

THAILAND 4.0: A NEW VALUE-BASED ECONOMY AND ITS IMPLICATION ON WELLNESS BUSINESS

Surada Chundasutathanakul¹ and Suthawan Chirapanda²

¹School of Law and Politics, Suan Dusit University
145/9 Sukhothai Rd., Dusit, Bangkok 10300 Thailand

^{1,2}School of Business, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce
126/1 Vibhavadi Rangsit Rd., Dindang, Bangkok 10400, Thailand

¹csurada@gmail.com, ²suthawan_chi@utcc.ac.th

Abstract

The research aims to explain how COVID-19 has affected wellness business SMEs in Bangkok. It also uses political and management theories namely, developmental state theory, social capital theory, diffusion of innovation theory, resource-based theory, and image theory.

The research is qualitative research by nature as it uses snowball sampling and non-random sampling methods to gather the information through semi-structure in-depth interviews and focus groups. The main finding of this research is that, though the Thai government has set “Medical and Wellness Tourism” as the country’s development strategy to make Thailand a hub for medical and wellness tourism since 2002, the country has failed to manage COVID-19 crisis, and to provide appropriate risk management and suitable compensation to wellness business SMEs, both entrepreneurs and employees. As well, the government has high hope for the future of the wellness business as it believes that the sector, combined with medical and leisure tourism, will still be the engine of economic growth for Thailand while the business sector has not yet seen the bright future for wellness business in the post pandemic world.

The conclusion of the research is that the state ineffectively implements risk management measures makes the wellness SMEs in Bangkok suffer the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research suggests that crisis communication and crisis management plan of the country shall be improved in order to better relieve like situations if ever occurs again. As well, the limitation of this research, apart from the pandemic itself, is that it is mainly conducted in Bangkok, especially in the city center. Therefore, the research suggests that other researchers who are interested in this topic conduct research in more thorough areas of the city and even nationwide to fill the knowledge gap.

Keywords: Crisis management; Public policy; Wellness business; SMEs



Introduction

COVID-19 and its effects on wellness business SMEs in Bangkok

Historically, Thailand developed the country's economy through its competitive advantage in rich natural resources and bio-diversity and devoted most its investment and attentiveness in the agriculture sector, which is the 1.0 economic development phase. Then the country entered the 2.0 and 3.0 phases, where the country received most revenue from light industries and heavy industries respectively. Yet, Thailand still faced 3 traps that hindered it from succeeding expected economic growth, namely middle-income trap; inequality trap and; imbalance trap. These traps merged with structural problems led to the country low effectiveness in economic development. Therefore, to frame economic improvement for 20 years (2017 – 2036 B.E.) onward, the government has come up with the idea of Thailand 4.0 economic development strategies that moves the focus into innovation-based development and to connect the country's economy to the universal level. (Ministry of Industry, 2016)

According to Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI), Thailand has faced challenges in numerous scopes that affect health systems. It proposes 11 dimensions of changes, namely consuming and living behaviors; urbanization; aging society; reasonable drug use; environmental change; market competition and investment; technological development; preventable diseases; higher spending on health-

related activities; healthcare human resource management and; inequality in health system (Thailand Board of Investment, 2018).

As well, the Thai government has set “Medical and Wellness Tourism” as the country's development strategy to make Thailand a “hub” for medical and wellness tourism activities since 2002. (Thailand Board of Investment, 2018). With medical and wellness tourism as a “new s-curve” innovation is to ensure that Thailand's economy will continuously develops. That is, the country will profit from the new wave of innovation, while the first s-curve, or the heavy-industry based economy in the past, will eventually fade out. (Ministry of Industry, 2016)

The first s-curve is the industry that Thailand has capabilities to produce and it is a potential industry that had created tremendous economic value, but it lacked technological improvement and generate low growth rate. On the other hand, the new s-curve industry is a new industry that has intense use of technology and innovation. This is the industry that has great potential growth in the future. However, as it is a new industry that acquires low number of players, it requires that the relevant actors must support the industry in order to make it strong and highly competitive in the near future (Ministry of Industry, 2016).

One of the strategies is to reform the Thai industry sector into an innovation industry. To elaborate, the strategy is to transform from production-based activities to innovation and technological based activities by empowering the industry's competitiveness to level up production standard and to create new innovations with digital technology as a



key tool. This is to build a network of “Innovation Driven Entrepreneurship” (IDE) who uses innovation and technology in their activities and to support the aggregation of industry cluster. This SPRING strategy is to level up standard, productivity, and innovation. Apart from that, to craft sustainable development, the country needs to support green growth industry and cultural and creative entrepreneurs to assure that they achieve 5 elements of development: productivity; standardize; innovation; green growth enterprise and; cultural and creative enterprise (Ministry of Industry, 2016).

Wellness business is seen as a new s-curve actor. To elaborate that, the Thailand 4.0 model puts the wellness business, as a new s-curve economic actor, development into following 4 phases.

1. For 1-2-year timeframe: the strategy is to strengthen new s-curve business/start-ups and to craft them into “New Economic Warrior”; to promote smart SMEs and; to develop SMEs Rescue Center and Cultural Industrial Village
2. For 2-5-year timeframe: the strategy is to accelerate start-ups; to increase the number of smart SMEs; to connect SMEs with Les and; to support industry networking
3. For 2-10-year timeframe: the strategy is to support the Thai entrepreneurs to be known internationally and; to connect the Thai entrepreneurs to the high-valued chains in the international market.
4. For 10-20-year timeframe: the strategy is to push the Thai entrepreneurs to transform themselves to be global leading enterprises (Ministry of Industry, 2016).

The COVID-19 Pandemic has caused great damages in many sectors, especially the business sector. The pandemic’s impact on tourism and hotel industry is massive. The helms of global economy is affectedly paused by applying the brakes of the pandemic, and it has not stopped at any limit to any limits which hinders all the domains of the economic activities as well as commercial and managerial activities. The stances towards in preventing the pandemic, especially in hospitality industry is the essence of this study in which greater parts of the sector got a stark blow in functioning the suave way of perspective viewpoint of this sector. The outbreak of the first and second waves of COVID-19 have affected tourism industry in a higher and progressive manner (Kannan, 2020).

The COVID-19 symbolizes the definitive test for several leaders, entrepreneurs, and employees operating in most, if not, all industries. Among other waves, the contagion has brutally affected the world economy including the travel, tourism and hospitality industries. Besides, the first-time nature of the pandemic has had destroyed effects, with various restrictions on businesses. That leads to enormous stress on hotels, restaurants, bars, and other hospitality businesses, with overall serious and seemingly unbeatable challenges for the whole hospitality industry (Alonso, Kok, & Bressan, 2020).

The research aims to explain COVID-19 crisis management and resilience in wellness business sector in Thailand. The country has been dealing with the pandemic since late 2019 and the virus has spread in various time span, or waves through 2019 – 2021 where the



government has implemented many policies and measures to relieve the pandemic situation. The main problem, apart from the pandemic itself, is lack of cooperation in information sharing between responsible organizations as they sometimes compete against each other to get public recognition. That worsens both the pandemic control and people's trust in government. (Bangkok Post, 2021) Another problem is that the policies, such as closing various places and financial aid measures, that have been issued for relieving the situations are ineffective. That shows that policy makers and those affected from the pandemic and the policies are not in the same page and the business sector that is most affected is wellness business, namely massage parlors, spas, hair salon and gyms because they are the first to be closed and the last to be reopened. (Khaosod English, 2021)

The novel corona pandemic began in late December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei province in China where clusters of pneumonia cases were reported to Wuhan Municipal Health Commission. (World Health Organization, 2020) Then, the virus has spread around the globe, including Thailand. The medical and wellness business is certainly affected from the pandemic. Nevertheless, with all the strategies laid out, they have not incorporated pandemic into the 20-year strategic plan. With COVID-19 breaking out in the country, Thailand has now faced huge challenges that it needs to overthrow. The government as well as relevant actors must redesign the strategies to cope with reality. Therefore, it is crucial to portray the support and policy implementation that the government and relevant actors provide for medical and wellness

business, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic phase. In other words, it is important to match the policy makers/practitioners and those who affected by such policies and measures to see the similarities and differences in their perspectives.

In the wellness market, the lines of goods offered are comprehensive ranging from preventive measures of health to the treatment of illness, for example. The preventive measure introduces a concept of healthy living while the treatment of illness merely produces the idea from health-related tourism. The common wellness ideas are spa, massage, body pampering, healthy gourmet meals, fitness classes, and alternative clinical treatment (such as aquatic therapy and acupuncture). Spa treatments, as the focus point of wellness amenity, can be delivered in different manners in terms of sources of water and its setting. As for the water sources, thermal mineral water from the ground have been used to treat diverse kinds of diseases since the invention of spa therapy over 1,000 years ago. Nonetheless, thanks to the cutting-edge technology, the dwellings without a natural thermal water source can also offer a healthy spa treatment. For instance, some herbal ingredients and mineral extracts can be mixed into hot water to help fully relax the body (Chen, 2007).

As well, customers can soak into the mineral water at a nature, rustic setting directly such as lake and river for spa settings. However, spa clients receive the treatment at modern amenities such as pools and bathtubs in which the sanitation issue can be prudently scrutinized (Chen, 2007).



It is reported that 35% of UK residents visit a spa in a year while 21% of Americans do so. The most popular type of spa in the UK is resort/hotel spa though, in the USA, day spas are more preponderant. With an exceptional growth, the wellness market has recently increased the attention by tourism stakeholders including government, business and hosting community. To elaborate, the Finnish Government has invigorated their war veterans to join a welfare program in which the veterans can get a subsidy from the government for healing their illnesses in some wellness amenities, such as a spa resort. Even for the veterans who live overseas, they could travel back to those amenities in Finland for 10 days in a year with a full subsidy of all the cost of travels and treatments. Moreover, Finland's Sickness Insurance Act has an emphasis on preventive treatment at local facilities, such as a spa center that helps encourage the wellness business. On the top that, in Switzerland, many spas incorporate a rehabilitation department in which the visitors can get treatments from certified nurses and doctors and, in some cases, the visitors can also enjoy five-star meals (Chen, 2007).

In the United States, the wellness destinations can accommodate the pregnant. It is reported diverse locations accumulation maternity services; in this case, even pregnant persons are able to safely enjoy spa treatment. The potential solutions are using hydraulic treatment tables and providing door-to-door services because the pregnant are least likely to travel during a certain stage of pregnancy. Some retreats have coped with the need of single-parents and take care of child care service while the clients are getting the treatments (Chen, 2007).

Looking at an even higher standard, Switzerland has founded even greater standards of wellness delivery for the rich and famous for decades. According to the new standards, wellness service's contribution to the quality of life is not only narrowed to the tourists, but also extends to the host community. A recent example of the integrated design of a treatment center in Lake Geneva has displayed the sensitivity of wellness provider to nature environment and local heritage. The treatment facility prudently matches with a quaint scene of a 19th century design attached to a modern medical center. It implies that the wellness sector may follow the essence of sustainable living. As the trend predominates, it can be intriguing to expect if the future development of wellness business will uphold better quality of life from the angles of the tourists as well as the host communities (Chen, 2007).

Wellness business is estimated around more than 10 billion Baht worth and Thailand is ranked the 16th best spa/massage in the world and the 5th in Asia. That makes Thailand both medical tourism for foreigners and health and beauty market for Thais. At Present, domestic spa and massage market is estimated at 35 billion Baht with 8% growth rate with continuing leap growth in the tourism segment as there is still high demand for therapy and relaxation in the market. Spa/massage market takes 23% of overall beauty market while medical service market is estimate as high as 100 thousand million Baht, which is 75% of the market (Marketeer, 2021).

The medical and wellness business surely benefits from these public policies. Nevertheless, with all the strategies laid



out, they have not incorporated pandemic into the 20-year strategic plan. With COVID-19 breaking out in the country, Thailand has now faced huge challenges that it needs to overthrow. The government as well as relevant actors must redesign the strategies to cope with reality. Therefore, this research suggests that the study of the medical and wellness business support from the government and relevant actors, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic phase, should be further scrutinized to make the story of Thailand 4.0, value-based economy, model entirely complete.

As the title of this paper is “COVID-19 and Its Effects on Wellness Business SMEs in Bangkok”, I have used following theories to frame the research:

Social network theory

Social network theory assumes that people tend to think and behave similarly because they are connected. That is, the theory scrutinizes collections of ties and linkages among a defined group of actors (individuals, groups, or organizations). Moreover, the connection as a whole can be used to interpret the social behavior of the actors involved. The actors can also be connected, or divided through the use of the network. The theory also makes analysis of a range of organizational phenomena at both the micro level (leadership, teams, power, trust, turnover, etc.) and the macro level (interfirm relations, alliances, network governance, etc.) (Miles, 2012).

The theory should be applied into the research proposal in order to explain how wellness businesses as a group utilize their connections to manipulate (if there is any proof) the policy related to wellness business issues in Thailand. As

well, the theory helps describe how organizational phenomena at both macro and micro levels should be put into analysis.

Social capital theory

Social capital theory’s main point is that people receive both tangible and intangible resources at the individual, group, and organizational levels through social interactions and connections. A key focus in the theory is that social capital resources are embedded within, available through, and derived from social networks of interconnected people, groups, or nations. That is why, according to this theory, to build strong families and local communities is crucial. The term “social capital” is described as “goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit, the rural community” (Miles, 2012).

Also, the social capital is different from other kinds of capitals because it is based on position or location of the member within the member’s network of social relations. Adler and Kwon have described 3 dimensions of social structure which are 1) market relations which refer to the monetary or bartering exchange of goods and services; 2) hierarchical relations which refers to the exchange of material and security for obedience to authority; and 3) social relations which refer to tacit, symmetrical, ongoing mutual exchanges of gifts and favors (Miles, 2012).

The theory should be applied to the research in a way to explain how people, both in wellness business and policy makers, use their social capital or, in other words, “trust” to facilitate the



crafting of policies and measures related to wellness business.

Diffusion of innovations theory

Diffusion of innovation theory examines the process through which information is communicated to people or organizations over time that can lead to the use of an innovation. An innovation can be a good, service, practice, or idea that people perceived to be new. The newness does not depend so much on the creation date of the item, but refers more to the newness of the application for helping address a need or for solving some sort of problem. Newness also refers to people having a positive reaction to using the item themselves; they may have known about the item before, but may have never thought about using it themselves (Miles, 2012).

The arc of innovations can be explained by its adoption rate. Innovations tend to be adopted more quickly when they 1) have a relative advantage over existing methods; 2) are compatible with existing value, past experience, and current needs; 3) are simple to understand; 4) can be tried out or played with by potential adopters; and 5) are observable, in the manner that the adopters can see the results for themselves (Miles, 2012).

Apart from that, the word “diffusion” means that it is a process through which an innovation is communicated, or shared, through communication channels over time to people in a social system. According to this theory, innovations are diffused through organizations in 5 stages: 1) agenda setting; 2) matching; 3) redefining or restructuring; 4) clarifying; and 5) routinizing. At each stage, there are specific events, actions, and decisions that occur, and later stage cannot take

place until the previous stages have been completed (Miles, 2012).

The research uses this theory to rationalize how wellness businesses and policy makers follow these 5 stages of innovation diffusion. The stage that the researcher is most intrigued by is the first step “agenda setting” as the researcher believes that to tune the military-run government to look into wellness-business related policies is not easy. Therefore, the researcher would like to acquire more knowledge on how these agenda are put into the agenda and crafted into policies and measures.

Resource-based theory

Resource-based theory observes performance differences of organizations based on their resources. It makes 2 main assumptions: 1) Organizations within an industry may differ in their resources, and 2) these resources may not be perfectly mobile across organizations, so organizational differences in resources can be permanent. The theory also explains how organizations maintain unique and sustainable positions in competitive environments because it highlights efficiency-based differences. Therefore, the organizations’ market power, collusion, strategic behaviors can be various (Miles, 2012).

The main idea of this theory is that the organizations in the same industry compete against each other on the basis of their resources and capabilities. The theory also concludes that organizational decisions to select and accumulate resources are economically rational and subject to limited information, biases and prejudices, and causal opacity/ambiguity. The causal ambiguity means it is not known exactly how a resource leads to



outstanding performance for a certain organization (Miles, 2012).

The theory will be used in the thesis as one of the theories clarifying the wellness/health-related organizations' use of their resources. That is, organizations in the same industry may not have same resources and are subject to limited information regarding wellness-related policies they have acquired. Therefore, the researcher assumes that the organizations, though in the same industry, have (somewhat) different access to the resources and different and limited information regarding the policies. As a result, the wellness-related policies may differently affect/benefit the organizations.

Image theory

Image theory believes that an individual who decides in the context of a relationship or organization with a presumption that the decision may remain or may later be changed. The theory is an alternative to traditional decision-making theory because it is a psychological theory of decision making (Miles, 2012).

Apart from that, image theory sees decisions as being made intuitively and automatically while traditional decision-making theory believes that the decisions are being made deliberately and systematically. Hence, to image theory, decision makers often make decisions using simple, easy, nonanalytic, and rapid processes for each decision, even when the decision has considerable significance to the decision makers (Miles, 2012).

Moreover, the image theory has 3 types of image: value image; trajectory image; and strategic image. The value image is

the decision makers' principles (morals, ethics, values, ideals, standards of equality, justice, loyalty, goodness, etc.), combined with their moral, civic, and religious beliefs. The value image portrays the "self-evident truths" for which the decision makers believe. Therefore, it helps the decision makers foresee which goals are worthy for them to pursuit and which is not (Miles, 2012).

The trajectory image projects the future state that the decision makers desire to achieve; or the agenda that the decision makers follow. The last image is the strategic image that includes plans, strategies, and tactics that have been adopted in order to achieve the trajectory image (Miles, 2012).

This research will clarify all the three types of image, namely the value image; the trajectory image; and the strategic image, that the decision makers, both in the side of policy-making processes and wellness-related organizations, acquire. As well, the research assumes that the decision makers make decision regarding wellness policies using simple, easy, nonanalytic, and rapid processes, rather than making decisions deliberately and systematically.

COVID-19 and its effects on wellness SMEs in Bangkok

Looking to the case of COVID-19 pandemic and how it quickly and fatally widespread throughout the country, business sector, especially tourism and wellness industry are heavily affected. The scope of this research focuses on wellness SMEs in Bangkok, to be precise, wellness and spa business in Bangkok. To elaborate that, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration has issued



several announcements that require wellness and spa salons to close during certain period of time where each time the businesses are closed for weeks and months (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 2020). The researchers have interviews 25 key informants: wellness and spa entrepreneurs; wellness and spa employees; BMA officials; and Ministry of Health officials. The main finding is that the state ineffectively implements risk management measures makes the wellness SMEs in Bangkok suffer the effects of the COVID-19.

Therefore, this thesis will be conducted by using both documentary and field research. It examines written documents and carries out participatory field research. Regarding documentary research, the thesis thoroughly examines both published and unpublished documents in relation to the wellness-related policies during 2014 - 2021. As no research has systematically studied the wellness-related policies in the new political environment produced by the reform agenda and the military administration under General Prayut Chan-o-cha, the study aims to fill the gap by concentrating on the policies after the 2014 coup d'état and consequent introduction of the political reform agenda.

The empirical content is mainly based on field research in Bangkok, Thailand. The research will be conducted using qualitative methods with a variety of qualitative techniques. The mechanisms of inquiry include semi-structured in-depth interview, participant and non-participant observation, and the recording of oral histories. The research uses a triangulation approach which utilizes more than one research technique

to study the same incidents in order to validate information as well as to cross-check different sources and clarify conflicting information.

To obtain in-depth information and record the undocumented stories of the wellness-related policies and actors, an ethnographic approach will be used. This method is used because it allows the actors (both in policy making side and wellness-related organization side) to fully express themselves, reveal the experiences of their struggles and describe their everyday practices and the way they see the world. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions will also be used to acquire information and opinions of members of wellness-related organizations, such as spas, wellness centres, hospitals, etc., as well as that of policy makers.

Data analysis of existing information, such as news clippings, and unpublished documents of the government and official organisations will also be used to provide supplementary information to substantiate and fill any gaps in the findings. The supplementary information includes internal documents and minutes of meetings of the government and ministry of health, unpublished documents and first-hand information gathered from the special committees dealing with the wellness-related organizations. During the fieldwork, the researcher expects that the idea of deliberative participation in that it intends to involve those who are the subject of the research in the process of researching and finding answers.

The table below describes the characteristics of the selected samples that are interviewed and studies in this research.

Table 1 Sample Table

Type of Organization	Number	Active Administration Years
National Government Level	3	2 – 7 years
Ministry Level	5	7 years
Local Government Level	2	7 – 35 years
Association	3	5 – 10 years
Business	6	5 – 23 years
Wellness-business Employee	3	3 – 15 years
Landlord	3	7 – 41 years

To elaborate, the researcher interviews 25 interviewees that can be categorized into 2 groups: governmental staff and wellness business related informants.

1. Governmental staff

The researcher interviews 10 governmental staff which are General Prawit Wongsuwan, Deputy Prime Minister, Anutin Chanvirakul, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Health and other 2 ministry of health's officials;

Doctor Thaweessin Visnuyothin, CSSA spokesperson; Arkhom Termpitthayapaisith, Minister of Finance; Phipat Ratchakitprakarn, Minister of Tourism and Sports; Kachit Chatchavanich, Permanent Secretary of Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and Police Captain Pongsakorn Kwanmuang, spokesperson for Bangkok Metropolitan Administration; and Suporn Attawong, an assistant to the prime minister's office.

Table 2 Governmental informants

Organization Type	Title	Name	Experience
National Government	Deputy Prime Minister	Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan	7 years (for current administration)
National Government	CSSA Spokesperson	Dr.Thaweessin Visnuyothin	2 years
National Government	assistant to the prime minister's office	Suporn Attawong	7 years
Ministry Level	Minister of Health	Anutin Chanvirakul	4 years
Ministry Level	Advisor to Deputy Minister of Health	Thanitpol Jayananda	4 years
Ministry Level	Department of Health Service Support Officer	Ubol	20 years
Ministry Level	Minister of Finance	Arkhom Termpitthayapaisith	2 year
Ministry Level	Minister of Tourism and Sports	Phipat Ratchakitprakarn	2 years
Local Government Level	Permanent Secretary of BMA	Kachit Chatchavanich	3 months (in this position, but working in the BMA for 35 years)
Local Government Level	Spokesperson for BMA	Pongsakorn Kwanmuang	5 years



2. Wellness business related informants:

The researcher interviews 15 wellness business related informants which are 4 wellness and spa entrepreneurs; 3

wellness business association representatives; 3 beauty assistants; 1 medical wellness doctor; 3 landlords; and a Chief Executive Officer of an insurance company.

Table 3 Wellness-related informants

Business Type	Title	Name	Experience
Spa	Manager of Gaya Health and Beauty Spa	Vilai	23 years
Spa	Owner of Health Land Spa	Pitak Lapphrathana	22 years
Spa	Owner of Blink Spa	Poom	20 years
Spa	Manager of Away spa	Bee	3 years
Wellness Clinic	Director of Smith Prive Aesthetic Clinic	Smith Arayaskul	18 years
Association	Director of federation of Thai spa and wellness association	Chavanat Sinthukiow	18 years
Association	Director of Charawi Association for the Conservation of Thai Massage	Pitak Yotha	3 years
Association	Member of Charawi Association for the Conservation of Thai Massage	Monlapas Thaichareon	13 years
Counter Brand	Sisley Brand’s Beauty Assistant	Wan	23 years
Counter Brand	Sisley Brand’s Therapist	Noon	19 years
Counter Brand	Christian Dior Brand’s Beauty Assistant	Will	8 years
Landlord	President of The 1 Central Limited	Ton Chirathiwat	18 years
Landlord	Managing director of the marketing department of CPN	Natthakit Tangpoolsinthana	35 years
Landlord	A landlord of a spa located on Sathorn Road	Tee	7 years
Insurance Company	CEO of AIA Thailand	Krit Chantanotoke	4 years

The researcher practices “snowball sampling” and a “non-random sampling” methods in this study as the nature of the data sources and frequent difficulty in getting subjects to volunteer information. Graduate students attempting to contact with high-rank officials and governmental agencies are often refused. Therefore, the high-rank officials and governmental officers who are willing to

volunteer information are used as samples. The criteria include: working in the relevant governmental agencies; having at least 2-year experience in the office (given that the COVID-19 has hit the country 2 years ago). For the wellness business related informants, the criteria include: owning a business for at least 10 years; or working in the field of wellness business for at least 3 years: the business’



products or services are available in domestic and/or in global markets; and the brand is well-recognized domestically and/or internationally.

For the governmental informants, the researcher uses person-to-person in-depth interviews with each informant to gain knowledge on how the governmental organizations at various levels plan and tackle the COVID-19 pandemic

For the wellness-business related informants, the research uses the qualitative method which the researcher has conducted semi-structure in-depth interviews and focus groups with the mentioned informants to acquire deep knowledge and understanding of wellness business and how the COVID-19 has affected the business. As well, the researcher aims to see if the relevant governmental organizations have issues suitable policies and measures to relieve the hardship caused by the pandemic.

There are 3 main topics that have surfaced during the interviews, namely crisis management; compensation; and the future of the wellness business. The arguments are as followings:

3. Crisis management

It is crystal clear from the interviews that both wellness-related informants and governmental informants are on the same page that there are still room for improvement for COVID-19 crisis management. For example, miscommunications of the CSSA and BMA can be managed by better cooperation between the 2 parties. That will prevent misunderstandings for the public. However, the governmental informants express that this is the best they can do for the given circumstances

and they hope that the situations will get better once the pandemic is over because they impose new-and-stricter health standard for the wellness business to act upon.

Therefore, the wellness-business related informants feel that while the government has not managed the crisis well, it also pushes all the burden for the public to absorb. For example, the wellness business needs to practice new health standard and cover all the expense by itself because the government does not give hand in providing needed resources, such as ATK test kits, masks, etc.

4. Compensation

The compensation topic is also crystal clear for both groups of informants that there is insufficient compensation for wellness business affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. That is, the 5,000 Baht compensation for the registered therapists/masseurs is much lower than the high living expense they have nationwide. As well, there are plenty of unregistered therapists/masseurs who have received no compensation at all. Not to mention that the wellness business owners also have not received whatsoever compensation for the loss due to the pandemic though they are those who fall the hardest in this crisis.

Nonetheless, the governmental informants believe that the situations will get better as all relevant organizations are working together to come up with better compensation schemes for the wellness business as well as other affected businesses.

5. The future of wellness business



From the interview with wellness business-related informants, there are mixed information regarding the future of wellness business. To elaborate, for the business entrepreneurs, there are those who believe that there is still hope for wellness business in the post-pandemic world, and there are also those who are afraid of continuing in the wellness business market because they have lost big amount of money during the pandemic and they think that the wellness business is too risky and unpredictable.

As well, for the landlords' points of view, there are landlords who understands that the pandemic has damaged the economy as a whole and they are willing to help those entrepreneurs to pass the hard time in order to let them prepare to be able to continue their business again in the post-pandemic world. On the other hand, there are also landlords who believe that wellness business is not attractive tenant

because it is a close-contact activities business which will be affected again if the similar pandemic occurs. Therefore, it is too dodgy for them to let the wellness business rent their properties. However, it should be remarked here that the landlords who are more adaptive, like CPN, will better cope both during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic time.

For the governmental informants, they strongly believe that the wellness business will pick up their paces in the post-pandemic world and the customers will be even more confident when they revisit the wellness shops because they realize that the shops are practicing even more stricter health standard than before. Also, as medical tourism and wellness business are one of engine of economic growth for Thailand, the government will find more measures to help boost and prepare the wellness business for the coming new normal world.

Table 4 Results of differences and similarities from governmental and wellness-related informants

Results	Governmental informants	Wellness-related informants
Similarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More room to improve in crisis management • Communication is key 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More room for improvement in both crisis management and communication
Different	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think they are doing their best • Relief measures meet targeted groups' need • Wellness business will pick up paces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieving measures are insufficient • Wellness business is risky

Discussion

First, social network theory is applied into the research in order to explain how wellness businesses as a group utilize their connections to manipulate the

policy related to wellness business issues in Thailand. As well, the theory helps describe how organizational phenomena at both macro and micro levels should be put into analysis. In the interviews, the researcher learns that wellness business



entrepreneurs and registered therapists have gathered as an association to negotiate policies and measures that affect them. As well, they have pushed the authority to get the policies accordingly to their preference and have received many successful milestones, such as vaccine quotas and SHA+ certification.

Second, social capital theory is applied to the research in a way to explain how people, both in wellness business and policy makers, use their social capital or, in other words, “trust” to facilitate the crafting of policies and measures related to wellness business. To elaborate, all of the authority, in this term, is defined as the Thai government (mainly Ministry of Health and Ministry of Tourism and Sports), the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, need to closely work hand in hand in order to make the new normal lifestyle work. As well, the wellness business entrepreneurs and therapists need to trust both each other and the authority to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic situations as well as to assure that the business will be able to get through this harsh time and be able to get through the state of resilience and thrive again after the crisis have passed.

Third, resource-based theory assumes that organizations in the same industry may not have same resources and are subject to limited information regarding wellness-related policies they have acquired. After conducting the research, the researcher believes that the organizations have different accesses to the resources and different and limited information regarding the policies. As a result, the wellness-related policies differently affect the organizations. To

clarify, the federation of Thai spa and wellness association is able to negotiate policies that affect their members’ conditions because they are united for communicating with authority to achieve what they think best for their members while other wellness businesses that are not the part of the association are left alone trying hard to survive during the crisis.

Last, neo-authoritarian developmental State theory play vital roles in this research as the state is micro-managing the COVID-19 crisis at every level and that leads to miscommunication and misunderstanding both among the authorities and for the public. That is because the state still fails in tackling the problems and recovering the affected parties, especially wellness business SMEs who are first to crash and last to bounce.

From the interviews, it occurs that the policymakers still do not fully understand the nature of wellness business which is close-contact activity. That leads to mismatch policy making that fails to solve the actual problems and propose suitable recovery scheme for such business. Also, the researcher believe that it is important for those who would like to study this topic that main source of income of wellness business SMEs in Bangkok is from foreign tourists, especially Chinese. Therefore, the business has certainly crashed once the government decided to prohibit inbound tourism.

In this research, it is proven that, in order to sustainably survive, the wellness business SMEs must be more versatile, both in term of providing service and building products under their own brands, whether they are skin cares,



herbal balm, or food. All in all, wellness business is still the answer in the long run because there are still customers' need to take care of themselves. However, the business needs to adapt to be more universal and to position themselves beyond providing service and other close-contact activities.

As well, to compare this research with relevant studies, the researcher finds that there are gaps that this research has come to fulfill. That is, in this research, various management theories have been put into test if they are applicable and, more importantly, still relevant to the real world. The researcher finds that the relevant studies that have been done before this research have not well proposed the crisis management and crisis relieve plans for wellness business, especially in the Thailand's context. To elaborate, the crisis management plans in the past have been crafted for any businesses, not particularly wellness-related business. Though the researcher is able to find one crisis management scheme that is purposely for the wellness-related businesses, there are still many intervening factors that have surfaced in the research. Therefore, there is no "one-size-fits-all" crisis management plan for every wellness-related business. Everyone must learn from their experience and work from that.

Apart from that, since the researcher has interviewed several key informants who are either engineers in policy making process, or wellness-related practitioners, it is certain that this research has proposed a holistic point of view of the COVID-19 crisis management of wellness business in term of how the policy makers have responded to the

crisis and how the entrepreneurs and relevant parts have adapted during the crisis.

Finally, it is essentially intriguing to explore how those key informants reflect on the crisis management plan of the governments as well as their own crisis management plans, and to look forward for their expected post-pandemic world's projection.

Limitation and further study

The main limitation of this research is the COVID-19 pandemic itself because it has prevented the researcher to have face-to-face conversations with many key informants and the researcher believes that to have face-to-face and in-depth interviews in flesh is much juicier and exciting than to hold those via internet applications and phone calls. Also, there might still be some information that the informants have to omit because they might fear that it could leak to unwanted groups.

Apart from that, as the research is mainly conducted in Bangkok and the city center part of the province, the information and the results explained in this research may not comprehensively display that of other provinces and the whole country.

For the further study, the researcher highly recommends those who are interested in doing research on this topic to dive deeper in many aspects of wellness business as many kinds of them are different and, therefore, there are still more interesting knowledge lie beneath what is presented in this research. Also, to expand the information horizon from



merely Bangkok and city center to other provinces in the country as well as the country as a whole will definitely give the more complete picture to the research on wellness business and crisis management policy in Thailand. As well,

it will be interesting to evaluate how the crisis has affected the wellness business in the long run, and to learn from the wellness-related businesses who have survived this pandemic to see what they have done to make it.

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