

Factors Influencing Chinese Consumers' Purchase Intention for Thai Products and Travel in Thailand from Thai Dramas and Films

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Abstract

Following the footsteps of the popularity of Korean Wave, Thai movies and dramas are also starting to break domestic boundary and gaining international fandom. This study tends to examine the behavior of Chinese viewers of Thai movies and dramas and identify the factors influencing viewers' satisfaction and purchase intention on Thai products and travel in Thailand. The study examines Cultural diffusion theory and Purchase intention theory, important theories on consumer behavior along with the available literatures in order to develop the framework. Results of the study showed the significant relation between viewers' involvement and satisfaction while the satisfaction of Thai movies and dramas had positive effect on viewers' intention to buy Thai products and intention to visit Thailand.

Keywords: Cultural Diffusion, Customer Satisfaction, Purchase Intention, Film Induced Tourism, Thailand, Chinese Consumer

Introduction

The impact of movies and television dramas on viewers' behavior has been subject of many social researches. Social scientists are of assumption that media industry serves the purpose of medium of controlling social behavior. Since the beginning, movies and dramas have been considered as an effective marketing strategy to control consumers' behavior. Hudson and Hudson (2006) pointed out that in the modern time the strategy of product placement have become more complex as products and services are no more used as an advertisement in the movies rather they are embedded into the content of media such that they seem like the part of a lifestyle. This leads to even stronger emotional engagement with the viewers. This new strategy of integration of brands advertisement into the entertainment content has been termed as branded entertainment (Sellgren, 2010). One of such successful case of branded entertainment is James Bond movies. In the movies, the main character James Bond is always portrayed as a sophisticated personality with particular choices for brands like Aston Martin, Vodka Martini, Rolex, and Sony etc. As the viewers aspire to become as sophisticated as the character, they imitate its behavior as well. And this has resulted in the large scale consumption of such brands.

In the past, despite close geographical proximity and cultural compatibility, East Asian countries had largely suppressed cultural exchanges for political reasons.. In the span of three

decades, there has been massive spread of cultural products in the region. Through different mediums, the popular cultures have found their way into neighbouring countries with equal or even more popularity. In the 90's and early 2000, Chinese and Japanese TV programs and movies made their successful export to the neighbouring countries. This trend was further bolstered by the immense success and flow of Korean TV dramas, pop songs, and movies into South East Asia and other parts of world having earned the name of "Korean Wave" (Sora, 2014).

Korean Wave has had huge impact on the over all lifestyle of fans including what they eat, they wear and their travel. Hwang (2009) noted that the spill-over effect of the Korean Wave has attracted foreigners to take notice of Korean food and language. Kim (2007) established that many Chinese youths were deeply influenced by all Korean things, from hairstyles to lifestyles. This meteoric rise of Korean pop culture has made a significant contribution to the overall development of the country; mainly to the growth of entertainment industry, tourism industry and fashion industry. And riding on this trend, in the recent years, Thai TV shows and movies are also making their presence felt accross its borders with substantial success.

This paper aims to study the impact of Thai TV dramas and movies among Chinese viewers and how it influences their intention to purchase Thai products and visit Thailand. The rise of Korean Wave made people aware that foreign movies and dramas can be entertaining as well. And the evolution of digital media in past decade or two have made their foreign media widely available all around the world. Thai TV dramas were seen as different source of entertainment for Chinese viewers who had been following western and Korean dramas. Thai TV soaps and movies had been broadcast by CCTV-8 and provincial TV stations like Hunan TV and Anhui TV since 2003. The main attractions of Thai TV dramas are pretty Thai faces, exotic tropical scenery such as beautiful sunshine, beaches and luxurious palace-like viillas and intense sadomasochistic type of romance. Furthermore, as many of the actors and actresses are of Chinese descent, they develop a sense of familiarity emotional attachment with Chinese viweres. The influence of Thai TV dramas has encouraged stronger engagment between Chinese fans and Thai media star. This influence even stimulated then Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to sign contracts with the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to increase the quotas for the importation of Thai Dramas to Chinese TV stations during Vejjajiva's visit at the opening ceremony of the Sixth Asian Games in Guangzhou, China to promote Thai Tourism. Battle of Angels, aThai TV drama showcasing scandals and stories of airline crew and pilots became a big hit among Chinese viewers when it was broadcast by Anhui TV in 2009. Similarly Track of Love another love story based TV drama received second highest in ratings on China central television CCTV8 channel in 2010. More recently Full House Thailand, a thai version of classic Korean drama Full House became massive hit as it attracted around 100 million views when it was aired on QQ video in 2014 (Thaitrakulpanich, 2016).

Research Objective

The objective of this study is to identify the factors that influence Chinese Viewers' satisfaction of Thai TV Dramas and Movies and how it is connected with their purchase intention of Thai products and visit intention of Thailand.

Literature Review

Consumer Behavior

Mowen (1993) defined consumer behavior as: "a study of purchasing units and exchange process that take place to acquire, consume, and dispose products; goods, services, experiences and ideas." This statement focuses on the transaction of unit products by both

individual as well as groups who purchase products and services. Schiffman and Kanuk (1997) explained consumer behavior as the study of decision making process by individuals in order to spend their accessible resources like time, money and effort on consumption related products. This covers the study of different aspects like what, why, when, where and how often consumers purchase and how the purchased products are put to use. Additionally this also includes all behaviors of consumers while they search, purchase, use, evaluate and dispose the products.

In general consumer behavior can be defined as the study of processes used by individuals, groups, or organizations in selecting, securing, using, and disposing of products, services, experiences, or ideas in order to satisfy their needs and the effects that these processes impart on the end consumers and societies. Consumer behavior is not confined to only one field of social science. It is a mixture of various elements from psychology, sociology, social anthropology, marketing and economics. Consumer behavior includes characteristics of individual consumers, such as, demographics and behavioral variables in an attempt to understand what people want and the effects of the influencing groups to the consumers like friends, family and society as a whole.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is referred as the extent of consumers' happiness with the products and services offered by organization. Satisfaction is the state of mind of a person who had direct experience with the use of product and service fulfilling their expectations. Hence satisfaction can be considered as a combination of respective level of expectation and the perceived performance from the product or service. Westbrook and Oliver (1991) from their study on specific purchase selection defined customer satisfaction as a post-choice evaluative judgment related with a specific purchase selection. Halstead, Hartman and Schmidt (1994), from their study on product performance compared to some pre purchase standard, concluded the consumer satisfaction as a transaction-specific affective response resulting from the consumer's comparison of product performance. Consumer satisfaction is a judgment that any product or service imparts a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment. Greenwell et al. (2002) defines customer satisfaction to be the after purchase judgment related with the purchase decision. Ha and Jang (2010) in their study to examine customer satisfaction in an ethnic restaurant segment, found customer satisfaction to be the cognitive assessment of service or food quality and affective elements caused by experience of consumption (Saxena, 2017). In general customer satisfaction can be considered as an overall level of satisfaction with the product or service experience. Machleit and Mantel (2001) established that the core principal of marketing activities in service business is to satisfy consumers' needs and desires. The aptitude of satisfying customer is important in any business as the satisfied customers will in return help grow the business by showing loyalty.

Purchase Intention

Whitlark, Geurts and Swenson (1993) define purchase intention as a potential of purchase related with an intention area among the individuals that will actually purchase products or services. Kim and Kim in their study of purchase intention of online clothing products established purchase intention as the tendency of customers with certain fixed purpose where it is calculated in terms of actual purchasing. Crosno, Freling & Skinner (2009) defined purchase intention as the probability of purchasing a particular brand from a range of products during the buying process. Purchase intention can be considered as an underlying promise made to own self to purchase specific products or services when he or she goes to shopping. In general purchase intention is readily taken as the likelihood of consumers intending to buy any service or product (Xie, 2012). Purchase intention helps to predict customers' attitudes. This influences future purchasing decision of consumers. Purchase intention is beneficial in predicting purchase behavior of consumers and thus helps to

understand market and its requirements. For this reason purchase intention has been regarded as a crucial instrument to forecast in marketing researches (Sheth, 1967).

However, the execution of purchase intention is based on different external variables and can be explained based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the product evaluation model (PEM). The theory of reasoned action (TRA) was proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen to study and better understand the relationships between attitudes, intentions and behaviors. The theory of reasoned action postulates that the intention of performing a special behavior is driven by a personal and a social factor where personal factor is represented by attitude towards the behavior in a special situation and the social factor; subjective norms that govern the behavior in such condition and the motivation to carry on them. The theory of reasoned action is deemed fruitful and instrumental when the individual can take responsibility of his/her own purchase intentions (Nejad, 2015).

Chung and Pysarchik (2000) showed the strong correlation between consumers' actual behavior and their intention and stipulated that the theory of reasoned action only might not be completely accurate. This is also supported by the study from Collen & Hoekstra (2001) who expressed the requirements of other external factors to explain the purchase intention. Among such factors are the perceived value of consumer which is explained by the product evaluation model proposed by Dodds, Monroe and Grewal (1991). From the recent studies, perceived value of customer has been established as one of the major influential and constant factor to predict the purchase intention (Chi, Yeh, & Tsai, 2011).

Diffusion of Culture

Over time due to various reasons, elements of culture from one society or social category spread to another society. This process of social change through which new ideas, values, social practice products, innovations, attitudes or methodologies spread among the participants of a specific social system through particular communication channels is considered as diffusion. Diffusion is considered as an influential method of communication because it nurtures social development in the assessment and embracement of new ideas to tackle social issues. Diffusion is applied in the various fields of social sciences especially rural sociology, communication and anthropology (Kreps, 2017). There is no single universal collection of propositions or conclusions to deduce the principal methodology of diffusion that can be applied over all substantive sectors. However, after many researches, there are numerous distinct volumes of propositions, which explain different diffusion processes in diverse content areas. Based on such arguments, the most prominent families in the theory of diffusion are categorized as: (1) cultural diffusion; (2) collective behavior and (3) diffusion of innovations (The Gale Group Inc., 2001).

Cultural diffusion is a process by which cultural values, ideas, attitudes are spread among populations and societies. Cultures utilize new traits from foreign cultures that are beneficial to their own betterment. Cultural diffusion plays crucial role in the progress of culture as it permits cultures to prosper on basis of their learning experience from others. Sociologists are of a belief that cultural diffusion is the primary reason for modern societies and cultures to have been developed as they are now. (Crossman, 2017).

In the recent studies on cultural diffusion model, researchers are more focused on the diffusion of culture as it spreads across borders; the borders can be among neighborhoods or countries. These studies put more emphasis on the experience of population in the destination country rather than on the characteristics of the incoming social traits (Wejnert, 2002)

Film-induced Tourism

The early researches on film-induced tourism were dominantly descriptive and there were not much data that would support the claims of the significance of the film induced tourism. But in the past two decades, there have been rapid explosion of academic interest and researches published in this field (Olsberg, 2007; Nam, 2016). Beeton (2005) published book named

Film-Induced Tourism which can be considered as the first publication of the comprehensive analysis of the relations between movies and tourism making a significant contribution to the literature specially related to film tourism issues, destination marketing and strategic planning. Beeton in her book emphasizes the need of more rigorous studies on the theoretical and practical aspects of film-induced tourism in order to develop better theoretical models to investigate the costs and benefits associated (Beeton, 2005).

Film-induced tourism, also called film tourism, movie-induced tourism, screen tourism and media-related tourism can be described as "...on location tourism which is takes place after the success of a film or drama or any media related materials like animation, documentary movie or advertisement (Beeton, 2005; Chan, 2007). Iwashita states that movies, dramas and literature can impact the travel preferences and destination choices of people as they are exposed to the attributes and attractions of the destinations (Iwashita, 2003). Most of the movies and dramas are often shot at important and popular historical and heritage areas like castles or manors and as a result they become popular tourism destinations after the release of the movies. Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Halong Bay in Vietnam, Maya Bay in Thailand are some of such cases as these destinations saw influx of tourists after being showcased in popular movies (Macionis, 2007).

Some researchers have studied film induced tourism from the perspective of consumers emphasizing more on the behavioral characteristics of the film induced tourists. In this regards the tourists are both the consumers of the movies and dramas and the tourism as well. This view falls under framework developed by Urry's (1990) called tourist gaze. According to this, viewers would be induced to visit the locations that they have gazed upon on the cinema screen. When people intend to visit the places they have seen on the movies and dramas, it is only then they can be considered as movie induced tourists and the phenomena as movie-induced tourism (Riley, Baker, & Doren, 1998). Griffin (2002) suggests that tourism is driven by strong desire to experience new sites and the sights, tastes, ambience and people are crucial to the whole experience so vicarious experiences may affect certain aspects of desire to choose destinations but it may not be the complete(Griffin, 2002).

Movies and dramas can be an effective marketing tool to impart awareness and knowing of a destination and form favorable destination images in order to attract potential visitors. Studies have shown that there is positive correlation between the exposures of locations by movies with people's intention to visit. For instance after release of blockbuster movie, The Lord of Rings, the number of tourists in New Zealand increased by fifty percent. Up to twenty percent of British people travel to locations that they see in the popular movies and dramas (Zhang, 2017).

Hypotheses

Attractiveness of the actors has strong impact on the para-social integration of the viewers. Attractiveness is a complex variable with features like social attraction, physical attraction and task attraction (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Hoffner and Cantor (1991) in their study of mass media characters impact on viewers, found out that attractiveness of the characters was a leading indicator for viewers' motive to choose their favorite dramas. Thus, the hypotheses 1 is proposed as:

H_{1a} Attractiveness of Thai stars has a positive effect on satisfaction of Thai dramas and movies.

H_{1b} Attractiveness of Thai stars has a positive effect on purchase intention for Thai products.

H_{1c} Attractiveness of Thai stars has a positive effect on travel intention in Thailand.

According to Horton & Wohl (1956) media characters offer the continuous relationship to the viewers as they appear regularly and are more predictable and with less unpleasant results. Hogarth (2013) stressed the major role of Asian-ness in the popularity of Korean Wave. These factors help develop emotional attachment with the actors and viewers get more

satisfaction with the sense of identification. Hence, hypotheses 2 is presented as following:

H_{2a} Emotional connectedness with Thai stars has a positive effect on satisfaction of Thai dramas and movies.

H_{2b} Emotional connectedness with Thai stars has a positive effect on purchase intention for Thai products.

H_{2c} Emotional connectedness with Thai stars has a positive effect on travel intention in Thailand.

Audience involvement is defined as the extent of viewers' engagement with movies and dramas (Kim, 2012). This relationship can develop to the level that the viewers start to make virtual friendships with the characters in the movies; a phenomenon termed as "para-social interaction". Viewers even develop sense of intense emotional connection with the characters and start concerning for the characters' wellbeing, imitating their behavior. They start to collect merchandise related to or shown in the popular dramas. Viewers justify their action of imitating the characters by recalling their memorable moments in the movies and feel attached to them (Nam, 2016). Hence hypotheses 3 are proposed as:

H_{3a} Involvement of audience has a positive effect on satisfaction of Thai dramas and movies.

H_{3b} Involvement of audience has a positive effect on purchase intention for Thai products.

H_{3c} Involvement of audience has a positive effect on travel intention in Thailand.

Park & Lessig (1977) introduced reference groups as the real or imaginary group or individual perceived to be significantly relevant for the consumers' aspirations, evaluations or behavior. People are propelled to create and prosper a specific concept or identity of own self and to look for validation from others in the society (Escalas, 2005). They act as the frames of reference for consumers in their process of making purchase decisions. Friendship groups, shopping groups, work groups, virtual communities, and consumer action groups are some of the example of social group or reference group for consumers. Hence, the hypotheses 4 are proposed as below

H_{4a} Consumer's social group of audience has a positive effect on satisfaction of Thai dramas and movies.

H_{4b} Consumer's social group of audience has a positive effect on purchase intention for Thai products.

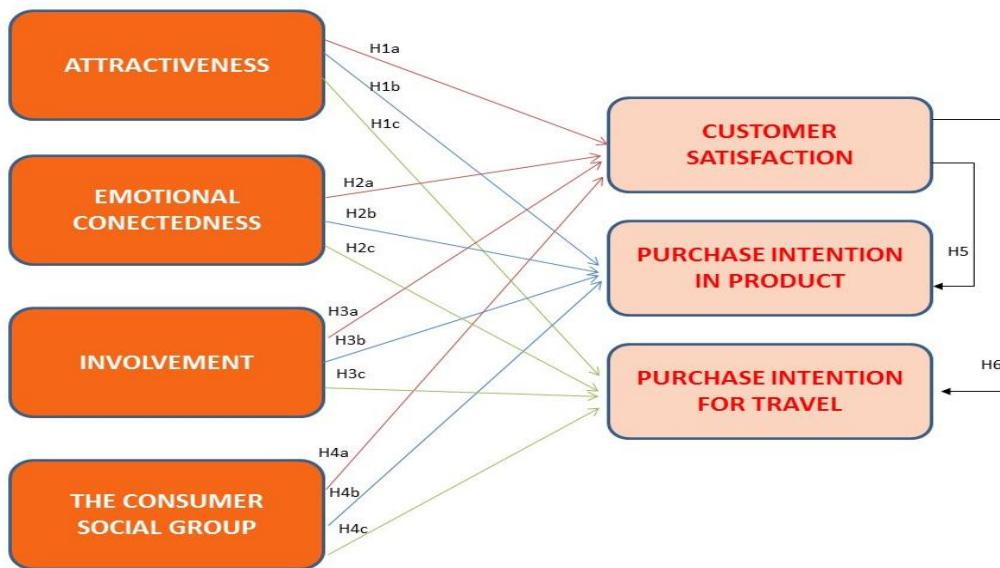
H_{4c} The Consumer's social group of audience has a positive effect on travel intention in Thailand.

Walker (2006) suggested that the purchase intention of any products or brand is strongly influenced by the satisfaction in advertisements of the products. When consumers get a good feeling watching the television advertisements, they tend to buy the products more. The brands displayed in movies and dramas are more popular if such programs are commercially successful. Lee (2015) suggests that the popularity of Korean pop culture induced foreign viewers' interest in Korea and its lifestyle. As the Korean dramas satisfied more viewers, more viewers developed positive intention in travelling to Korea. In this case while the consumers did not have firsthand experience of the products, their satisfaction of the medium drive their purchase intention of products shown in the media programs (Lee, 2015). Thus the hypotheses 5 and 6 are proposed as:

H₅ Satisfaction in Thai dramas and films has a positive effect on consumer purchasing intention in Thai products.

H₆ Satisfaction in Thai dramas has positive influences on travel intention to Thailand.

Based on the above literature review, research framework for this study is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure1** Proposed Research Framework

Source: The framework modified from Won-jun (2015)

Research Methodology

In order to empirically validate research framework proposed on the basis of hypotheses, self-administered questionnaires were sent to Chinese respondents via online media. A total of 430 responses were received from the targeted 1100 potential respondents with a 40.3% response from China City Tier1, 20.5% response from China City Tier2 and 39.2% response from China City Tier3. Respondents with more than one exposure to Thai Cinemas were selected. Sample consists of 69.2% female and 30.8% male. Majority of participants are of age group 21-30 yrs with 57.9%. The sample is fairly educated people with 59.7% having bachelor degree.

The variables of the questionnaire were tested for their validity and reliability using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha for the constructs ranged from 0.774 to 0.933 meaning the data is reliable. Also the value of KMO ranged from 0.702 to 0.883 thus passing the validity test. In order to analyze the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis is conducted in the SPSS with Satisfaction, Purchase Intention and Travel Intention as dependent variables and Attractiveness, Emotional Connectedness, Audience Involvement and Social Groups as independent predictors.

Table 1 Summary of Testing Hypotheses

Hypothesis Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p value	Results
H₁			
a. Attractiveness → Customer Satisfaction	0.119*	0.091	Supported
b. Attractiveness → Purchase Intention	0.101	0.680	Rejected
c. Attractiveness → Travel Intention	0.200***	0.000	Supported
H₂			
a. Emotion Connectedness → Customer Satisfaction	1.099	0.273	Rejected
	0.362***	0.000	Supported
b. Emotion Connectedness → Purchase Intention	0.051	0.382	Rejected
c. Emotion Connectedness → Travel Intention			Supported

Table 1 (Con.)

Hypothesis Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p value	Results
H₃			
a. Involvement → Customer Satisfaction	3.359***	0.001	Supported
b. Involvement → Purchase Intention	0.002	0.961	Rejected
c. Involvement → Travel Intention	0.047	0.247	Rejected
H₄			
a. Social group → Customer Satisfaction	0.834	0.405	Rejected
b. Social group → Purchase Intention	0.464***	0.000	Supported
c. Social group → Travel Intention	0.565***	0.000	Supported
H₅			
Customer Satisfaction → Purchase Intention	0.235***	0.000	Supported
H₆			
Customer Satisfaction → Travel Intention	0.173***	0.001	Supported
Note: * p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.001			

Discussion

With all the measures, it is found that not all consumer behavior variables had significant influences on customer satisfaction. Attractiveness (H1), Emotional Connectedness (H2) and Social Groups (H4) did not have significant influence on viewers' satisfaction of Thai Movies and Dramas. The variable Involvement of audience (H3) was found to have significant positive effective on consumers' satisfaction of Thai Movies and Dramas. This result is in contrary to the results of study by Won Jun Lee in which it was found that the attractiveness of Korean Stars had positive effect on Chinese viewers' TV drama satisfaction (Lee, 2015). In addition, it is found that not all consumer behavior variables had significant influences on customer satisfaction. Attractiveness (H1), Emotional Connectedness (H2) and Social Groups (H4) did not have significant influence on viewers' satisfaction of Thai Movies and Dramas. The variable Involvement of audience (H3) was found to have significant positive effective on consumers' satisfaction of Thai Movies and Dramas. This result is in contrary to the results of study by Won Jun Lee in which it was found that the attractiveness of Korean Stars had positive effect on Chinese viewers' TV drama satisfaction (Lee, 2015).

On purchase intention of Thai product, The Satisfaction of Thai dramas and films is found to have significant positive influences. The two factors Emotional Connectedness (H2) and Social Groups (H4) also showed significant positive influences on purchase intention of Thai products and toward satisfaction. On travel intention in Thailand, the Satisfaction of Thai dramas and films is found to have significant influences. The two factors Attractiveness (H1) and Social Groups (H4) also had significant influences on travel intention in Thailand toward satisfaction. The summary of testing hypotheses is presented in Table 1.

As for the unsupported hypotheses, it may be due different reasons. One possibility may be as Thai Movies and Dramas are still in nascent stage in Chinese media, the viewers there are yet to develop similar kind of affection towards it compared to Korean movies. Also unlike Korean dramas and movies, Chinese viewers associate Thai Actors in different ways.

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to identify the factors that influence Chinese Viewers' satisfaction of Thai TV Dramas and Movies and how it is connected with their purchase intention of Thai products and visit intention of Thailand. It is evident for this study that the Thai entertainment industry can play crucial role in promoting Thai tourism and Thai

products. Satisfaction of Thai movies and dramas could influence viewers to visit Thailand and buy Thai products. So, Thai government must invest on Thai entertainment industry to improve the quality and content of movies and dramas. Media programs should be crafted such that it carries Thai cultural values and beautiful locations. Corporate promotions should be done aggressively in country like China who are the main source of Thai tourism. Thai media programs should be made easily available with Chinese subtitles through official channels or video sharing apps.

This study has some limitations that offer ample of opportunities for future reference. First, the study is on Thai drama or film industry which is yet to break the domestic boundary and make name of itself abroad. In the future as the Thai film industry grows bigger and obtains big fan base, the rejected variables like Attractiveness, Emotional Connectedness and the Consumer's Social groups may be seen significant factors for overall satisfaction.

Also the results are based on data obtained from Chinese viewers through online medium. There can be issues concerned with this sampling approach since it was not possible to check if respondents clearly understood the questions or not. Due to personal reasons or situations at the time of survey, some viewers may have been uninterested to report their true intentions or may be bias. So, more systematic survey is needed in the future for clearer results.

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