

- Response Existence (receive the response)
- Response Timing (receive a quick response)
- Content of the Response (can fulfill your queries)
- Others please specify:

2.2. Which of the following factors affect your dissatisfaction in complaining via E-mail with TAT?

(You can choose more than one answer)

- Response Existence (not receive the response)
- Response Timing (receive a late response)
- Content of the Response (cannot fulfill your queries)
- Others please specify:

3. What was the timing that TAT had a real responded, excluding a thank you letter, to your e-mail complaint?

Within 2 hours

Within 12 hours

Within 24 hours

Within 48 hours

Within 1 week

More than 1 week

Expectation on E-mail Response

4. Do you expect to receive an E-mail response from TAT? Yes No

5. How long do you expect TAT to respond to your E-mail complaint?

- Within 2 hours Within 12 hours Within 24 hours
 Within 48 hours Within 1 week
 Others please specify:

TAT Credibility as a result of Response existence and timeliness

7. If you receive **no** response from TAT, how will you rate the credibility of TAT?

- Not at all Low Medium High Very high

8. If you receive the response **later than** you expected, how will you rate the credibility of TAT?

- Not at all Low Medium High Very high

Preference on E-mail Communication

9. Do you think that E-mail is a good way for

TAT to communicate with the tourists?

- Yes No

10. Do you think that TAT should handle

customer complaint by E-mail?

- Yes No

11. Will you still use E-mail as a medium in complaining

if you receive **no** E-mail response from TAT?

- Yes No

12. Will you still use E-mail as a medium in complaining

if you receive E-mail response from TAT

later than you expected,?

- Yes No

13. Do you think TAT should continue offering E-mail

option for Internet users, if TAT **does not respond**

your E-mail complaint?

- Yes No

14. Do you think TAT should continue offering E-mail

option for Internet users, if TAT **cannot respond**

the E-mail complaint **in the time that you expected**?

- Yes No

Thank you very much for your cooperation

VITAE

VITAE

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