THE IMPACT OF TRAVEL EXPERIENCE ON DESTINATION LOYALTY TO BANGKOK

อิทธิพลของประสบการณ์เดินทางที่มีต่อความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทางการท่องเที่ยวของกรุงเทพมหานคร

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Abstract

Travel experience is an important element of tourists' journey, especially overseas travel. However, little effort has been explored on its relationship with destination loyalty. Understanding the impact of the travel experience on destination loyalty will benefit the destination managers in developing appropriate tourism strategy. This study therefore has an objective to examine the impact of travel experience on destination loyalty to Bangkok. Data were collected from 284 international tourists visiting Bangkok through a convenience sampling method, and were analyzed by the multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that travel experience in relation to tourism resources, local hospitality, and safety were found to affect tourists' destination loyalty to Bangkok. Recommendations are given to promote repeat visitors to Bangkok.

Keywords: travel experience, destination loyalty, Bangkok

บทคัดย่อ

ประสบการณ์เดินทางอาจกล่าวได้ว่าเป็นองค์ประกอบที่สำคัญของการเดินทางท่องเที่ยว โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งการเดินทางท่องเที่ยวต่างประเทศ อย่างไรก็ตาม การศึกษาในเรื่องความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างประสบการณ์เดินทางกับความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทางการท่องเที่ยวยังมีอยู่อย่างจำกัด การเข้าใจถึงอิทธิพลของประสบการณ์เดินทางที่มีต่อการเดินทางมาท่องเที่ยวซ้ำของนักท่องเที่ยวจะเป็นประโยชน์ต่อผู้บริหารด้านการท่องเที่ยวในพื้นที่เพื่อจัดทำกลยุทธ์การตลาดที่เหมาะสมเพื่อดึงดูดนักท่องเที่ยวให้กลับมาท่องเที่ยวซ้ำ ดังนั้น การวิจัยในครั้งนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์การวิจัยเพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพลของประสบการณ์เดินทางที่มีต่อความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทางของกรุงเทพมหานคร โดยเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติจำนวน 284 คน โดยใช้การเลือกตัวอย่างแบบโควตา และวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยการวิเคราะห์การถดถอยพหุคูณ (Multiple regression analysis) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ประสบการณ์เดินทางในด้านสิ่งดึงดูดใจทางการท่องเที่ยว อัธยาศัยไมตรีในการต้อนรับนักท่องเที่ยว และความปลอดภัย มีอิทธิพลต่อความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทางการท่องเที่ยวของกรุงเทพมหานครอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ งานวิจัยในครั้งนี้จึงได้ให้ข้อเสนอแนะเพื่อส่งเสริม

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ให้นักท่องเที่ยวกลับมาเยือนกรุงเทพมหานครอีกครั้ง

คำสำคัญ: ประสบการณ์เดินทาง ความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทาง กรุงเทพมหานคร

Introduction

With the rapid growth of tourism industry in Thailand, toady tourism has been regarded as one of the most important tools used to boost economies and promote country's development. The growth of tourism in Southeast Asia has developed very fast and each country is attempting to promote tourism to generate revenues to the countries (Marzuki, 2012). Every nation has developed various marketing campaigns to persuade tourists to visit its state by promoting attractive tourist destinations, local culture, food, architecture, folklore and man-made tourist attractions. As tourism industry makes lots of benefits to the country, the Thai government has established various national policies to develop Thailand's tourism continuously. Thailand, the leading tourism state of the ASEAN, has various major tourist attractions located in different parts of the country both natural and cultural heritages. Among the major tourist destinations, Bangkok, the nation's capital, is one of the most famous places among international tourists. With the attractiveness of Bangkok, millions of international tourists visit Bangkok each year.

When tourists visit a destination, they will experience or expose to the destination environment (tourist attractions, people, services, and infrastructure) in different ways. Tourists' travel experience may be both positive and negative outputs. Given the positive travel experience, tourists may be likely to revisit the destination or share their favorable travel experience to others (Kim & Brown, 2012). However, with the negative travel experience, they may be not satisfied with the destination and would not return (Kim & Brown, 2012). Moreover, they may spread the negative word-of mouth to other as well. Thus, travel experience is regarded as one of the important elements for the tourism industry and associated with destination loyalty (Mechinda, Serirat & Gulid, 2009; Mohamad & Ghani, 2014). However, there are limited studies exploring tourists' travel experience and destination loyalty in relation to Thailand's tourism industry, particularly their travel experience in Bangkok. This study therefore has an objective to investigate the impact of travel experience on destination loyalty to Bangkok by focusing on international tourists. Understanding the relationship between travel experience and destination loyalty will help the local authorities develop appropriate tourism strategies to attract and increase a number of repeat tourists to Bangkok.

Literature Review

Travel experience

According to the literature, travel experience refers to the exposure of tourists to tourism environment (e.g. tourist attractions, local people,

culture) and the interaction between tourists and service providers (tourism business, facilities). Travel experience may occur through tourists' engagement, involvement, perception and participation in events, activities, or tourist attractions of the destinations (Kim & Brown, 2012). In other words, travel experience may relate to what tourists see, feel, meet, or contact with tourism suppliers and destination features. In general, a destination is the location of a cluster of attractions and related tourist facilities/services (Andriotis, Agiomirgianakis & Mihiotis, 2009). It may argue that when tourists visit a particular destination with positive travel experience, they are more likely to be happy or satisfied with their trips, and later they may come back to the same destination. In this sense, tourists with positive experience of products, services, and other resources provided by tourism destinations could produce repeat visits (loyalty) and word-of-mouth effects to their friends or relatives (Chi & Qu, 2008). Hence, assessing tourists' travel experience may help destination authorities/planners in understanding of the destination attributes that may have the impact on tourists' positive experience and their intentions to revisit to the destination.

Destination loyalty

Destination loyalty refers to tourists' intention to revisit the same destination, and their intention to recommend the destination to their friends/relatives (Toyama & Yamada, 2012). It is also defined as the whole feeling and attitudes that encourage travelers to revisit a particular destination (Hsu et al., 2008). The concept of destination loyalty has been widely examined among tourism scholars to develop effective ways to attracts more tourists to their destinations (Kim & Brown, 2012; Toyama & Yamada, 2012; Mechinda, Serirat & Guild, 2009; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Destination loyalty is regarded an important indicator used to develop competitive advantages of the destination and effective marketing strategy (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In general, destination loyalty may be measured through tourist's intention to revisit the same destination, and their intention to recommend the destination to others (Toyama & Yamada, 2012). Of these two measures, repeat visitation is considered as a very strong indicator of future behavior (Mechinda, Serirat & Guild, 2009).

Related studies on destination loyalty

A review of literature indicates that there are some related studies regarding tourists' destination loyalty to Bangkok. McDowall & Ma (2010), for example, compared international and Thai tourists' intention to revisit Bangkok. The study revealed that both groups differed in their intention to revisit Bangkok due to travel distance and trip price. The study has found that image and tourism attractions in Bangkok contributed to tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, and intention to recommend Bangkok to others. In addition, safety & security also played an important role to tourists' intention for both groups to revisit and recommending Bangkok

to others. Furthermore, McDowall (2010) also compared first-time and repeat international tourists on their satisfaction and destination loyalty in Bangkok. The study disclosed that both groups were satisfied with the beautiful architectural buildings and historical sites, shopping opportunities and cultural sightseeing. First-time and repeat visitors differed in their views of Bangkok as being an amazing place, the hospitality of residents, and the quality of goods/services. Both groups would revisit Bangkok and recommend it to others. A recent study by Thiumsak & Ruangkanjanases (2016) examined the factors influencing international visitors to revisit Bangkok. The findings revealed that accommodation, shopping, and attitude of Thai people positively influenced international tourists' intention to visit Bangkok. In addition, the study found that most respondents were likely to revisit and recommend Bangkok to their families and friends.

In international tourism literature, there are some studies on destination loyalty. For example, Chi & Qu (2008) examined the impact of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. The study revealed that tourists' destination loyalty was influenced by high satisfaction. The study suggested destination managers focus on establishing a high tourists' satisfaction level so as to create positive post-purchase tourist behavior. Kim & Brown (2012) examined the impact of perceived travel experience on destination loyalty. The findings indicated that discovering new experience, adventure experience, and

geological attractions had the potential to influence return behavior. Another study by Toyama & Yamada (2012) explored the relationships between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty in Takayama City, Japan. The findings disclosed that the overall satisfaction had a direct influence on destination loyalty. The study suggested that destination authorities reduce the risk of unsatisfactory experience by improving destination's services and quality in order to create tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty.

In sum, although there are some studies investigating Bangkok's destination loyalty, there is a lack of empirical studies examining the impact of tourists' travel experience on destination loyalty to Bangkok. Since travel experience is the important variable associated with destination loyalty, understanding the impact of tourists' travel experience on destination loyalty will assist the local authorities to further develop their policies, plans and strategies to promote tourism and repeat visitors to Bangkok.

Methodology

The samples in this study were Asian and European tourists (aged 20 years older and over) who traveled independently to Bangkok. This is because Asian and European tourists are the important markets for Bangkok's tourism. Since the number of Asian tourists visiting Bangkok is 2-3 times greater than European tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2015), thus, a quota sampling method was employed

in this study on a proportion of 70:30 (Asians: Europeans). Data were collected at major tourist attractions in Bangkok through a closed-ended and self-administered questionnaire. During the survey in January 2016, the respondents were asked if they would be interested to participate in the survey. Once they agreed, questionnaires were distributed on site and collected by researcher team (researcher and college students). All research respondents received small souvenirs for their participation. A total usable of 284 questionnaires were obtained during the survey. The questionnaire for measuring tourists' travel experience was developed from a review of related studies (Kim & Brown; 2012; Thiumsak & Ruangkanjanases, 2016). What to measure on travel experience were adapted in accordance with tourists' exposure to tourism suppliers, destination attributes, and tourism environ-ment. Sampled statement was for example, "I appreciate Thai culture and local way of life". Respondents were asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point likert scale (5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree).

With regard to destination loyalty, most prior studies have measured destination loyalty on two items: (1) the intention to revisit the destination in the future and (2) the likelihood to recommend the destination to other people (Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim & Brown, 2012; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Following the literature, this study asked the respondents to rate their intention to revisit Bangkok in the near future (1-3 years), and their likelihood to recommend Bangkok to their relatives/friends by using a 5-point Likert scale (1=least likely and 5=most likely).

A reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was performed for tourists' travel experience with a result of 0.85, exceeding the minimum standard (0.80) (Hair et al., 2006). The validity test (face validity) was also undertaken to check the content quality of the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, S.D.) were used to describe respondents' profile, mean score of travel experience and destination loyalty while inferential statistics (multiple regression analysis) were used to analyze the impact of travel experience (independent variable) on destination loyalty (dependent variable). All statistical tests were performed at the .05 level of significance.

Findings

Table 1 Profile of respondents

Characteristics	Descriptions	Number (n=284)	Percent (100%)
Gender	Male	164	58.0%
	Female	120	42.0%
Age	20-30 years	74	26.0%
	31-45 years	108	38.0%
	46-59 years	88	31.0%
	60 years or older	14	5.0%
Marital status	Married	176	62.0%
	Single	88	31.0%
	Divorced/Separated/Widowed	20	7.0%
Education	Bachelor degree	145	51.0%
	Master degree or higher	105	37.0%
	High school or lower	34	12.0%
Occupation	Company employee	72	25.0%
	Business owner	60	21.0%
	Independent/self-employed	42	15.0%
	Government officer	34	12.0%
	University student	28	10.0%
	Housewife	20	7.0%
	Unemployment	17	6.0%
	Retired	11	4.0%
Monthly Income	USD 1,000 or lower	42	15.0%
	USD 1,001-2,500	110	39.0%
	USD 2,501-3,500	104	36.0%
	USD 3,501-or higher	28	10.0%
Number of visit to Bangkok	First time	217	76.0%
	2-3 times	56	20.0%
	4 times and more	11	4.0%
Tourist region base	Asia	198	70%
	Europe	86	30%

According to table 1, most of the respondents (58%) were males and 42% were females. Most of them were in the age group of 31-45 years (38%) and 46-59 years old (31%). More than half were married (62%), and the majority (51%) had education at the college level. The respondents came from different occupations, for example, 25% were company employees, 21% were business owner, 15% were self-employed, and 12% were government officers. Approximately 39% had monthly income in the range of USD 1,001-2,500 while 36% had income in the range of USD 2,501-3,500. Most of them (76%) were first time visitor, while 20% visited Bangkok 2-3 times, and 4% return to Bangkok 4 times and more. Among 284 respondents, they came from Asia (70%) and Europe (30%).

Table 2 Mean score of tourists' perception on travel experience in Bangkok

Travel experience in Bangkok	Mean	S.D.
1. I have seen a wide range of tourist attractions.	4.32	0.99
2. I have seen a lot of Thai temples in the city.	4.30	0.61
3. I appreciate Thai culture and local way of life.	4.25	0.75
4. I feel local people are friendly to tourists.	4.21	0.94
5. I experience service staff are nice and helpful.	4.17	0.86
6. I have seen a lot of cultural attractions in the city.	4.09	0.76
7. I enjoy a variety of shopping places and entertainment.	4.05	0.74
8. I enjoy a reasonable price of living in Bangkok.	4.14	0.85
9. I experience a standard service on accommodation.	4.12	0.81
10. I enjoy eating Thai food.	4.08	0.75
11. I experience a standard on food service and restaurants.	3.97	0.78
12. I enjoy night life in Bangkok.	3.85	0.84
13. I feel local vendors are honest and sincere.	3.80	0.77
14. I experience hygienic food.	3.75	0.70
15. I feel safe when traveling within the city.	3.68	0.64
16. I experience easy accessibility/ traveling within the city.	3.48	0.66
17. I experience Bangkok as a clean city.	3.42	0.72

(5 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree)

Table 2 shows the mean score ranking of tourists' opinions on their travel experience in Bangkok. The top three most favorable travel experience in Bangkok were 1) a wide range of tourist attractions (mean = 4.32), 2) a lot of Thai temples (mean = 4.30), and 3) appreciating Thai culture (mean = 4.25). While the least two favorable travel experience in Bangkok (mean score below 3.50) are 1) transportation system (mean = 3.48) and 2) city cleanliness (mean = 3.42).

Table 3 Mean score of destination loyalty to Bangkok

Destination loyalty	Mean	S.D.
1. Likelihood to return to Bangkok	4.16	0.77
2. Likelihood to recommend Bangkok to friends, family, relatives	4.11	0.89

Table 3 shows mean score of respondents' opinions on Bangkok's loyalty. Based on the finding, the respondents rated their likelihood to return to Bangkok with an average score of 4.16 while the likelihood to recommend Bangkok to their friends, families, and relative was rated scored at 4.11.

Table 4 Factor analysis of travel experience

Factor dimensions (Cronbach's alpha)	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Factor Mean
Factor 1: Tourism attraction (alpha = 0.88)		5.38	32.12	4.20
A wide range of tourist attractions	0.88			
Cultural attractions	0.82			
Thai food	0.75			
Thai culture	0.73			
Temples	0.71			
Factor 2: People & local hospitality (alpha = 0.81)		2.82	15.18	4.06
Friendliness of local people	0.81			
Hospitality of service staff	0.77			
Honesty of local vendors	0.74			
Factor 3: Services and facilities (alpha = 0.78)		1.64	10.26	3.94
Shopping & entertainment	0.88			
Accommodation	0.86			
Food service	0.82			
Night life	0.75			
Local transportation	0.72			
Cost of living	0.61			
Factor 4: Safety & cleanliness (alpha = 0.73)		1.30	8.78	3.62
Tourist safety	0.80			
City cleanliness	0.79			
Food hygiene	0.61			
Total variance explained	66.34%			

According to table 4, a factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to group travel experience items. Five travel experience factors were derived from the factor analysis of 17 travel experience items. They were labeled as 1) tourism attraction 2) people & local hospitality 3) services & facilities, and 4) safety & cleanliness. Among them, tourism attraction was the most favorable travel experience factor (mean=4.20). In this study, all travel experience factors had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and the items in each dimension had a factor loading greater than 0.4. In addition, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the internal consistency of items within each factor. The test showed that the alpha coefficients for the five factors ranged from 0.73 to 0.88, well above the minimum value of 0.6 as an indication of reliability (Hair et al., 2006). Thus, all five satisfaction factors were retained for the final structure for regression analysis.

Table 5 Regression analysis of travel experience factors on destination loyalty

Travel experience factors	Beta	t-value	Sig.	Multicollinearity (VIF value)
1. Tourism attraction	0.35	2.28	0.00[*]	1.28
2. People & local hospitality	0.26	2.31	0.00[*]	1.42
3. Services and facilities	0.11	0.78	0.68	1.11
4. Safety and cleanliness	0.22	0.82	0.01[*]	1.34

R^2 = 0.531

Adjusted R^2 = 0.524

Table 5 shows the finding of regression analysis and its coefficients (beta) indicating the relationships between independent variables (travel experience factors) and dependent variable (destination loyalty). The finding is expressed in terms of beta coefficient, which is a standardized regression coefficient that allows for a direct comparison between coefficients as to their relative explanatory power of the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2006). The finding indicates that 1) tourism attraction, 2) people & local hospitality, and 3) safety & cleanliness had the impacts on destination loyalty (p<0.05), and their relationships were positive. Among the three values of coefficient, the tourism attraction is a more powerful variable (coefficient = 0.35) than the other two variables in explaining tourist loyalty. This may suggests that tourism attraction is the most important factor influencing tourist loyalty to Bangkok, followed by people & local hospitality (coefficient = 0.26) and safety & cleanliness (coefficient = 0.22). This may imply that the respondents who have positive travel experience

with these three factors are more likely to revisit Bangkok or recommend Bangkok to others. However, the travel experience like services & facilities was not found to be associated with the destination loyalty in this study. This suggests that this factor is not a significant explanatory variable in destination loyalty. Table 5 shows that the VIF values ranging from 1.06 to 1.47 (less than max value of 10) (Hair et al., 2006). This indicates that the regression model used in this study is acceptable to determine the effect of independent variables on the dependent variables.

Discussion and Recommendation

This study had the objective to investigate the impact of travel experience on destination loyalty in Bangkok by focusing on international tourists. The finding of the study contributes to gaining a better understanding on the determinants of Bangkok loyalty. According to the results, travel experience in relation to tourism attraction, people & local hospitality, and safety & cleanliness were found to have the significant impacts on the destination loyalty in a positive direction. This result is similar to previous studies (McDowall & Ma, 2010; Thiumsak & Ruangkanjanases, 2016) indicating that tourism attraction such as culture, tourist attractions, and temples play an important role in drawing international tourists in visiting Bangkok. In particular, people and local hospitality also were found to have the influence on tourists' intention to revisit Bangkok. This finding corresponds to previous research in Thailand and international

context (Kim & Brown, 2012; Thiumsak & Ruangkanjanases, 2016) revealing that local people is an important factoring influencing tourists' likelihood to revisit the same destination such as Thailand, Malaysia and Australia. For instance, disclosed that the friendliness of local people is the important destination attribute related to destination loyalty in Malaysia. Given past studies on this related topic, they could help justify in that Bangkok is the capital of Kingdom of Thailand. It is one of the oldest capitals in the ASEAN countries. Being the capital and the tourism hub of the country, Bangkok has a wide range of tourist attractions such as the Grand Palace, old temples, cultural/historical attractions, and entertainment activities. Moreover, past research (McDowall & Ma, 2010; Thiumsak & Ruangkanjanases, 2016) has indicated that the friendliness of local people as well as Thai hospitality from tourism services generate high tourist satisfaction. Given a variety of tourist attractions, the friendliness of the Thai people as well as a better tourist security in the current situation (2015 - 2016), it is not surprising that a number of international tourists revisit Bangkok and spread their positive word-of-mouth about Bangkok and Thailand to others.

Based on the current findings, the government and local authorities are therefore the key players in order to promote international tourists' revisitation to Bangkok. They may work together to establish Bangkok's tourism plans and strategies in order to manage these attributes (i.e. tourism resources, Thai hospitality, and safety). For instance (for a short plan),

in order to maintain and manage Bangkok's tourism resources (e.g. cultural/historical attractions), protection policy, conservation plan, and legal action should be seriously taken into consideration. These resources should be inspected and monitored to ensure they are well maintained by related parties (McDowall & Ma, 2010). In particular, the sustainable management approach should be emphasized/implemented in the current plan as well. In addition (a long plan), the government and local authorities should build the awareness and campaign for local people (including residents, venders, service staff) for being the good hosts in welcoming and assisting foreign visitors in Bangkok since the study indicated that people and their hospitality/friendliness had the impact on destination loyalty. Regular campaigns or related activities may be established to build a good relationship between them such as food festival, cultural events or other social events. Also, safety & cleanliness should be attended. For tourist safety, local authorities and tourism polices should closely work together by providing more channels/information for emergency contact and having officials regularly visit the tourism sites throughout the city. City cleanliness is also a big issue for Bangkok. The major party like Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) should be a key player to cope with this problem. The city planning for garbage issue should be highlighted in terms of staff and garbage bins in major tourist attractions throughout the city. Furthermore, a concept of "Green Bangkok" or "Keep Bangkok Green" may be campaigned (through various media) and undertaken among local people, business sector and tourists to reduce the garbage problem.

As for the research limitations, this study used a convenience sampling method and the results obtained may not be generalized to the overall international tourists to Bangkok. Future research may compare the result of each major markets visiting Bangkok such as Asia, Europe, Oceania, and North America to increase the generalizability of the finding. In addition, there may be some other factors affecting destination loyalty such as destination image and travel motivation. Thus, it is advisable for future studies to investigate these factors on the relationship with destination loyalty to gain a better understanding on the determinants of destination loyalty in Bangkok.

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