

The Effects of Thailand Country Images on Behavioral Intention of Chinese Tourists in Thailand

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Abstract

Tourism plays a considerable supporting role in the Thai economy, and Chinese tourists are the main customers of Thai inbound tourists. The main objective of this study is to discover the influence of the Thailand Country Images on Behavioral Intention of Chinese tourists in Thailand. This study uses questionnaire as the research tool to randomly collect data from 400 Chinese tourists at the airports, shopping malls, and other tourist attractions of Thailand and adopts a number of statistical analysis methods to analyze the data: mean, standard deviation, correlation analysis, and regression analysis via SPSS 17.00. The results show that the total average of the mean score of twelve dimensions of Country Images is high. The top five highest scores are Atmosphere Attractions, Activity Attractions, Price and Value, Landscape and Environment Attractions, and Perceived Image and Satisfaction respectively. In addition, the results indicate a significant effect of Thailand Country Images on Behavioral Intention of Chinese Tourists. Particularly, Thailand Country Images in the dimensions of National Capacity, Activity Attractions, Price and Value, and Perceived Image and Satisfaction, and National System have been found their significant influence on Behavioral Intention of Chinese Tourists. As well, this study provides applicable suggestions for policymakers as well as tourism managers both at national or regional levels to develop better country images and marketing programs for sustainably attract and retain Chinese tourists into the ASEAN country of Thailand.

Keywords: Country Images, Behavioral Intention, Thailand Tourism

Introduction

The context of a slowdown in global economic growth, many countries have taken up the development of tourism, especially inbound tourism. This represents an important engine to stimulate their economic growth and many countries even pursue this as a national building strategy. Tourism plays a supporting role in the Thai economy, and Chinese tourists are the main customers of Thai inbound tourists. This study investigates the impacts of Country Images in twelve dimensions (National System, National Capacity, National Characteristic, National Relationship, Environment Conditions, Landscape and Environment Attractions, Atmosphere Attractions, Activity Attractions, Services Facilities Attractions, Commodity, Price and Value, Perceived Image and Satisfaction) on Behavioral Intention of customers via three dimensions: Consumption Intention, Recommendation Intention, and Revisit Intention. This can enhance the understanding about Country Images of Thailand and Behavioral Intention of Chinese tourists, which is conducive to the development of tourism in Southeast Asian country of Thailand.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to explore the influence of Country Images of Thailand on Behavioral Intention of Chinese tourists. This study could enhance the understanding of the importance of country image in response to behavioral intention of tourists especially from China. Eventually, this may raise awareness among policy makers and managers to focus on image of country or image of tourist destination.

Scope of the Study

1. Population and Sample group

1.1 Population in this study are the Chinese tourists. In 2019, China maintains its position as the largest source of arrivals to Thailand, with almost 11.0 million visitors (Ministry of Tourism & Sports, 2020).

1.2 Sample of this study will randomly be selected from 400 Chinese tourists at the airports, shopping malls, and other tourist attractions of Thailand.

2. The variables used in research

2.1 The independent variable is Thailand Country Images.

2.2 The dependent variable is Chinese Tourist Behavioral Intention.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Thailand Country Images

Since the 1960s, foreign research on Country Images has been widely carried out, but at the beginning, it was in the field of marketing. Research confirmed that consumers' evaluation of products is significantly different because of the origin, which is the "country of origin effect". In the field of international business and marketing,

Country Images (CI) research is closely related to the study of the country-of-origin (COO) (Zhang and Cai, 2011). The earliest investigation of country-of-origin effect is conducted by Schooler (1965). He used Guatemalan students as a sample to study the evaluation of Guatemalan consumers' products in the four Central American countries. The findings indicated that consumers' evaluation of El Salvador and Costa Rican products was lower than that of Mexican and domestic products, thus demonstrating the existence of the country-of-origin effect. Since then, research on the country-of-origin has sprung up. Early studies of country-of-origin effects have focused on differences in evaluations and preferences for products from different countries (Zhang and Cai, 2011). As the research progressed, Roth & Diamantopoulos (2009) proposed the concept of the country-of-origin image (COI). They argued that traditional research merely analyzed whether consumers had different evaluations and preferences for products and brands in different countries, but the study of the image of the country-of-origin could analyze clearly the reasons in which consumers had such different evaluations and preferences.

Country Images is an evaluation of all aspects of a country. The macroscopic Country Images is the sum of the beliefs held in the memory of a country for the consumers, whilst the microscopic Country Images is the sum of the beliefs held by the consumer in the memory of a product from a given country (Lei et al., 2015). According to Scott (1966), "when we think of the country, the overall image of the country emerged in our minds." In this study, researchers want to study the overall image of Thailand, which emerged in Chinese tourists' minds. In order to describe Thailand Country Image systematically, researchers used both "Macro" and "Micro" aspects in studying Country Image. The "Macro-Country Images" are measured by five dimensions as: National System (Nadeau et al., 2008); National Capacity (Knight et al., 2003); National Characteristics (Wang et al., 2012); National Relationship (Wang, 2010); and Environmental Conditions (Lei et al., 2015), whereas seven dimensions of "Micro Country Image" consist of Landscape and Environment Attractions (Chaulagain et al., 2019), Atmosphere Attractions (Beerli & Martin, 2004), Activity Attractions (Lou, 2018), Services and Facilities Attractions (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999), Commodity (Bao et al., 2008), Price and Value (Gallarza et al., 2002), and Perceived image and Satisfaction (Lou, 2018).

Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intention, also called "intention" in psychology, refers to the state of preparation of behavior, which is the behavioral tendency to respond to certain things or phenomena (Fang, 2015). In behavioral theory, behavioral intention is the easiest and most effective way to determine whether a person is performing a given behavior. Asking whether he or she intends to do so by asking. This means that behavioral intention is a tendency for a person to judge that he or she may take some action in the future (Fang, 2015). The behavioral intentions in the field of tourism research mainly include willingness to travel, willingness to pay for premiums, willingness to recommend, and willingness to revisit (Tian, 1999). Correspondingly, Woodside and Lyonski (1989) point out that the intention of tourism behavior is the perceived possibility of potential tourists visiting a destination at a specific time. Behavioral intentions and situational variables jointly predict the actual choices of behaviors of tourists to the destination. Further, Chen and Tsai (2006) argue that the behavior intention of tourists can be the prediction of

the possibility of tourists recommending their destinations and revisiting destinations to their relatives and friends. Likewise, Kozak (2001) define behavioral intentions as the tourists' willingness to repeat participate on certain tourism activities. The re-parade is that tourists are willing to visit the same tourist destination again in a satisfactory state. (Kozak, 2001). All above, to correspond to previous studies, this study measured Behavioral Intention in three dimensions as follows: Consumption Intentions, Revisit Intention, Recommendation Intention (Bai et al., 2012). Fang (2015).

According to the literature discussed above, it can lead to the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis A: *There will be the influence of Thailand Country Images on Chinese Tourist Behavioral Intention in Thailand.*

Methodology

Measurement

Dependent variable of the study is Behavioral Intention in three dimensions: a) Consumption Intention is the purpose of consumers who carry out a specific and intended activity to consume specific products (Zeithaml and Berry, 1996); b) Recommend Intention is the tourist satisfaction based on high willingness to recommend tourist destinations or travelling products or souvenirs to friends and families (Baker and Crompton, 2000); c) Revisit Intention is the willingness to visit the same destination again in a satisfactory mode (Alenmoud and Armstrong, 1996).

Independent variables of the study is Thailand Country Image in twelve dimensions of two aspects: "Macro" and "Micro" aspects. The "Macro-Country Images" are measured by five dimensions as: National System (Nadeau et al., 2008); National Capacity (Knight et al., 2003); National Characteristics (Wang, et al., 2012); National Relationship (Wang, 2010); and Environmental Conditions (Lei, et al., 2015), whereas seven dimensions of "Micro Country Image" consist of Landscape and Environment Attractions (Chaulagain et al., 2019), Atmosphere Attractions (Beerli and Martin, 2004), Activity Attractions (Lou, 2018), Services and Facilities Attractions (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999), Commodity (Bao et al., 2008), Price and Value (Gallarza et al., 2002), and Perceived image and Satisfaction (Lou, 2018).

Data Analysis

Ordinary least square (OLS) regression analysis is adopted to test the hypothesis relationships between Thailand Country Image and Behavioral Intention of Chinese tourists. According to Aulakh et al. (2000), if all dependent, independent and control variables in the research are neither nominal data nor categories data, OLS is the appropriate method for examining the hypotheses' relationships.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability of the measurements was computed by Cronbach alpha coefficients. In the scale of reliability, the coefficient values in this study are greater than 0.70; this can be interpreted as meaning that the scale of all

measures is internally consistent (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Factor analysis is used to test the validity of data in the questionnaire. According to the rule of thumb of Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), if all factor loadings are greater than 0.40 cut-offs and are statistically significant, the validity of instruments is proved. All the results of this study comply with this rule.

Possible problems relating to multi-collinearity occur when two or more independent variables are linearly related very closely. This problem was also monitored. Hair et al., (2006) argue that a correlation with a value above 0.80 should be considered a serious problem. After the simple correlations between independent variables and standard errors of the estimated coefficients had been examined, the data showed that there was no serious multi-collinearity which would distort the efficiency of the estimate. Also, the variance inflation factor (VIF) has been used to check the multi-collinearity problem between the independent variables. The VIF value of this study is below the cut-off value of 10; this indicates that the independent variables do not correlate to any great extent with each other (Neter et al., 1985).

Findings and Discussion

Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand are mostly women (59.5%), aged between 22 to 44 years old (68.3%), and are single (53.5%), with monthly income between 3,001 to 7,000¥ (48.2%). Visitors chiefly have earned the bachelor's degree (59.0%) and travel with friends (32.3%). Most the tourists are not the first time to travel to Thailand (58.5%).

Further, the data show that the total average of the mean score of twelve dimensions of Country Images is high. Five highest are: Atmosphere Attractions, Activity Attractions, Price and Value, Landscape and Environment Attractions, and Perceived Image and Satisfaction respectively. Moreover, the average mean score of three items of Behavioral Intention of Chinese Tourists in Thailand is high: Revisit Intention, followed by Recommend Intentions, and Consumption Intention respectively.

In response to multiple regression analysis, the study can initially create an equation to predict Behavioral Intention (BI) as follows:

$$BI = 0.754 - 0.067AA + 0.112BB + 0.017CC + 0.036DD + 0.005EE + 0.099FF + 0.031GG + 0.166HH - 0.021II + 0.033JJ + 0.131KK + 0.305LL$$

Table 1: Regression Analysis between Thailand Country Images and Overall Behavioral Intention of Chines Tourists in Thailand

Thailand Country Images	Overall Behavioral Intention		t	P-value
	Regression coefficient	Standard Error		
Constant (a)	0.754	0.128	5.870	0.000**
National System	-0.067	0.027	-2.483	0.013*
National Capacity	0.112	0.030	3.789	0.000**
National Characteristics	0.017	0.044	0.399	0.690
National Relationship	0.036	0.037	0.988	0.324
Environmental Conditions	0.005	0.034	0.147	0.883
Landscape and Environment Attractions	0.099	0.049	2.032	0.043*
Atmosphere Attractions	0.031	0.043	0.724	0.470
Activity Attractions	0.166	0.047	3.515	0.000**
Services Facilities Attractions	-0.021	0.041	-0.519	0.604
Commodity	0.033	0.035	0.939	0.348
Price and Value	0.131	0.056	2.351	0.019*
Perceived image and Satisfaction	0.305	0.056	5.451	0.000**
F=83.831 P=0.000 Adj R ² = 0.714				

*With statistical significance level of 0.05

**With statistical significance level of 0.01

The multiple regression analysis indicates that an F-value of 83.831 is significant ($p < 0.001$) ($F = 83.831$; $p = 0.000$ at Table 1), meaning that at least one independent variable has an influence over the dependent variable. The equation above can predict overall Behavioral Intention (BI) due to independent variables: National Capacity, Activity Attractions, Perceived Image and Satisfaction (with significance level of 0.01) and National System, Landscape and Environment Attractions, Price and Value (with significance level of 0.05). The regression can explain 71.4% of the variation of the dependent variable: overall behavioral intention (Adjusted R² is 0.714 at Table 1).

From Table 1, it illustrates National Capacity, Activity Attractions, Perceived Image and Satisfaction (with significance level of 0.01) and National System, Landscape and Environment Attractions, Price and Value (with significance level of 0.05) had positive relationship and impact on Behavioral Intention (BI). These lead to the acceptance of study hypothesis. When taking significant independent variable in dimensions of National System, National Capacity, Landscape and Environment Attractions, Activity Attractions, Price and Value, and Perceived image and Satisfaction to create predicted equation for predicting the overall Behavioral Intention, the data show the predicted equation below.

$$BI = 0.791 - 0.059AA + 0.116BB + 0.113FF + 0.185HH + 0.146KK + 0.340LL$$

Table 2: Revised Regression Analysis between Thailand Country Images and Overall Behavioral Intention of Chinese Tourists in Thailand

Thailand Country Image	Behavioral Intention		t	P-value
	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error		
Constant(a)	0.791	0.120	6.579	0.000**
National System	-0.059	0.024	-2.483	0.013*
National Capacity	0.116	0.025	4.698	0.000**
Landscape and Environment Attractions	0.113	0.044	2.573	0.010
Activity Attractions	0.185	0.040	4.642	0.000**
Price and Value	0.146	0.054	2.683	0.008**
Perceived image and Satisfaction	0.340	0.049	6.879	0.000**
F=168.044 P=0.000 Adj R ² = 0.715				

*With statistical significance level of 0.05

**With statistical significance level of 0.01

The multiple regression analysis indicates that an F-value of 168.044 is significant ($p < 0.001$) ($F = 168.044$; $p = 0.000$ at Table 2), meaning that at least one independent variable has an influence over the dependent variable. The equation above can predict overall Behavioral Intention (BI) due to independent variables: National Capacity, Activity Attractions, Price and Value, and Perceived Image and Satisfaction (with significance level of 0.01) and National System (with significance level of 0.05). The regression can explain 71.5% of the variation of the dependent variable: overall behavioral intention (Adjusted R² is 0.715 at Table 2).

Discussion

Effects of Thailand Country Image toward to Behavioral Intention of Chinese Tourists can be found from this study. This is partly consistent with previous studies. Rittichainuwat et al., (2001) used logistic regression to test the hypothesis about how Thailand's image affects the likelihood that travelers would visit again. Their result for the goodness of fit and parameter estimated of the positive regression model is achieved. This confirms the result of this study. As well, Sarunya Lertputtarak (2012) finds her results that image of Thai food has a positive relationship with an intention to revisit. "The R² value was 0.154, which means that 15.4% of the total variance in the dependent variable could be explained by the independent variables in the model" Sarunya Lertputtarak (2012).

Country Image plays a critical role in today's business environment. Organisations or government cannot overlook the importance of Thailand Country Image in the current global economy. Modern tourism depend heavily on implementing good country image to drive their tourism operations. This study result supports the research

hypothesis of the study. Furthermore, to support the result of this study, correspondingly, Chen (2015) analysed the current situation of Chinese tourism in Thailand from his study in that: (1) Chinese tourists whose choose "personal leave" as a higher proportion of tourism reaching 56.3% would travel to Thailand mainly during public holidays and Golden Week as style travel of tour trip; (2) The male tourists to Pattaya in Thailand are greater in number than those of female tourists; (3) In the tourism product preferences, the 40-year-old tourists are the main tourists group; 75% tend to enjoy the coastal natural scenery; (4) Chinese tourists who travel to Pattaya emphasise on the importance of arrangement of tourist attractions and guided tours. In addition, they are also concerned about the diet and entertainment. The reasons leading to the slight different research results from this study may arise from: firstly, survey object (destination) are different, which may cause different results due to different specific destinations; also, the survey time is different, which triggers to different results according to different development of tourism in Thailand.

Likewise, the result of this study is similar to that of Koo (2013). He indicated that the better the image of a tourist destination, the higher the behavioral intention of revisiting. Revisit behavioral intentions can be divided into two broad categories: direct access behavior intention and indirect access behavior intention. The direct access behavior intention is the plan to visit tourist destination or similar place again; the indirect access behavior intention is the willingness to recommend satisfactory tourist destination to the surrounding people, and the indirect access behavior intention is also called recommendation behavior intention or oral intention.

Furthermore, the findings of this study positively corresponds to those of Ajzen and Driver (1992) that point out that attitude perceived control and subjective norm are important components that affect intention and also still has a direct impact on behavior. In this study, attitude manifested as perceived image and satisfaction of country image. As well, according to Wong & Zhao (2016), their research is based on data from Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries to analyse the Country Images of China, the United States, and Japan from a multidimensional comparison perspective and they conclude that the National System has a positive impact on China–Thailand relationships and promotes the development of Thai tourism; this confirms the conclusion mentioned earlier.

Contributions

Theoretical Contribution

In the first place, this study considerably contributes to the body of knowledge in understanding the effect of Country Images on Behavioral Intention of tourist. Secondly, this study indicates twelve dimensions of Thailand Country Images and the impact of each dimension on the Behavioral Intentions of Chinese tourist. To sum up, this study not only provides data support for relevant theoretical models but also lays a further foundation for deeper influence of Country Image on Behavioral Intention.

Managerial Contributions

The study results have managerial implications for policy maker as well as tourism managers both in

national or regional levels to develop better country images and marketing programs for sustainably attract and retain Chinese tourists into the ASEAN country of Thailand. Firstly, this study help the policy makers and tourism managers to identify and justify the key components of Thailand Country Images (National System, National Capacity, Landscape and Environment Attractions, Atmosphere Attractions, Activity Attractions, Commodity, Price and Value and Perceived Image and Satisfaction) that could be more essential in current severely competitive business environment. Further, grounding on the result of this study, especially the significance of National Capacity influencing on Behavioral Intention of Chinese tourist; this can be a guideline for the policy makers to focus on formulating long-term and stable tourism policies aimed at improving National Capacity. Moreover, Perceived Image and Satisfaction has the most positive influence on Behavioral Intention of Chinese tourist. These could be evidences for tourism managers to improve products or services to achieve a successful competition and sustainable development in the future. In a word, policy makers, mass media and tourism managers raising awareness of shaping a great Thailand Country Images will certainly contribute to the long-term and stable development of Thailand tourism industry.

Limitation of the Study and Future Research Agenda

The limitation of the present study is the shortcomings identified in all survey-based research. A weakness of regarding questionnaires as an “objective” approach, followed by rigorous and quantifiable analysis, is that it may seek to elicit opinions which respondents are unwilling to articulate. Following the survey approach prevents the present researcher from undertaking an in-depth investigation of the influence of Country Image on Behavioral Intention in the ASEAN context of Thailand, which the qualitative method would enable. In this respect, an interpretivist/qualitative approach might provide a deeper knowledge and understanding of certain aspects.

The results of this study indicate that the need for further research in apparent. Firstly, this study is collected data only from Chinese tourists in Thailand, so future research could investigate the effects of the antecedent variable on Country Images in different countries or different tourist groups in order to confirm the findings with this study, to verify the generalisability, and to increase the level of reliability. Secondly, the result in this study finds that National System has negatively effected on Behavioral Intention that is different from previous studies; it needs to be explored further in future research. Finally, this study uses questionnaires to collect the data and is explored through cross-sectional survey. Therefore, further research may be developed longitudinal data or mixed methods designed to ascertain the effect of Country Images on Behavioral Intentions of tourists.

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