

# ผลกระทบเชิงสาเหตุของการตัดสินใจเลือกที่พักของนักท่องเที่ยว ชาวไทยในพื้นที่ภาคใต้ตอนบนในช่วงสถานการณ์โควิด-19

## The Causal Effect of the Decision-Making for Accommodations of Thai Tourists in the Upper Southern Region of Thailand During the COVID-19 Situation

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### บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยเชิงสาเหตุของการตัดสินใจเลือกที่พักของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยในพื้นที่ภาคใต้ตอนบนในช่วงสถานการณ์โควิด-19 เป็นวิจัยเชิงปริมาณ ประชากรวิจัยเป็นนักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยในภาคใต้ตอนบนที่มาพักค้างคืนที่โรงแรมในพื้นที่ภาคใต้ตอนบน ได้แก่ จังหวัดชุมพร ระนอง ยะลา พัทุมธานี สงขลา ตรัง และนครศรีธรรมราช กลุ่มตัวอย่างจำนวน 400 คน ใช้เทคนิคการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจงและแบบสโนว์บอร์ด รวบรวมข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถามออนไลน์มีค่าความเชื่อมั่นรายตัวแปร

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คือนโยบายภาครัฐ ภาพลักษณ์ ปลายทาง ส่วนประเมินทางการตลาดบริการ และการตัดสินใจเท่ากับ .832, .934, .961 และ .749 ตามลำดับ วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยแบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง (SEM) การศึกษาพบว่าแบบจำลองนี้เหมาะสมกับข้อมูลเป็นอย่างดี จาสถิติ Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) = 866.20,  $p$ -value = 0.00,  $X^2/df$  = 1.626, RMSEA = .040, GFI = .913, CFI = 0.965. ปัจจัยเชิงสาเหตุของการเลือกที่พักประกอบด้วยนโยบายภาครัฐ (0.11) ภาพลักษณ์ของจุดหมายปลายทาง (0.58) และส่วนประเมินทางการตลาดบริการ (0.40) ปัจจัยทั้งสามนี้ส่งผลด้านบวกต่อการตัดสินใจเลือกที่พักของนักท่องเที่ยวในช่วงโควิด-19 ที่น่าสนใจคือภาพลักษณ์ของจุดหมายปลายทางมีผลสูงสุดต่อการเลือกที่พักของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยในช่วงที่มีการระบาด นอกจากนี้การวัดส่วนประเมินทางการตลาดบริการในช่วงที่เกิดโรคระบาดมีเพียงผลิตภัณฑ์ ราคา พนักงาน และการส่งเสริมการตลาดเท่านั้น ซึ่งขัดแย้งกับหลัก 7P แบบดั้งเดิม ดังนั้นรัฐบาลทั้งระดับท้องถิ่นและชาติควรเน้นสร้างภาพลักษณ์ของจุดหมายปลายทางที่เกี่ยวข้องกับความปลอดภัยจากโรคระบาด ซึ่งจะช่วยเพิ่มความมั่นใจให้นักท่องเที่ยวในการมาเยือน นักการตลาดด้านที่พักควรเน้นที่ผลิตภัณฑ์ ราคา ผู้ให้บริการ และโปรโมชั่นในช่วงโรคระบาด

**คำสำคัญ :** นโยบายภาครัฐ ส่วนประเมินทางการตลาด ภาพลักษณ์ การตัดสินใจ

### Abstract

The research objective was to investigate the causal effect of the decision-making in choosing accommodations for Thai tourists in the upper southern region of Thailand during the COVID-19 situation. It was the quantitative research. The research population was Thai tourists in the upper southern region of Thailand who stayed overnight at the hotel in the upper southern region of Thailand consisting of Chumphon, Ranong, Krabi, Phang Nga, Phuket, Surat Thani, and Nakhon Si-Thammarat. The research

sample was 400 respondents who were selected by purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected by online questionnaires with reliability regarding government policy, destination image, service marketing mix, and decision-making of .832, .934, .961, and .749, respectively. The data were analysed by applying the structural equation model ( SEM) . The research study found that the model fits data very well; Chi- square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 866.20, p-value = 0.00,  $\chi^2/df$  = 1.626, RMSEA = .040, GFI = .913, CFI = 0.965. The causal effect of choosing accommodation consisted of government policy (0.11), destination image (0.58), and service marketing mix (0.40). These three factors positively impacted the decision- making to choose accommodations for tourists during COVID- 19. Interestingly, destination image was the highest effect on choosing accommodation for Thai tourists during the pandemic. Furthermore, the measurement of the service marketing mix during the pandemic was only product, price, people, and promotion, contradicting the classic 7Ps. Therefore, the local and national governments should emphasize building a destination image related to the safety of the pandemic resulting in boosting tourist confidence to visit. Accommodation marketers should emphasize product, price, people, and promotion during the pandemic.

**Keywords :** government policy, marketing mix, destination image, decision-making

## Introduction

The tourism industry consists of many types of businesses. There are directly and indirectly related businesses or various related businesses such as tours, accommodations, transportation, foods and beverages, souvenirs, department stores, agriculture, etc. Tourism is, therefore, an important tool for governments to develop and enhance the economy, society, culture, and natural environment. Before the pandemic, tourism induced 39.9 million tourists in 2019, and generated an income of 1.91 trillion baht for Thailand country (Lunkam, 2019). Additionally, the hotel business is related to the tourism sector, its GDP accounted for 1.03 trillion baht, 6.1% of the country's GDP. The major contribution was from foreign tourists, which accounted for 65% in 2019. Total number of rooms in Thailand increased noticeably, it was 784,000 in 2019, increased 5.1% from 2018. The southern region of Thailand had the highest number which was 226,000 rooms constituting of 29%, followed by Bangkok 160,000, 20% (Lunkam, 2021). However, the coronavirus pandemic has severely resulted in disruption and collapse of the hotel business since late 2019 because of the area lockdown measures and fears. The occupancy rate of the whole of Thailand immediately slumped to 29.3% in 2020 from 69.7% in 2019, severely reduced to 14.02% in 2021, and slightly recovering to 36.21 % in 2022 (Lunkam, 2022). All hotels must struggle to survive through a variety of strategies such as cutting operation costs, setting new work procedures, reducing working time, reducing the number of employees, mergers and acquisitions, and bankruptcy (Jehang et al., 2021).

Since the recovery from the COVID-19 situation, hotel entrepreneurs have shown resilience amid the crisis and taken opportunities from both the government policies and the new normal behavior of travelers. The Thai government measured various policies to stimulate and support hotel businesses such as the travel for sharing happiness project, the traveling together project, the half-cost sharing project, etc. However, very few studies have been conducted in investigating the impacts of government measures on hotels. Meanwhile, travellers' behaviours have changed according to the COVID-19 pandemic which needs new insightful understanding leading to setting the right hotel services for them. Especially, the criteria for choosing a hotel during the COVID-19 pandemic should be clarified.

According to the literature reviews, the decision-making of hotel customers is highly complicated (Sohrabi et al., 2012). There are many factors intervening in the decision-making process for example marketing stimuli, other stimuli, consumer psychology, and characteristics which were explained in the consumer behaviour model (Kotler & Keller, 2016:187). Therefore, factors influencing the decision-making of hotel customers have been widely studied, however, the lack of papers simultaneously emphasized the effect of government policy and tourism destination image on hotel customers' decisions, especially during the pandemic situation. While, government policy is an external factor that affects marketing strategy and business performance (Mousavi et al., 2021) most papers have focused on service quality, service marketing, and customer demographics. For example, Merlo & Joao (2011) found that hotel customer satisfaction relies on cleanliness, silence, and air conditioning. Sohrabi et al. (2012) revealed

that the indicators of hotel selection consisted of promenade and comfort, security and protection, network services, pleasure, staff, and their services, news and recreational information, cleanliness and room comfort, expenditure, room facilities, and car parking. Li et al. (2013) proposed 6 main factors influencing travellers choosing a hotel composing of value, location, sleep, room, cleanliness, and service. Increasing the competitive advantage of hotel firms relies on suitable marketing strategies which are in accordance with the situation. However, it is questionable that former theoretical knowledge relating to the marketing mix can apply during the COVID-19 which is a new phenomenon. While it is unanimous in the influence of each marketing factor on decision-making there is still vagueness in the decision-making of hotel customers in the epidemic situation which needs further research studies to clarify. Accordingly, there is a need to develop an insightful understanding of these factors and how they interact with hotel customer decision-making.

This paper aimed to investigate factors influencing hotel customer decision-making during the pandemic of COVID-19. The results could clarify the relationship between government policies, tourism destination image, and the service marketing mix of hotels toward the decision to choose a hotel in the new phenomenon. A deep understanding of hotel decision-making will be revealed. The key findings can benefit academics, governments, and hotel entrepreneurs to improve the whole hotel sector.

## Research Objectives

To study the causal effect of destination image, government policy, and marketing mix toward the decision-making for accommodations of Thai tourists in the upper southern region of Thailand during the COVID-19 situation

## Research Scope

The population scope was Thai tourists who live and had an experience traveling in the upper southern region of Thailand and stayed overnight at an accommodation.

The sample scope was 400 respondents according to Cochran (1977) and the condition of applying SEM analysis.

The content scope was destination image, government policy, marketing mix, and decision-making

The research area scope was the upper southern region of Thailand consisting of Chumphon, Ranong, Krabi, Phangnga, Phuket, Surat Thani, and Nakhon Si-Thammarat

The timing for collecting data was in 2021, from January - May.

## Literature Review

The theoretical background of this study is the model of consumer behavior. Kotler & Keller (2016:187) revealed that consumer decision-making is influenced by the consumer's inside and other external stimulus factors.

Stimuli consist of many factors such as marketing stimuli; products, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process, thus they are internal factors, while other stimuli are economic, government policy, technology, culture, demographic, etc. which are external factors. Those factors impact the different decisions of customers.

This research aimed to study the impact of government policy which is an external factor in the model of consumer behavior. Government policy is an important factor to stimulate the economy of the country. It is also an external factor influencing customer decisions as well as operating businesses, especially in times of crisis. Government intervention in the tourism industry can set policies and measures that benefit tourism and hotel businesses (Mousavi et al., 2021). Therefore, the elements of government measures will consist of benefits, attractiveness, convenience, and friendly systems supporting using the government measures.

Service marketing mixes with 7 Ps consisting of products, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process were applied to study for enhancing hotel service quality and customer satisfaction in many papers. The concept of 7Ps was proposed by Zeithaml et al. (2017), they suggested that the key elements of service businesses are people, physical evidence, and process, therefore, it expands the 4Ps of marketing mixes. 7Ps have been widely applied in accommodation areas, for example, service marketing with the hotel selection decision (Kamau et al., 2015; Wijayanto, 2015), service marketing strategies with marketing performance; sales revenue, sales growth, customer satisfaction, and profitability (Ali & Kaldeen, 2017). Therefore, 7Ps in service marketing will be applied in this study.

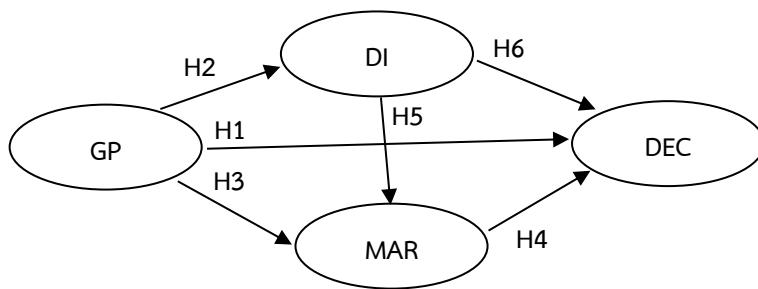
Destination image is widely studied by academics however, its definition was diverse depending on the context and factors applied in determining the definitions. Crompton (1979) defines a tourism destination image as a psychological set in a tourist's mind toward a tourism destination; the mental set consists of beliefs, ideas, and impressions. Carballo et al. (2015) mentioned that destination image is a combination of the positive and negative perceptions of tourists toward a tourist destination. Tourists may get information from different resources such as the media, the internet, and people resulting in different images in their minds. Real experience also intervenes in the destination image. Thus, the image can change over time depending on the information and experience gained during that time. The image prior to experience and post-experience can therefore differ. Lai & Li (2016) found that most previous research mainly explained tourism destination image as the mental feeling, impressions, and perceptions held by tourists pertaining to a destination. They tried to investigate various academic papers and propose a new clear definition. The new definition by Lai & Li (2016) is a voluntary, multisensory, primarily picture-like, qualia arousing, conscious, and quasi-perceptual mental experience held by tourists about a destination. They noticed that this experience overlaps and/or parallels the other psychological experiences of tourists, including their emotional attributes such as sensation, perception, mental representation, cognitive map, consciousness, memory, and attitude toward the destination. However, Wang et al. (2021) shifted the definition of destination image psychologically to functionally oriented, and from holistic to more attribute-focused. Similarly, it is suggested that the destination

image is diverse for different tourists. Consequently, the definition of a tourism destination image can cover both mental and functional attributes which shape the destination image in tourists' minds. Measuring destination image among academic papers is also different. The multidimensional scales were prevalent in research papers. For example, three components consisting of tourism infrastructure, hospitality atmosphere, and unique cultural attraction were employed to study the destination image in Brunei (Chen et al., 2013). Additionally, Deng & Li (2014) studied destination image via 5 dimensions; cultural environment, infrastructure, tourism infrastructure, political & economic environment, and benefits. Binter et al. (2016) applied 4 dimensions measuring destination image consisting of the image uniqueness, uniqueness of attractions and experiences, quality and cleanliness of the environment, and perception of safety. Teeranon & Ekamapaisan (2014) proposed 8 factors consisting of environment, activities, and attractions. development and promoting tourism, natural resources, facilities, freedom, human rights, reputations, and economy and society to study the destination image of tourists in Bangkok. A single scale has also been applied to measure the destination image. Puh (2014) applied one item to measure the whole tourism image with 5 points Likert scale, while, others applied multiple factors and items (Binter et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2013; Deng & Li, 2013; Kim et al., 2012; Teeranon & Ekamapaisan, 2014)

Lastly, making a decision is a complicated process for consumers. Kotler & Keller (2016) explained that there are 5 processes for making a decision consisting of problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase behavior. The service decision

process was separated into 3 stages consisting of prepurchase, service encounter, and post-encounter (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). Previous papers measured the decision process both applying a single item for each stage and multiple factors with items.

### Research Hypothesis



**Key:** GP-Government Policy, DI- Destination Image, MAR-Marketing Mix, DEC- Decision-Making

**Figure 1** the research hypothesis

Source : Authors

The research hypothesis is illustrated in Figure 1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were many Thai government policies that caused a shutdown of tourism businesses and unemployment. However, when the situation has been recovered, there were several policies to stimulate the economy of the tourism industry and support the tourism business including accommodation. These policies were aimed to encourage Thai people to domestically travel during the COVID-19 crisis to spend money in tourist areas which can increase employment and also related businesses nearby.

For example, the traveling together project is sharing the hotel room price between tourists and the government. Additionally, the sharing cost project is sharing costs of consumer products and services between consumers and the government. Government intervention in the tourism industry includes measures that benefit tourism and also hotel businesses (Mousavi et al., 2021). Therefore, this study will confirm the impact of government policy on tourists' decision-making in choosing a hotel as H1 and H2.

H1 : Government policy (GP) positively impacts hotel decision-making of tourists (DEC) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H2 : Government policy (GP) positively impacts the destination image (DI) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to government policy, hotels have been impacted by the intervention policies of governments. Huang et al. (2020) revealed that government policies related to preventing the spreading of COVID-19 cause negative impacts on labor management of the hospitality industry, in addition, reopening policies were an important role in reviving hospitality businesses. Consequently, hotels must adapt their strategies which can enhance the hotel's opportunities and competitive advantage. Hotel managers and governments must work together to develop measures and action plan to encounter the crisis and sustain tourism (Israeli et al., 2011; Jones & Comfort, 2020). Businesses must ensure that all strategies promote the transition and behavior of tourists from COVID-19 (Cohen, 2020). Le & Phi (2021) explained that hotels should respond to COVID-19 by applying proactive and reactive strategies. Proactive strategies included government policies, emergency transformation, service changes, health, and safety

measure and reactive strategies emphasize business innovation, recovery strategies, and acquisition. Marketing and sales strategies, service automation, and innovation are important missions for hotels in the recovery stage. Choirisa & Situmorang (2021) proposed 4 stages for hotel marketing strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic which consists of crisis reduction stage, readiness stage, response stage, and recovery stage. Consideration of these findings led to the following hypothesis H3.

H3: Government policy (GP) positively impacts the service marketing mix of tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are prevalent academic papers confirming that the service marketing mix influences the decision-making of consumers however, the findings were controversial. Wijayanto (2015) showed that service marketing impacted the decision to select a hotel, price, people, and physical evidence influenced the hotel-choosing decision, however product, place, promotion, and process were not significantly affected. However, the product, price, place, and promotion of hotels influenced the decision of tourists (Putra et al., 2020). Devi & Sardiana (2021) offered 7Ps for Islamic hotels and found that pedagogy and physical environment, persistence, and process as well as patience and place influenced the decision to stay. Similarly, product, price, people, process, and physical evidence affected the stay decision, price and place played significant roles in the decision (Satria et al., 2019). Kamau et al. (2015) also found that price, products/services, location, people, processes, physical evidence, and promotions were all important attributes in determining choice of accommodation by local tourists in

Kenya. Therefore, the relation between the service marketing mix and the decision-making is investigated as H4.

H4: Service Marketing Mix (MAR) positively impacts hotel decision-making of tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Destination image in this study was investigated via perceived tourism components being 4A; accessibility, accommodation, attraction, and activities. There were many papers that studied destination images with other factors. Deng & Li (2014) revealed that destination image impacted the overall attitude of tourists and intentional behaviors. Kim et al. (2012) found that travel experience reinforced individuals' image of a destination collectively and positively affected the intention to revisit the destination. Destination image has an important role to select a destination for tourists and influencing other behaviors. After selecting a destination, tourists will make a decision about accommodation and other tourism products and services. An empirical study found that destination image and travel constraints impact young tourists during the early decision-making process (Chen et al., 2013). Tourism components influence both the service marketing mix and the hotel decision. Tourists who perceived positive tourism components of the destination tend to travel to that destination leading to selecting a hotel. Furthermore, the attributes and uniqueness of tourism destinations also play important roles in designing service marketing strategies, then, H5 and H6 were proposed.

H5: Destination image (DI) positively impacts the service marketing mix of tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H6: Destination image (DI) positively impacts the hotel decision-making of tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Research Methodology

This paper adopted the quantitative research method. Tourists who traveled and had to stay overnight at a hotel or resort in the upper southern part of Thailand were the research population. The sample size was calculated by applying Cochran's (1977) formulation, being 385 samples. However, to reduce errors in the collecting data process, 400 samples were obtained. According to the structural equation model, the minimum sample size should be 300 with the models having seven or fewer constructs (Hair et al., 2010). While, Kline (2010) suggested that the minimum sample size should be 100-200 or five cases per free parameter in the model. Furthermore, in models with 4 latent variables or lower, 200 samples are adequate. Therefore, the sample size (400) in this study is adequate. The sample size was classified according to the proportion of tourist statistics in each province in the upper southern region. Therefore, Chumphon, Ranong, Krabi, Phangnga, Phuket, Surat Thani, and Nakhon Si-Thammarat collected 38, 20, 83, 41, 29, 60, and 129 samples, respectively.

The research tool was a self-rated questionnaire, all items were synthesized from previous research. Then, 3 experts were employed to check IOCs that were above 0.67, and the questionnaire was adjusted to make some sentences clearer. After that, the pilot test was conducted to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the Cronbach Alphas were in a range of 0.726-0.961, which were above 0.7 and acceptable.

Finally, the questionnaire was endorsed by the Human research ethics committee of Surat Thani Rajabhat University, IRB code SRU-EC2021/029.

The questionnaire was separated into 5 sections: 1) personal data, 2) government policy, 3) service marketing mix for hotels, 4) destination image and 5) deciding on choosing a hotel. Personal data applied closed-ended questions, while sections 2-5 applied the Likert scale 5 levels with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

Non-probability sampling with purposive sampling was employed to collect data; the data were collected online by google form. The structural equation model (SEM) was employed to analyze the data and test the research's hypothesis. Firstly, the data were checked according to the SEM conditions: kurtosis, skewness, and multicollinearity. And then, the confirmation factor analysis (CFA) was employed to test the reliability and the validity of the measurement model followed by the structural equation model. The fit indices of both the measurement model and the structural equation model should be in an acceptable range;  $\chi^2/df < 2.00$ , the goodness-of-fit index (GFI)  $\geq 0.90$  (Hair et al., 2010; Schermelleh-Engle, Moosbrugger & Müller, 2003), the comparative fit index (CFI)  $\geq 0.90$  (Hair et al., 2010), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $\leq 0.05$  (McDonald & Ho, 2002) or in a range of 0.03-0.08 (Hair et al., 2010)

## Research Results

### Respondent's profile

The total number of respondents was 400. Most of the respondents were females aged between 41-50 years old who had single status and

graduated with a bachelor's degree. The respondents were government officers who earned 20,001 – 30,000 baht monthly and were living in Krabi.

### Data Checking

It found that the data was normal which was suitable for analyzing the structural equation model. Skewness and kurtosis were in an acceptable range,  $-1.662 < \pm 2$ , (Hair et al., 2010; West et al., 1995) and  $3.719 < \pm 7$  (West et al., 1995). All items had positive correlations, and the coefficient was in the range of  $0.053-0.689 < 0.8$ .

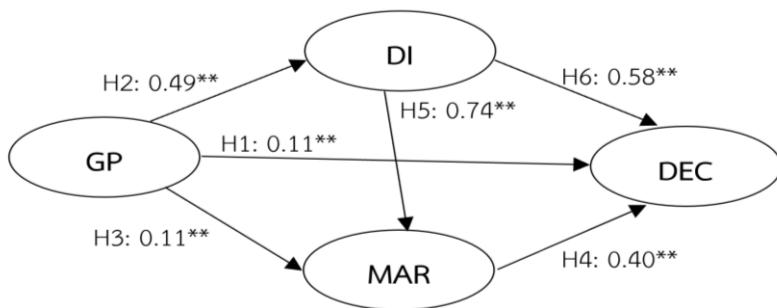
### The Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA)

The confirmatory factor analyses were applied to test the measurement model by the AMOS program. There were 74 observed variables, consequently, first-order and second-order were conducted. At the first time, the fit indices were not acceptable with  $\chi^2/df = 2.443$  RMSEA = .060 GFI = .681 CFI = .843. As a consequence, there were some items deleted to enhance the model fit. Lastly, the measurement model was confirmed, and the goodness of fits were in an acceptable range; Chi-Square = 866.20 , p-value = 0.00 , RMSEA = .040 , CFI = .965 , GFI = .913.

**Table 1** The validity of the measurement model

Variables	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	MAR	GP	DEC	DI
<b>MAR</b>	0.900	0.693	0.692	0.903	<b>0.832</b>			
<b>GP</b>	0.878	0.595	0.270	0.902	<b>0.520</b>	<b>0.772</b>		
<b>DEC</b>	0.892	0.676	0.466	0.923	<b>0.671</b>	0.432	<b>0.822</b>	
<b>DI</b>	0.949	0.861	0.692	0.967	<b>0.832</b>	0.483	0.683	<b>0.928</b>

Source : Authors



Chi-Square = 866.20, p-value = 0.00, RMSEA = .040, CFI = .965, GFI = .913

**Figure 2** the structural equation model and hypothesize result

Source : Authors

Figure 2 indicated that government policy (GP) positively impacted decision-making, service marketing mix, and destination image, therefore all 6 hypotheses were accepted. The government policy significantly influenced destination image, factor loading 0.49, sig. at 0.001, therefore, H1 was accepted. Additionally, the government policy slightly affected service marketing and decision-making, factor loading 0.11, sig. at 0.001, then, H2 and H3 were accepted. The service marketing mix positively affected the decision to choose a hotel, factor loading 0.40, sig. at 0.001, consequently, H4 was accepted. Destination image has a significant impact on the service marketing mix and the hotel decision-making of tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic, with factor loading being 0.74 and 0.59, respectively. Then H5 and H6 were accepted.

The result confirmed that the causal effects of choosing an accommodation during the pandemic were government policy, marketing

mix, and destination image. Therefore, all hypotheses were significantly accepted.

## Discussions

The tourism industry is fragile, there are various factors that intervene in its success. Currently, the industry has been confronted with a severe situation of COVID-19 which totally change the business pattern, unexpectedly. Undoubtedly, the study confirmed that government policy, marketing mix, and destination image affected tourists' decisions in choosing an accommodation during their trip. Each causal effect will be separately discussed as follow;

There were various measures from both government and business sectors to recover the business and tourism industry during the pandemic. This research results confirmed that factors consisting of government policy, tourism image, and service marketing mix positively impacted the making decision of tourists to select a hotel during their trip during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Mousavi et al. (2021) found that government policies can benefit the whole tourism industry. Government policies can enhance the destination image, service marketing of accommodation, and hotel customers' decisions.

Additionally, the finding confirmed that service marketing related to the customer decision (Devi & Sardiana, 2021; Kamau et al., 2015; Putra et al., 2020; Satria et al., 2019; Wijayanto, 2015; ). However, the service marketing mix components were only 4Ps being products, price, people, and promotion which were crucial factors during the crisis of COVID-19 pandemic

in this study. Differently, Devi & Sardiana (2021) found that pedagogy and physical environment, persistence, process, as well as patience and place, influenced the decision to stay in an Islamic hotel. Wijayanto (2015) found product, place, promotion, and process were not significantly affected. The place factor played a significant role in the decision (Satria et al., 2019). Location and physical evidence also were determining the choice of the hotel selecting decision (Kamau et al., 2015). Therefore, the marketing components rely heavily on the study contexts and the current phenomenon.

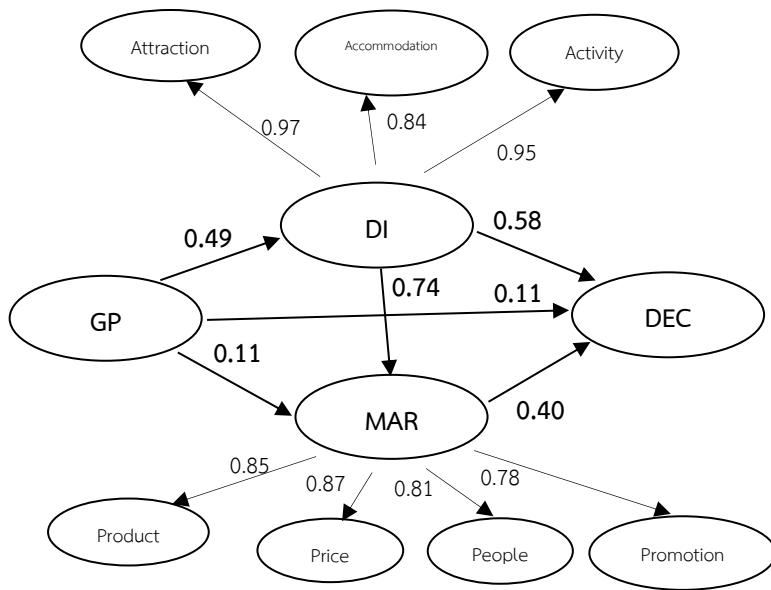
Interestingly, the results found that destination image had the highest impact on the decision-making of hotel customers and a high impact on the hotel's service marketing mix. This phenomenon can be explained by the spreading of the COVID-19 situation in tourist destinations being a concern for most travellers; they tend to avoid destinations with many cases of COVID-19 infection. Destination image involves tourists' attitudes, and post and after-traveling behavior (Deng & Li, 2014; Kim et al., 2012). Similarly, Chen et al. (2013) found destination image and travel obstacles impact the decision in the early process.

### New Knowledge and Contribution

According to figure 3, this research proposed different academic knowledge from the previous in several issues. Firstly, the model indicated that marketing mix, government policy, and destination image affected to tourist decisions for choosing accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, government policy plays an important role in

destination image and marketing mix which are important factors in choosing accommodations of tourists during the pandemic. It can convince tourists through the destination image, thus, it motivates people to travel outside during the pandemic. Furthermore, the government policy also gives directions for firms to set suitable marketing mix strategies. Moreover, the destination image has a high impact on the marketing mix of the accommodation business. The finding indicated that the service marketing mix during the pandemic measured only 4Ps consisting of product, price, people, and promotion. Differently, the theoretical concept of service marketing mix composes of 7Ps; product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence (Zeithaml et al., 2017). It indicated that some issues of marketing mix may not be necessary during the crisis. Lastly, the measurement of destination image consisted of only 3A; attraction, accommodation, and activity which contradicted the classic theory being 5A; attraction, accessibility, accommodation, and activity (Dickman, 1996). Accessibility may be a less concern during the pandemic where people favor to have distancing.

This study also gives contributions to practitioners or hotel businesses. The central concern of the marketing mix in the pandemic is products, price, people, and promotion, while government policy can support hotel sectors and give a clear direction in setting marketing strategies.



**Key:** GP-Government policy, DI-Destination image, MAR-Marketing Mix, DEC-Decision-making

**Figure 3** the model of tourist decisions during the pandemic of COVID-19

Source : Authors

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, there were several important findings from this paper. Firstly, the measurement confirmed that the model fits the data very well, therefore, the measurement can be widely applied. Service marketing mixes in the COVID-19 situation were only 4Ps consisting of products, price, people, and promotion. While, the destination image can be measured from 3 attributes composed of attractions, accommodations, and activities. Secondly, it revealed that factors influencing travellers' selecting a hotel

were government policy, tourism image, and service marketing mix. Destination image had the most impact on accommodation decisions, followed by service marketing mix and government policies, respectively. Additionally, destination image highly influenced the service marketing mix while the government policy slightly impacted it.

The paper can make contributions to both government and hotel marketers. Firstly, the government policy can effectively build a good destination image in the crisis of COVID-19. Various measures should be applied to build travellers' confidence leading to travel to a tourist destination. Different measures should be employed for different groups of travellers such as company employees, government employees, retirement groups, teachers, etc.

Hotel marketers should adapt service marketing strategies according to government policies and hotel customers' behaviours in the COVID-19 situation. All 7Ps in service marketing mixes may not be necessary during the crisis; products, price, people and promotion are crucial factors during the COVID-19 situation. Pricing should be considered to increase cash flow to the businesses. Safety measures should be added to products and people strategies of the standard of procedures (SOP) to ensure hygiene safety for both service providers and customers. Lastly, promotion is essential to induce travelers' decisions. Special service, upgradation of rooms, activities or trips, and health insurance should be included in the promotion strategies.

This finding further relied on Thai tourists' attitudes, the future research studies may include foreign tourists which have different thoughts

and experiences. Government policies related to reopening the country. Lastly, different statistics are recommended for future research.

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