

Examining the Combined Effect of E-CRM and Sensory Marketing, on Customer Satisfaction and Hotel Image in Thailand: The Moderating Role of Anxiety

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The postmodern era of business is basically a product of technology and particularly e-technology. Technology in general, and the internet and web, have changed traditional marketing and management practices. Service is an emerging yet least explored area of CRM. Meanwhile, the emergence of a concept such as e-CRM as brought a revolution in CRM research. Therefore, examining the link between hotel image and e-CRM is the objective of this study. In addition to that, the two-aspect sensory marketing known as ‘touch and taste’ are also examined. Satisfaction is examined as a mediator among e-CRM, touch, taste and hotel image. Finally, following the theoretical justification, we trace the moderating role of anxiety in the relationship between e-CRM and customer satisfaction. The data is collected from visitors to the Thai hotel industry. It transpired that the response rate was 54 percent, which is higher than the threshold level. SEM-PLS is one of the most robust statistical techniques for measuring structural relationships between and among variables. It is used to analyse the data. The study findings support the proposed or hypothesized relationships. The e-CRM appears as a significant determinant of a hotel’s image as well as customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction and anxiety appeared in significant mediating and moderating roles.

Key words: *E-CRM, Touch, Taste, hotel image, Thailand.*

Introduction

Competition within the hotel industry is mounting regularly. Marketers and decision-makers of the hotel industry follow a number of strategies by which they can please customers. They

are engaging in customer relationship management (CRM) activities and creating environments which please customers (Mohammed & bin Rashid, 2012; Jermsittiparsert, Sutdewan, & Sriyakul, 2018). Therefore, these activities play a vital role in satisfying customers. Moreover, the duration of visit and revisit intention of the hotel is increased as well. Hotels have used sensory activities and CRM strategies by which they can positively impact customer satisfaction (CS) and hotel image too. This is the era of competition in which traditional marketing is not relevant. It is the responsibility of the organizations to find to find different ways by which customer experience can be enhanced and the long-lasting relationship with customers can be developed. As the hotel Industry in Thailand is very competitive, it is very important for them to devise a mechanism to enhance customer retention (Udunuwara, 2015).

Presently customers want to enjoy the experience of a hotel and keep it memorable. Hotels in Thailand are facing the problem of customer retention due to intense competition. Competition is high, forcing customers to choose their hotel. Hotels try to meet customer needs. Competitive hotels try various ways to fulfil these needs. One way is to improve relationship management and hit customers' senses. These strategies can help organizations enhance their customer retention (Randhir, Latasha, Tooraiven, & Monishan, 2016).

It is critical for service sector organizations to provide best quality, to improve their performance. The company with good services is perceived well in the minds of customers. Scholars have defined perception as the image in the mind of customers, based on experience. Scholars have mentioned image as the symbol perceived in the customers' mind. There should be a positive image regarding the brand (Iqbal, Murni, & Sulistyowati, 2018).

Organizational relationships are profound, as complemented by technology and internet in the past few years. Scholars have considered e-services as an organizational visa at the global level. They are the internet-based content that drive the customer (Saengchai & Jermsittiparsert, 2019). Moreover, the customer is integrated, in relation to the support process of the organization and technology whose goal is to strengthen the customer relationship (Taylor & Hunter, 2002). Therefore, e-services are the emerging mechanism that can develop relationships with customers. Organizations can implement e-services through e-CRM software. Scholars mention that e-CRM plays a critical role in developing CS which is important in altering customer the intentions and attitudes. With the help of e-services, organizational decision-makers can make decisions in time which may positively impact organizational profitability. Moreover, organizations in such e-CRM strategies can perform better and compete in competitive environments (De Ruyter, Wetzels, & Kleijnen, 2001).

Creating a positive perception in the minds of customers impacts product usage. A focus on touch cues is critical for hotel management, as customers who come to stay in the hotel can



easily evaluate services by touch cues (Shabgou & Daryani, 2014). For several products and services, the 'touch' element plays a critical role in creating memorable experience regarding the product or service (Fenko, Schifferstein, & Hekkert, 2010; Pramudya & Seo, 2019).

Researchers mention that in relationship marketing, touch cues play a very important role. By touching the product, the customer can re-enforce what they see. The initial information gathered through visuals of the product is reinforced through touching it. Therefore, touch cues are critical in creating perception and emotions in customers (Pramudya & Seo, 2019).

Food in hotels plays a critical role in creating perception and emotions, through experience. Scholars lumped the attributes of food under one variable in terms of its quality, one that has a tendency to impact satisfaction among customers and create positive perceptions (Choi & Chu, 2001). The basic requirement of the hotel's customer is the food. Therefore, in dining experiences, taste is the basic attribute of the food. As customers understand its importance, a number of studies have been conducted regarding the impact of taste on different behavioural outcomes for customers (Rozekhi, Hussin, Siddiqe, Rashid, & Salmi, 2016).

Taste not only impacts the intake of the food but also influences the flavour, temperature, smell and appearance. Whenever a customer recalls the taste experience, all other sensory stimuli also come into play. The sensation of food is very strongly created by its taste. There are five types of the food taste; umami, bitter, salty, sour and sweet. When the customer eats the food, the experience is created. Customers at hotels cannot evaluate the food until it is eaten. Taste is one of the important factors that evaluate the product (Rozekhi et al., 2016). Scholars have expressed customer satisfaction as the perception, as well as expectation, regarding the services of the service provider. CS is very important because if the customer is satisfied, customers' actual experience is meeting their expectations (Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

Therefore, examining the role of e-CRM, touch and taste cues on CS and hotel image based in Thailand, is the main objective of the study. Moreover, this study will examine the moderating role of anxiety on the relationship between e-CRM and CS.

Literature review

Hotel Image

Image has been researched in a number of studies. Scholars have defined it as the sum of impressions, ideas and beliefs regarding a hotel. Researchers also used the hotel impression to control the attitude of guests. Scholars have added impression to the definition of image, but this is still a short-term orientation of the image (Countryman & Jang, 2006). The impression regarding the hotel is based upon its environment which makes the image in the

mind of customers, and is based on the experience of the customer in the hotel. The impact of atmospherics on hotel guests' impressions have also been studied, and found to play a critical role in developing hotel image. The overall approach of hotel image is also supported by the authors in terms of overall perception of a service or a product (Jani & Han, 2014).

Customer Satisfaction (CS)

Scholars mentioned that customer satisfaction is the feeling regarding disappointment and happiness, the outcome of comparing the hotel's performance with the customer's own expectation (Murni, No, & Kembangan, 2014). Further, CS is the customer feeling regarding the comparison, in terms of one's feeling of actual and expected performance. Overall, customer expectation is estimated when he or she consumes the product. The long-term retention of customers is vital, so organizations should focus on CS (Iqbal et al., 2018).

Taste Cues

Taste can be salty, sour, bitter and sweet. All these tastes are related to the tongue, the basic sense organ. The taste sense is very powerful despite it being very small. Academically, taste has been said to be dependent upon external environmental features and physical attributes, including nutritional and product information, and brand names. Brand names have also been found to affect perception as to taste. Customer retention in hotels is mainly dependent upon the taste of the food provided there. Regular exposure of a customer to taste stimuli will alter behavioural as well as psychological responses (Satti, Babar, & Ahmad, 2019).

Touch Cues

Scholars have referred touch cues as the haptic; the smoothness and temperature of the physical environment. Touch or the haptic is defined as the collective group of structures which develop perception regarding the stimuli. Touch cues include vibration, puncture, thermal properties, texture and pressure perceived through the skin where the receptors are present (Gunther & O'Modhrain, 2003).

Touch is one of the important marketing cues which plays a critical role in shaping customer mood, developing perceptions and eventually impacting consumer behaviour and decision-making as to purchases (Pramudya & Seo, 2019).

E-CRM

Scholars defined e-CRM in terms of the set of marketing activities that relate e-forums, emails, and the internet, to perception. Building a long-term relationship between the

organization and customer is the central idea of e-CRM. Moreover, e-CRM also uses technology like voice response systems, contact centres, customer calls and telephones (Nikou, Selamat, Yusoff, & Khiabani, 2016).

Taste Cues; Relationships with Customer Satisfaction and Hotel Image

Of the various experiences of hotels and restaurants, food is one of the most important. It consists of all of the attributes related to food, including its quality. Scholars have found that its attributes play a critical role in developing perception and satisfaction. On the other hand, they also report that one customer expectation from hotels is to fulfil the need for food (Kivela, Inbakaran, & Reece, 2000). A number of customers visit hotels and restaurants because they are habituated to certain tastes. In the past, a number of studies examined the impact of food attributes on customer behaviour and perception. Taste is one of the key attributes of food. Taste has been found by scholars to play a significant role in shaping perception and satisfaction. It is therefore important for restaurants to provide a wide range of food, according to the customer's cultural taste the customer. Once the customer gets a good taste, it will shape the perception which is the image of the restaurant. The customer will also be satisfied with the quality of services given (Rozekhi et al., 2016).

H1: Taste cues and CS are significantly related to each other.

In the current era of immense competition, it is critical for marketers to work on the emotions as well as perceptions of customers. As senses are the critical part of relationships with customers, it is very important that they understand that taste in the food industry plays a critical role in building image in the minds of customers. Hussain (2018) in his study found that taste is one of the most important cues that shape customer perception and the restaurant's image. Therefore, it is important for researchers to focus on the sensual experience, to build the long-term relationship and shape a positive image. This image is the perception developed in the customer's mind. Thus, it has been hypothesized that

H2: Taste cues and hotel image are significantly related to each other.

Touch Cues; Relationship with CS and Hotel Image

In the past, marketing research has neglected the importance of touch. In fact, touch is one of the most important human sense organs. One can contact the body through the skin. The temperature and the weight of the product plays an important role in shaping the customer experience. In hotels, it is important for customers to be provided with soft furnishings, to give the customer a good experience of touch. Scholars recognized that experience of the customer in the form of touch is multifaceted, and that it involves emotional as well as

cognitive responses. There is a positive impact on satisfaction due to touch experience (Dalla Pozza, 2014). In the hotel industry, furniture fabric is very important in providing a good experience. If the spoons and forks in the hotels are light-weight, the thickness of the glass is excellent, and chairs are excellent and comfortable, it will shape and improve the customer's perception of the hotel (Turley & Milliman, 2000).

H3: Touch cues and CS are significantly related to each other.

A sense of touch has been found in studies to be very important in the hotel industry, in building the customer relationship. Touch is the environment and ambience which can be felt by the customer (Krishna, 2011). In hotels, seating, tables, cutlery, silverware and tableware and their arrangement plays an important role in shaping the perception in the mind of the customer. To build perception regarding business, touch is very important. The impact of touch stimuli has been empirically found to have a significant relationship with brand image (Hussain, 2018). Thus, it is hypothesized

H4: Touch cue and hotel image are significantly related to each other.

E-CRM; Relationship with CS and Hotel Image

In this era of intense competition, organizations realize that they need to redesign CRM so they can satisfy the customer needs. As a result a relationship of mutuality is created. The internet provides a new platform to the CRM function. Organizations can perform CRM through websites. This concept is known as e-CRM. It plays a critical role in shaping CS and developing and gaining competitive advantage. Once the customer is satisfied, a long-term relationship is developed which is very beneficial for the organization. Through e-CRM, customers can easily place the orders, make product selections and give payment. So, CS is significantly impacted by e-CRM (Nikou, Selamat, Yusoff, et al., 2016).

H5: E-CRM and CS are significantly related to each other.

The design and implementation of e-CRM is very important for hotels, in a way which is customer friendly so they can get the maximum positive result. Organizations must not consider CRM as the tool of success. It should be implemented as part of organizational culture, and customers should be the important part of it. If customers remain regularly in contact with an organization, it will create positive associations for the brand (Nikou, Selamat, Harihodin, et al., 2016). As a result, competitive advantage is gained, and a positive image of the brand is enhanced. If organizations remain in touch with their customers online, it will also strengthen the image of the business. Therefore, the image of the organization is

positively impacted by e-CRM. Thus, positive brand image is enhanced as a result of e-CRM (Kejmar & Stefansson, 2017).

H6: E-CRM and hotel image are significantly related to each other.

Anxiety: Its Role as Moderator

Past literature has stressed the need to examine how anxiety impacts customers, and hence CS. This relationship was examined in the hotel industry, a service industry. That was because such anxiety was not understood in the context of the service relationship. Customer anxiety is reported to impact negatively CS. Therefore, customers' anxiety has a negative impact on their satisfaction (Pham, Nguyen, & Luse, 2018).

Scholars have defined anxiety as the individual's fear of using a system. It is an emotional response an individual poses while using a system. This system is different from a negative attitude. In the context of e-CRM, customer anxiety moderates the relationship of satisfaction and hotel image. Scholar have confirmed a link between customer satisfaction and e-CRM. But customer fear of using a web-based portal, will negatively impact the customer relationship (Khan & Khawaja, 2013).

H7: Anxiety moderates the relationship of E-CRM and CS.

Satisfaction and Image Relationship

Scholars have tried to relate CS and organizational image. They have found the CS is the antecedent of image. It has been recognized that CS can influence corporate image. Brand image is impacted because competition, as well as a superior product, is created by affordable prices. As a result, companies are enabled to survive in tough economic conditions (Hosseini & Nahad, 2012). The indirect relationship between image and satisfaction has been investigated. Scholars reported that once customers are satisfied, they will remain loyal to the organization because strong brand image is created. Another study reported strong relationships between these variables in the service sector. Sondoh, Omar, Wahid, Ismail, and Harun (2007) empirically examined the impact of satisfaction on brand image. They found that CS has a significant impact on the image of the hospitality industry (Kariuki, 2015).

H8: CS and hotel image are significantly related to each other.

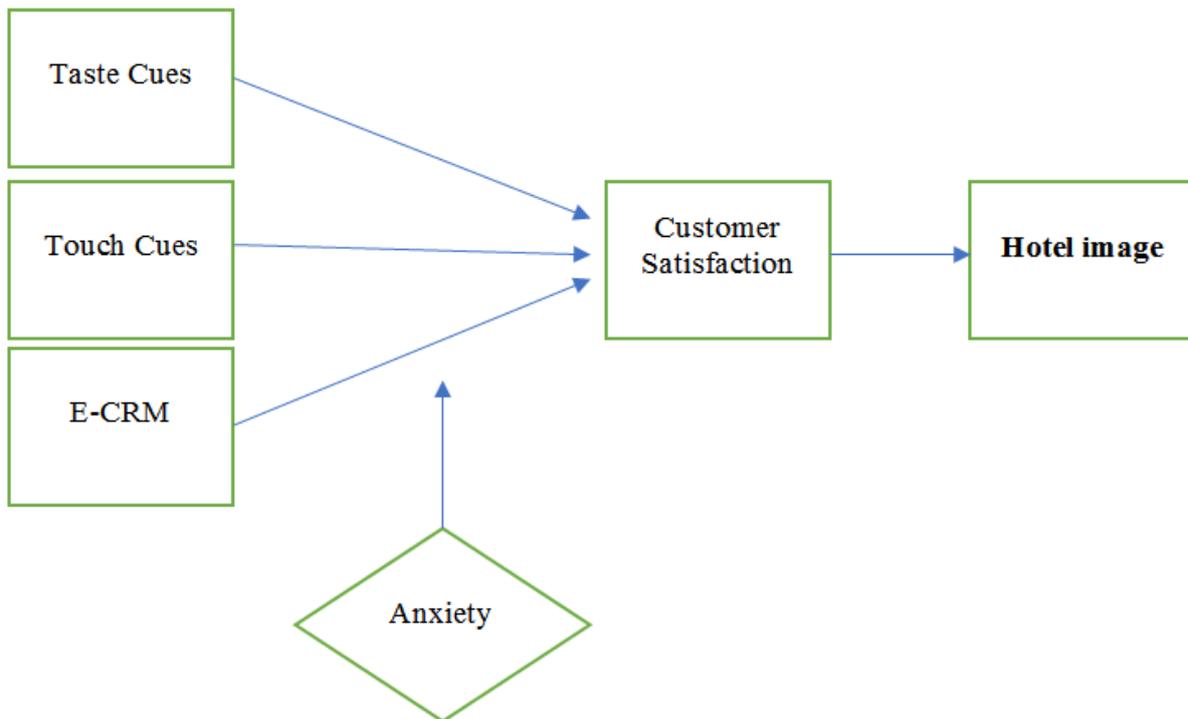
From the above argument, it is evident that there exist significant relationship between CS and image. Therefore, CS mediates the relationship of e-CRM, Touch Cues and Taste cues with Hotel Image. Therefore, it is hypothesized that

H9: CS mediates the relationship between taste cues and hotel image.

H10: CS mediates the relationship between touch cues and hotel image.

H11: CS mediates the relationship between e-CRM and hotel image.

Conceptual Framework



Methodology

A quantitative study was used. A survey-based methodology was employed to achieve the research objectives of. The quantitative research design comprehensively analyses large sample sizes and helps to generalize the obtained responses. In addition, it assists in calculating the summarized behavioural responses. Therefore, a questionnaire was adapted from previous researches as a statistical instrument, with the purpose of quantifying participants' opinions and responses regarding the study issues. The items regarding hotel image are adopted from (Jani & Han, 2014), while, customer satisfaction and anxiety were taken from past studies of (Satti et al., 2019) and (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008) respectively. For independent variables of e-CRM, items were taken from (Sivaraks, Krairit, & Tang, 2011), and both touch cues and taste cue items were adapted from (Satti et al., 2019).

Generally, a research employs a questionnaire to understand the existing linkage between research variables such as, independent, dependent and mediating variables. Thus, based on the study objectives, hypotheses, and problem of this research, a questionnaire was developed for assessing the significance of those factors which may be responsible for regulating

employee performance in Indonesia's manufacturing firms. A five-point Likert scale was adopted for operationalizing variables and the corresponding constructs. The collected responses were then loaded into SPSS, Excel and Smart-PLS. Afterwards, the study adopted a Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) technique for data analysis. According to Joseph F Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, and Thiele (2017), PLS analysis comprises two sub-models, involving inner model estimation in the first stage, and outer model estimation in the second stage. The response rate of the current study is 63 percent.

Analysis

Several studies have advocated the use of PLS-SEM, a second-generation multivariate data analysis method. It is considered a robust approach since it incorporates all the research models in the equational form, and simultaneously provides results by exhibiting all indirect (intervening) and direct relationships existing among the constructs. In the first step, validity and reliability are assessed for each model construct.

For testing proposed hypotheses, it is necessary to assess a structural model. The structural model evaluation involves five steps, namely 1) checking collinearity issues; 2) assessing path coefficient's significance; 3) observing R^2 values; 4) computing f^2 effect size; and 5) observing Q^2 value for predictive relevance, followed by the determination of q^2 effect size. Joe F Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011) mentioned the reason for preferring PLS-SEM, i.e. it can integrate multiple equations and simultaneously determine multiple structural relationships, as compared to multiple regression analysis.

In prior researches, several authors have observed the non-response bias phenomena. It arises for multiple reasons. These may occur due to lack of cooperation or no interest by the respondents, questionnaires may involve some particularly sensitive questions, reluctance because of fear of top management, failure to target a desirable audience, respondents' unwillingness to provide information, or their having limited time to complete the survey. Thus, to avoiding non-response bias, an appropriate selection of the required respondents must be ensured.

Figure 1. Outer Model

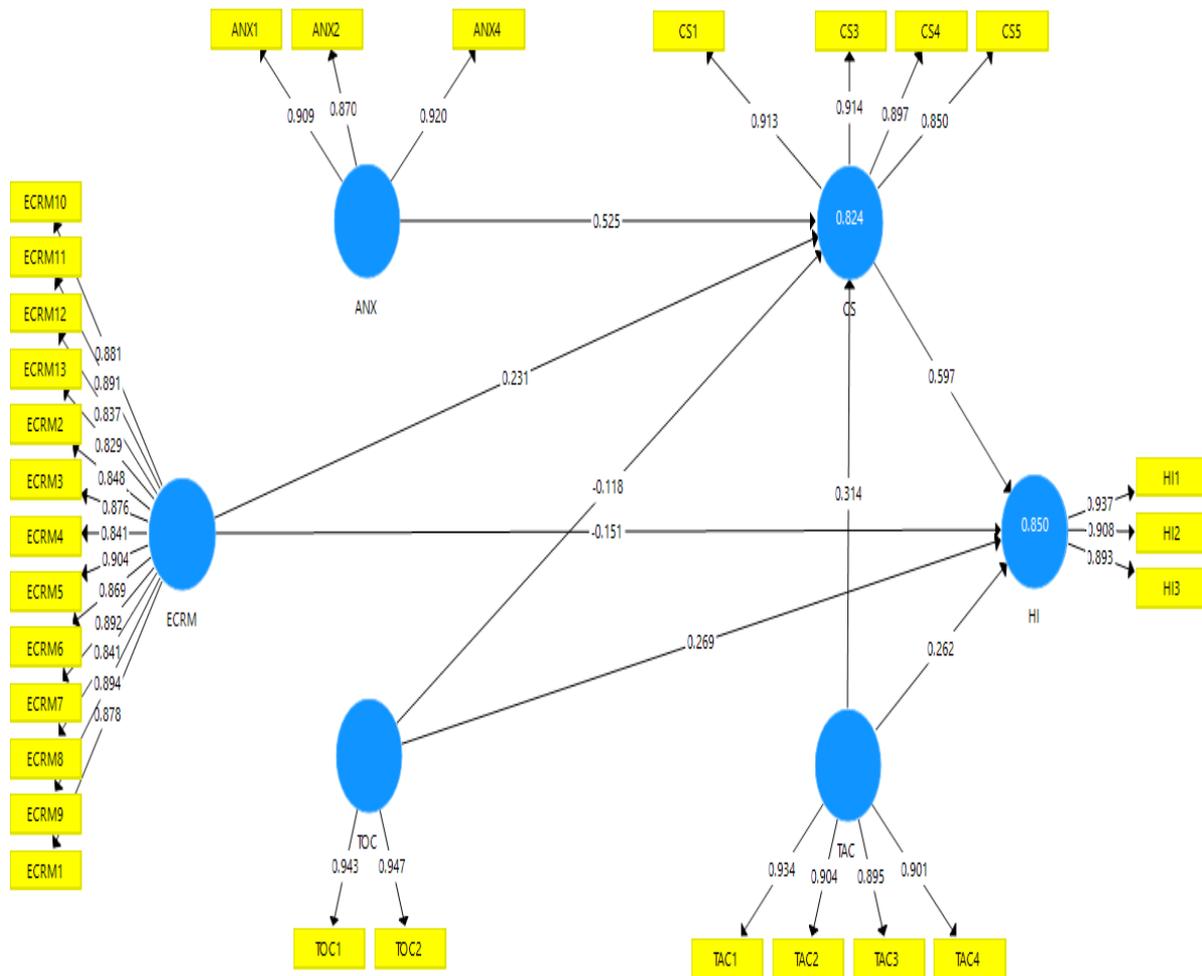


Table 1

	ANX	CS	ECRM	HI	TAC	TOC
ANX1	0.909					
ANX2	0.870					
ANX4	0.920					
CS1		0.913				
CS3		0.914				
CS4		0.897				
CS5		0.850				
ECRM10			0.881			
ECRM11			0.891			
ECRM12			0.837			
ECRM13			0.829			
ECRM2			0.848			
ECRM3			0.876			
ECRM4			0.841			
ECRM5			0.904			
ECRM6			0.869			
ECRM7			0.892			
ECRM8			0.841			
ECRM9			0.894			
HI1				0.937		
HI2				0.908		
HI3				0.893		
TAC1					0.934	
TAC2					0.904	
TAC3					0.895	
TAC4					0.901	
TOC1						0.943
TOC2						0.947
ECRM1			0.878			

Internal consistency, convergent validity, reliability, and discriminant validity are a few key measures which must be considered for a measurement model's evaluation (Joe F Hair Jr, Matthews, Matthews, & Sarstedt, 2017). In order to determine adequate convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) and each indicators' outer loadings were observed. The preferable values for outer-loadings are greater or equal to 0.70 whereas, greater and equal to 0.50 is the minimum acceptable value for outer-loadings, meanwhile, the value for AVE and composite reliability must be greater than 0.50 and 0.70, respectively (Joseph F Hair, Black,

Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). In PLS-SEM, to obtain second-constructs, the repeated indicator approach is suggested (Joe F Hair Jr et al., 2017). The results indicate that sufficient convergent validity is achieved, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	(AVE)
ANX	0.883	0.887	0.927	0.810
CS	0.916	0.920	0.941	0.799
ECRM	0.973	0.973	0.975	0.754
HI	0.900	0.902	0.938	0.834
TAC	0.929	0.930	0.950	0.825
TOC	0.880	0.881	0.944	0.893

The second criteria are the discriminant validity, which is an important measure for analyzing the measurement model. Several methods are used for measuring discriminant validity, however, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion is the most popular and recommended measure. In this criterion, the correlations with the latent variables are compared with the AVE square roots, where the latter are expected to exhibit higher values from the highest correlations for any other latent construct. However, in view of F. Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Hopkins, and G. Kuppelwieser (2014), it is a conservative method for assessing discriminant validity. The results obtained following the Fornell-Larcker criterion are given in Table 3, indicating that adequate discriminant validity is achieved.

Table 3: Validity Matrix

	ANX	CS	ECRM	HI	TAC	TOC
ANX	0.900					
CS	0.889	0.894				
ECRM	0.792	0.706	0.868			
HI	0.700	0.799	0.791	0.913		
TAC	0.811	0.871	0.789	0.862	0.908	
TOC	0.702	0.771	0.793	0.714	0.784	0.945

Subsequent to checking the instrument's reliability and validity, the structural relationships among model variables were estimated. In contrast to other statistical techniques, the structural or inner model in PLS-SEM explores both indirect and direct impacts of model constructs. Below is the structural model for this study. A bootstrapping procedure is the one which was adopted for determining the significance of path coefficients; for this procedure a sample size of 331 and bootstrap samples of 5000 were used (F. Hair Jr et al., 2014). According to F. Hair Jr et al. (2014), the structural model exhibits the hypothesized cause and effect relationships. In view of Joe F Hair Jr et al. (2017) and FERNANDES (2012) the

primary criteria for the structural model evaluation is the significance of path coefficients and R^2 value, whereas, f^2 and q^2 effect sizes, and predictive relevance provide additional quality-related insights about the PLS path estimators, and the mediators (if any). Table 4, Table 5 and Figure 2 represent the structural model estimates involved in this research.

Figure 2. Structural Model

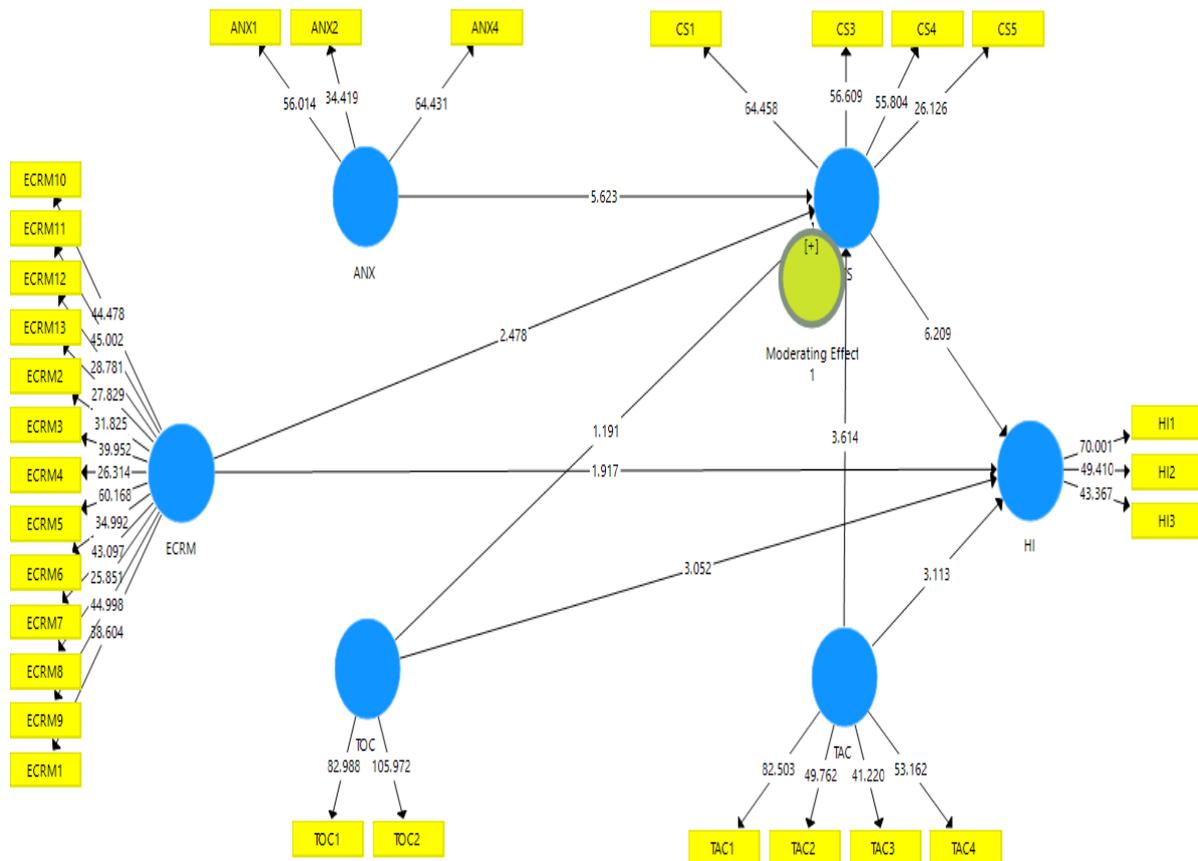


Table 4: Direct Relationships and Moderation

	(O)	(M)	(STDEV)	(O/STDEV)	P Values
ANX → CS	0.522	0.520	0.093	5.623	0.000
CS → HI	0.597	0.598	0.096	6.209	0.000
ECRM → CS	0.238	0.254	0.096	2.478	0.007
ECRM → HI	0.151	0.145	0.079	1.917	0.028
Moderating Effect 1 → CS	-0.028	-0.028	0.024	3.159	0.000
TAC → CS	0.323	0.316	0.090	3.614	0.000
TAC → HI	0.262	0.257	0.084	3.113	0.001
TOC → CS	0.117	0.124	0.098	1.191	0.117
TOC → HI	0.269	0.267	0.088	3.052	0.001

Table 5: Mediation

	(O)	(M)	(STDEV)	T (O/STDEV)	P Values
ECRM -> CS -> HI	0.142	0.150	0.058	2.449	0.007
TAC -> CS -> HI	0.193	0.187	0.054	3.592	0.000
TOC -> CS -> HI	-0.070	-0.072	0.058	1.209	0.113

Another significant PLS-SEM criterion for estimating structural model is the R^2 measure, also known as coefficient of determination. Scholars define it as the percentage variation in endogenous variable explained by one or multiple independent variables. Based on the research context, an acceptable range for R^2 value was determined at 0.10 (F. Hair Jr et al., 2014). Meanwhile, Duarte and Raposo (2010) categorized the R^2 values to be weak (0.19), moderate (0.33), and substantial (0.67), based on the R^2 values in PLS-SEM. The R^2 values obtained for the endogenous variables in this study are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: R-square

	R Square
CS	0.824
HI	0.850

Conclusion

The era of technology commonly termed the postmodern era of business is basically a product of technology, and particularly e-technology, changing the traditional ways of doing business. Big Data, the Internet of Things, Industry 4.0, the internet and the web have changed traditional marketing and management practices. E-service is an emerging yet least explored area of CRM. Meanwhile, the emergence of concepts such as e-CRM has brought a revolution in CRM research. Thus, the main purpose of carrying out this study was to explore and re-examine the link between e-CRM and image for the Thai hotel industry. However, the two aspects of sensory marketing known as touch and taste have also been examined. CS was examined as a mediator in the relationship between e-CRM, touch, taste and hotel image. Lastly, following a theoretical justification, we have traced the moderating role of anxiety in the relationship between e-CRM and CS. Also, the literature review highlighted the challenges the Thai hotel industry is facing and the opportunities available for it.

The data was collected using a survey instrument designed by adapting items from prior studies.

The questionnaire was distributed among visitors of the Thai hotel industry. The response rate turned out to be 54 percent which is higher than the threshold level. Therefore, PLS-SEM



was used in this research as a statistical tool to analyse the data. This technique has been recently employed by many researchers who have argued that while examining new concepts, or while carrying out advance examinations for a particular phenomenon, PLS-SEM is preferable instead of using multiple regression (Joseph F Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). Joseph F Hair Jr et al. (2016) have described PLS-SEM as an advanced multiple regression form, involving a two-step equation which accounts for inner and outer models' estimation. The SEM-PLS, one of the most robust statistical techniques for measuring structural relationships between and among variables was used to analyse the data.

Overall, the findings of the study have provided support to the proposed or hypothesized relationships. E-CRM appears as a significant determinant of hotel image as well as CS. CS and anxiety appeared in significant mediating and moderating roles. Touch and taste appear in significant positive relationship with both CS and hotel image, which indicates that for tourists and visitors the taste of food and touch matters. The anxiety appears a significant moderator in the relationship between e-CRM and CS, but the nature of the effect is negative. The findings revealed the fact that anxiety will adversely affect CS. The study will be helpful for the key stakeholders in the Thai hotel and restaurant industry.



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