

The Relationships Between Destination Branding and Destination Selection: A Study of Generation Y in Bangkok

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the relationships between destination branding and the choice of destination of Generation Y in Bangkok, to propose the development of the destination to be recognized and chosen by tourists. This is a qualitative study whose data was collected by interviewing 150 key informants in four central locations of Bangkok: Sathorn, Silom, Siam, and Ari, where the business centers and office buildings are located. The results show that Generation Y in Bangkok travels more domestically during and after Covid-19. There is a relationship between destination branding and destination selection by Generation Y in Bangkok, as they want to travel to a destination where they can showcase themselves on social media. Generation Y travels throughout the year to refresh themselves from their daily duties and responsibilities. Coasts and historical sites are the most popular destinations because there are plenty of activities for them and their family to do, both indoors and outdoors. To be considered as a destination, many destinations need to improve their branding and other facilities and stand out from other places.

Keywords: Destination Branding, Relationship, Destination Selection, Bangkok, Generation Y

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Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry has rapidly grown and become a core product in the global trading system. Thailand depends greatly on this business sector and its revenue generated is used to develop the country in various areas (Agarwal and Kariyapol, 2018). In the past decade, revenue from this industry ranked in the top two in comparison to the income from other industries, export, and agriculture sectors. Thus, tourism and hospitality businesses are the economic driving force and economic expansion leading to employment, income distribution, as well as an investment within a destination and country (Monica and Olimpia, 2020). At present, travelers' expectations and behaviors have changed due to the global economic situation and technological advancement (Adisornprasert, 2019). They consider well development in tourist areas including branding, image, activities, and marketing to make the destination more attractive (Agarwal and Kariyapol, 2018). These expectations have forced the tourism business to respond to the demands of the target travelers. Destination branding is introduced to create awareness, differentiation, and loyalty to the destination (Barreto et al., 2019).

Nowadays, Generation Y is the world's largest group of consumers and workers. They play the greatest role in directing and influencing the global economy because of a working-age population with high purchasing power leading them to be the most powerful consumer (OKMD, 2017; Lerspipatthananon, 2018). A work-life balance concept is concerned and applied to their lives, so they demand leisure time to travel and relax. In Thailand, Generation Y is considered 33% of the total population groups, and most of them work in Bangkok where career opportunities are available in various businesses (OKMD, 2017). Generation Y considers a destination based on activities, expenditure, management, and reputation of an area (Mongkol, 2020). Thus, the destination branding strategy is applied to promote a unique identity and create destination recognition for this population group.

Research Objective

This paper is to study the relationships between destination branding and destination selection of Generation Y in Bangkok. Specifically, the objectives are.

1. To study the seasons, types of destination, and activities that Generation Y prefers to travel.
2. To study the relationships between destination branding and destination selection of Generation Y in Bangkok.

Literature Review

Tourism and Destination Branding

Tourism is the temporary travel of a person from one place to another and return to their original place of residence. Normally, traveling is not directly for professional purposes as some involve business and MICE activities (World Tourism Organization, 2022). Thailand is one of the world's leading travel destinations with various tourism resources and attractions, for example, natural and man-made resources, lifestyles, traditions, cultures, and unique characteristics of the destination. (Chittangwattana, 2015). In Thailand, many destinations and activities depend on the climate and season. Northern provinces are selected in winter for experiencing cold weather and mist but the southern area is rejected due to the monsoon season. While in summer, the beaches, coastlines, and islands are popular where people experience full of activities. However, rainy season causes trouble for tourism in the country, the tourism statistics throughout the year indicates that rainy season is the season which people travel the least because of a difficult journey and the wetness of the rain (Kattiyavong, 2019). Thus, weather and season are the important factors for people to decide the place to travel including represent the senses and image of the locations in the different period (Chinwanno, 2020).

Destination Branding and Destination Selection

Barreto et al. (2019) defined destination branding as a set of meanings and experiences that express, in the form of differentiating elements, a promise of value for a specific place. The destination brand is used as a marketing tool linked to the search for positive feelings and sensations aimed at representing the potential experience of the tourist visiting the destination. Cardona et al. (2017), Ahmadova (2018), and Barreto et al. (2019) found a positive correlation between destination branding and destination selection. Their studies indicated the destination branding affect the visit intention and travel motivation of tourists. Moreover, the destination with well management will be able to motivate people to select the area for their next travel plan.

At present, tourists' behavior and expectations have changed because of global economic situation (Adisornprasert, 2019). Destination branding is introduced to the competitive market to differentiate tourism product and service in the area, to create a memorable service experience and to gain competitive advantages (Phangnga et al., 2017). It is the strategy used to develop and promote unique identity, image, and differentiation from other destinations (Ahmadova, 2018). The destination branding aims to create destination recognitions, memorable experiences, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty. Generally, travelers consider various factors in selecting the destination including information of the destination, location's reputation, and expenditure of the trip (Cardona et al., 2017).

Information is a significant factor in tourist's decision-making (Matikiti-Manyevere and Hattingh, 2020). The study of Cavalheiro et al. (2021) pointed that accessibility to destination information is important. The ease and convenience of accessing useful and accurate information increase the interest of tourists to the area and the opportunity for the destination to be selected. Walsh and Apivantanaporn (2015) also indicated public relations activities through communication channels, both online and offline platform, will make people more interested and choose to visit the area.

The reputation of a destination creates awareness and recognition to the area (Matikiti-Manyevere and Hattingh, 2020). The relationship between famous places and destination selection is found in the study of Barreto et al. (2019) who presented that tourists seek memorable experiences and life acceptance. When people visit popular destinations, the sense of socialization arises as they perceive themselves to be a part of well-known place and widely discuss about the visited destination in social media.

Expenditure is a financial factor that affects the travel decision and travel-related activities (Ahmadova, 2018). Monica and Olimpia (2020) studied the framework of destination competitiveness and found the positive relationship between travel expenditure and destination selection. It is important for tourists to spend money at the reasonable price compared to their expectation. The destination must develop value-added products and services to raise travelers' awareness towards worthwhile destination, to create satisfaction, and to become destination choice of tourists.

Generation Y: Characteristics and Travel Behavior

Generation Y is a demographic characterized by people who were born between 1980s to 1990s. They have attitudes and ways of life which are clearly different from the previous generation: Generation X. They are ambitions and striving for success. Generation Y is highly individual, wants a flexible lifestyle, seeks for better job opportunities, and travels in leisure time. Nowadays, Generation Y is the global largest consumers and workers group (OKMD, 2017; Lerspipatthananon, 2018). They spend an average of \$47,112 per person a year on rent or housing, cuisine, appearance, and services (Adams, 2023). Asia is the continent with the largest Generation Y population; more than 1 billion people or about 86% globally (Inthawirat and Siwaphithak, 2015; Mongkol, 2020). In Bangkok, there are 1,219,829 Generation Y population living and working in the area, as presented in Table 1. They are considered the majority of main labor force population. OKMD (2017) presented the reasons which Generation Y needs to work in Bangkok because of the career opportunity in the global companies located in the capital city as well as higher average income compared to other areas. Moreover, Generation Y in Bangkok is committed to creating life and financial stability, all expenses are concerned. Their monthly commitments include home and auto loans, household expenses and modern lifestyle expenses (Mongkol, 2020).

Table 1 Number of Population in Bangkok Classified by Generation

Generation	Number of Population	Remark
Baby Boomer	1,057,759	Retired
Generation X	1,266,819	Preparing for retirement
Generation Y	1,219,829	Working age
Generation Z	1,308,061	Student and first job seeker

Source: National Statistical Office, 2022

Generation Y is the multi-skilled people who can manage several activities at the same time. They do not have the brand loyalty but give lots of value to the review and opinion of friends, bloggers, and influencers. Compared to Generation X, Generation Y is highly self-confident and egocentric. Their lives depend on the use of internet and social media for both working and social purposes. They search and compare all information from the internet, work through various networks, and socialize by sharing their privacy, for example, daily life and leisure time to communicate their own characters and behaviors. Generation Y has an average income at 20,000 Baht per month (Lerspipatthananon, 2018). Bank of Thailand reveals Generation Y has 56% credit card loans, 53% home loans, and 47% car loans. The debt-generating attitude comes from consumerism and thoughtless purchase decision. Additionally, Generation Y buys new fashionable products or services with a strong fear of losing the reputation and not being a part of society if they fail to purchase or own the new items in the market (Mongkol, 2020).

The travel behavior of Generation Y depends mostly on themselves; they search a destination's information and travel alone or with a group of friends, not rely on a tour operator (Lerspipatthananon, 2018). Generally, 46.61% of Generation Y makes a trip with friends, 35.04% prefers to travel with family, and 12.73% enjoys a solely travel (OKMD, 2017). Generation Y pays attention to the convenience in booking and purchasing tickets and accommodations. Additionally, they want to experience the authentic local life in a destination, for example, local cuisine, culture, and tradition (Lerspipatthananon, 2018). They prefer travel to the famous locations to represent themselves as a fashionable person. This can be seen from the photos and contents in various social media focusing on the popularity of each post with the purpose to share information of destinations and activities to their followers in social media (Inthawirat and Siwaphithak, 2015; Mongkol, 2020). Generation Y believes in the concept of work-life balance, which is to manage work and free time for the benefit of travel and leisure. They spend about 10% of their salary on travel and leisure activities (Lerspipatthananon, 2018).

Generation Y and Destination Branding

Generation Y is a digital native who follows news and information via online applications such as social media, websites, and online televisions (OKMD, 2017) as well as shares personal skills and lifestyles to the public (Mongkol, 2020). They are affected by public's opinion and influencer's review. The destination needs to connect with this group of tourists and to make them actively involve into a destination network, for example, participation of the activities, interaction with locals and creation of destination brands using information and communication technologies (Bochert et al., 2017). Generation Y emphasizes the passion for public visibility as an essential marketing tool to build a profitable image and relationship between themselves (Safeer et al., 2021).

Generation Y considers a destination based on various factors, for example, activities in an area, expenditure, management, ease of access, and popularity of a place (Mongkol, 2020). The activities are one of the key factors that visitors consider to visit such as taking pictures, experiencing local life, shopping, learning about nature and adventure activities (Cardona et al., 2017). Travel expenditure needs to be reasonable compared to the overall experiences they gain from the destination (Ahmadova, 2018). Generation Y limits the spending at 1,000-3,000 Baht per day, maximum at 5,000 Baht, to avoid financial problems and save money for next trip (Inthawirat and Siwaphithak, 2015; Lerspipatthananon, 2018). In addition, they pay attention to the management of attractions, facilities, and infrastructure, including accommodations, restaurants, and visitor centers. The well-planning and management within the destination lead to the convenience of tourists and the increase of competitive advantage to the destination (Ahmadova, 2018). The ease of access to all information is an essential factor for Generation Y as 85% of them habitually spend more than 3 hours a day in which 45% use the internet and social media more than 6 hours (OKMD, 2017). They need to access to the accurate information easily and immediately to compare the information from sources including the official websites, blogs, and reviews in various media (Lerspipatthananon, 2018; Tomic et al., 2019). Moreover, the popularity of a place is another significant factor in selecting a destination (Ahmadova, 2018). It represents the identity and character of the attraction itself and the lifestyle of tourists who travel there. Generation Y perceives that visiting the well-known places and sharing their experiences through medias lead them to be fashionable and to be recognized by the public because people would widely discuss about the destination and follow the location from their posts or related hashtags (Lerspipatthananon, 2018; Mongkol, 2020).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This paper is qualitative research gaining specific information through interviews and observation for the information. This will reveal the desired seasons and activities as well as Thailand's destination selection criteria for Generation Y in Bangkok. As there are 33% of the Generation Y population in Thailand, most of them work in the capital city; Bangkok because of a desire to work with a large organization located there including the career opportunity. They are working-aged people and an important force in the country's economic system.

Population and Sample

A group of 150 key respondents was selected purposively from a cohort of Generation Y, at the age between 27 and 42 years old, working in four central Bangkok locations: Sathorn, Silom, Siam, and Ari, where are the business centers and office buildings of private and public companies. Those selected are Generation Y in the country's tax system according to the working status employed by organizations registered in Thailand.

Research Instrument

The qualitative research tools consisted of the researcher, interview form, and interview method. The interview questions included average expenses for traveling, the average number of stays, travel patterns, seasons, and favorite activities, as well as destination selection criteria.

Data Collection

The data collection has been carried out for four months. Each of the respondents was interviewed using a list of open-end questions regarding destination branding and selection. Each interview consisted of 1-5 respondents and the interview took a maximum of 30 minutes. The privacy of interviewees is the major ethical consideration. The interview permission is requested before conducting the activity and a third person, whom the interviewee feels comfortable with, observes throughout the interview. All respondent information was managed confidentially, and the responses were administered anonymously in the research. The responses were used merely for the main purpose of completing the aim and objectives of the research.

Data Analysis

The data is analyzed by content analysis with three key components: data organizing, display, and conclusion. The data is presented according to the research objectives.

Findings

The key informants can be divided into four groups based on travel patterns; traveling alone (14.00%), traveling as a couple (20.67%), traveling with friends (17.33%), and traveling with children and/or elderly (48.00%). As the aim of the research is to study the relationships between destination branding and destination selection of Generation Y in Bangkok, the results will be presented by each objective.

1. To study the seasons, types of destination and activities that Generation Y prefers to travel

Most of the respondents agreed that the weather and seasons influenced their travel decisions. Winter is the season most mentioned by respondents when choosing a travel destination because of comfortable atmosphere as well as the fullest time on the outdoor activities. The respondents also prefer traveling in summer, although, the weather is sweltering, traveling is easy and convenient. People can visit every region of Thailand without the rain ruining their itinerary. In summer, there are not any obstacles to participate in the activities, especially adventurous activities such as diving and mountain climbing. Although the weather in winter is comfortable, there may be situations where the weather is closed such as dense fog on top of the mountain that can pose a danger to travelers.

Many people refuse to travel in the rainy season because of the unfavorable weather conditions for traveling. However, there are groups of people like traveling in this season because the weather is fresh and cool as well as most of the destination are not crowded. One of the most concerns in planning a trip in rainy season is the accurate information on weather conditions, storm, and rainfall information to prevent the risks during a journey.

Nevertheless, most of Generation Y in Bangkok commented that season is only part of choosing a destination. They saw themselves working hard all year, therefore, travel can be done all year round to relax and refresh themselves. The most important factor is vacation leaving as Generation Y neglects the long holiday season because of crowded people in each destination. Generally, they take a few weekends to refresh themselves with friends and family by choosing a destination that is suitable for the current weather conditions.

Majority of respondents prefer to travel to the coastlines and islands because there are activities that are suitable for both children and adults. The coastlines and islands in Thailand are popular and well-known for their beauty, fresh seafood, and sport activities such as scuba diving and jet skiing as well as beach lounging. In addition, the coastlines and islands have many beautiful photo corners and theme restaurants where tourists can share their leisure activities and destination with the public via social media.

Besides the coastlines and islands, historical and cultural tourism is another leisure activity that Generation Y prefers to travel. The historical destination provides both knowledge and entertainment where travelers experience and learn inside the area. Moreover, many of the historical sights are indoors, which are not affected by the weather condition, such as museums and palaces. This leads people to travel all year round and promotes the learning of local communities in all regions of the country. Mountain destinations including nature study, trekking, waterfall, and camping are less popular compared to the coastlines and historical sites. The preferences in mountainous areas of Generation Y include fresh air, good atmosphere, and beautiful photography angles. Moreover, the mountain destinations support activities with a group of friends, for example, barbequing, photo shooting, and adventure activities.

2. To study the relationships between destination branding and destination selection of Generation Y in Bangkok

Famous destination will attract attention, create awareness, and encourage travelers to visit. Generation Y who travels in pairs or with couple preferred well-known or frequently mentioned destinations where a suggested itinerary from others have already planned. The famous attraction is a significant key in destination selection, it is a time saver, especially for working-age population, to follow travel influencers or guidebook making the leisure life easier and more convenient. In addition, traveling to well-known makes traveler a modern person who is always follow the current issues in society.

Access to destination information is critical to the travel decisions of Generation Y. Each trip requires a study of the destination. If the information is easily searchable and complete, it supports the destination selection. When Generation Y travels with young children and the elderly, it is important and necessary to know the information about activities, accommodation, food, safety, and facility in the destination which are suitable for family's condition. A group of Generation Y who likes adventure activities explained the importance of convenient access to information plays an important role in traveling safely, especially activities required the safety information such as diving. It requires knowledge of wind and waves and also climbing which information of weather condition is essential.

Generation Y pays attention to the expenses. Therefore, the cost of each trip should be carefully planned even it is a domestic destination. A domestic trip with a time of 2 - 3 days will cost an average of 7,000 – 13,000 Baht per trip and the average of 9,000 - 15,000 Baht for 3 - 5 days. However, the families traveling with young children and/or elderly need to consider the additional expenses in selecting a destination including accommodation and restaurants. This leads to the higher cost per trip reaching 20,000 – 30,000 Baht. Moreover, Generation Y who often travels alone or in pairs presented that they try to manage and control the travel expenditure because they

usually travel on weekends so the price should be reasonable. Thus, they always plan for a destination and activities as well as visit places where stories and images can be shared with others.

The image of attractions, destination branding, and the overall reputation are important to deciding on a destination. The selection of famous destination with good branding ensures the other supporting factors such as activities, accommodations, restaurants and bistros, and service management of the destination. This makes the destination selection easier, meet tourists' expectations, and create a destination loyalty.

Discussion

Thai people travel more within the country during and after Covid-19 because of the international travel restriction. Many attractions and destinations continue to develop themselves to be the destination choices for travelers (Madhyamapurush, 2022). It is important to publicize tourist attractions and attract people to visit which is consistent with Ahmadova (2018) and Barreto et al. (2019) who reported in their studies that destination branding in the tourism market supports the promotion of destination image and differentiates a destination from the others. In addition, the branding aims to create a memorable experience, destination recognition, and destination loyalty and encourages repeat visitors (Cardona et al., 2017).

The findings of the present study revealed that destination branding is considered an important factor in the tourist attraction selection of Generation Y in Bangkok who is a majority population and the most powerful consumer (OKMD, 2017; Lerspipatthananon, 2018; Mongkol, 2020). The key informants were selected from the four major business areas in Bangkok, and they are in the tax system of the country (National Statistical Office, 2022). Adopting the concept of work-life balance, they need leisure activities and destinations to visit. Their destination choice must reflect the social media lifestyle (Mongkol, 2020). The weather is not the major factor as they travel all year round to refresh themselves. Coastlines and islands as well as historical sights are popular for them with full of activities that are suitable for both children and adults (Lerspipatthananon, 2018). According to the study of Barreto et al. (2019), the findings found a positive relationship between destination branding and destination selection of Generation Y in Bangkok. They consider the destination based on its popularity, accessed information, and travel expenditure. Moreover, the destination needs to represent their lifestyle leading to sharing their story to the public.

Suggestion

1. Suggestion for Research Utilization

1.1. The tourism operators should be applied as a guideline for improving and developing businesses and destinations to meet current tourists' demand as well as understand travel behavior and pattern of Generation Y who lives in Bangkok.

1.2. The destination branding should be followed up in each area to develop and enhance the branding of the destination to be recognized and chosen by tourists.

1.3. The findings could be beneficial for public relations to target consumers in promoting tourism in the future.

1.4. The paper could be used as a case study for academics in tourism and tourist behavior-related courses.

2. Suggestion for Future Research

This paper focused on the relationships between destination branding and destination selection of Generation Y in Bangkok. The suggestion for future research is

1.1. It would be interesting to extend the investigation to cover Generation Y in other locations and to cover other generations.

1.2. The concept should also be applied to international tourism, especially when international travel restrictions are lifted.

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