

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON TOURISTS' MOTIVATIONS FOR TOURISM TO THAILAND

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Abstract

Thailand is a major tourism site and the reason for this is because the country is gifted with immense natural and cultural tourism products in addition to beautiful beach destinations, which are a great getaway for tourists experiencing winter in their countries. Moreover, the country's unique culture and traditions augment many of the attractions for tourists. These attributes work well together to attract millions of tourists who visit the country for adventure, leisure or holiday. It is therefore important to study the Thailand Tourism industry in order to ascertain the ways through which it fulfils tourist satisfaction and how tourists are motivated to visit the country. This article review on motivation theories on tourism, 7Ps and customer characteristics of tourism in Thailand.

Keywords: Tourism theory, 7Ps, customer characteristics

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the growing industries sectors worldwide. Over the years, the travel and tourism business has risen by leaps and bounds, with international tourist arrivals (before covid-19 pandemic) recorded as 1,235 million for 2016 or 3.9% of global economic growth [22]. Tourism as a business needs deal with a range of tourist behaviours, as well as the internal and external forces that influence them. Tourism is a major component of the Thai economy. Not only is it the major source of Thailand's foreign economy, but it also plays a critical role in balancing the country's balance of accounts. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2016), [21] tourism accounts for 6-7% of the country's GDP, and achieved a revenue of \$71 billion in 2016 with almost 75% of the income being drawn from international tourism. One of the main reasons for the tourism industry's key contribution to the GDP emanates from the fact that not only does the revenue come from tourist activity; there is also significant revenue from the employment opportunities and other indirect association such as the food industry which contributes to the facilitation of tourism [18]. For that reason, it is imperative to ensure that tourism has enough support.

Regardless, many research has focused on tourists' reasons to travel, more research is needed to investigate the different theoretical foundations that academics use to analyze travel trends. As a result, the current study sought to add to the existing literature by bringing together various tourism motivational theories through a literature review and examining their contributions to understanding travellers' behaviours.

Theoretical Perspective on Tourists Motivations to Travel

Iso-ahola motivation theory

According to the Iso-Ahola theory of motivation, tourists and travellers have one main need, which is to escape from a situation and look for a particular reward. Through this theory, the main motivators for tourist activity are therefore escape and reward. These factors are further divided into four more motivational factors with the theory asserting that the key factors that motivate are personal escape, interpersonal seeking, and interpersonal escape [1]. Furthermore, the theorists posit that for tourists, leisure activities have the potential to produce satisfaction for two main reasons. First and foremost, they may provide intrinsic rewards such as competence or mastery of a destination, culture or even an activity. Secondly, they also provide extrinsic rewards which are directly linked to the escape factors. The first motivating factor according to the theory is personal escape and this motivation pushes people to tour and travel in order to get away from their normal environment, overcome bad mood or feelings or even have a change of pace from their everyday life [12]. In addition, there is the interpersonal escape and unlike the personal escape, this is more extrinsic as it involves escaping other people. For instance, tourists may escape in order to avoid people they hate to not want to see, get away from a stressful social environment and finally, avoid interactions with others. Thirdly, it is personal seeking, which unlike the previous two, does not entail getting away rather it is motivated by the need to experience new things such as feel good about one's experience about new things such as new destinations and new cultures. Thanabordeekij. (2018), [20] states that the final factor is interpersonal seeking and it occurs when one engages in tourism in order to be around people of similar interests, meet new people, bring friends and families closer.

The Iso-Ahola motivation theory postulates that there are both push and pull factors towards a destination. The push factors answer the question on why a tourist travels and the pull factors answers the question why they travel to that particular destination. For instance, one may be pushed to travel so they can fulfil the need to experience new things and cultures. Then their attraction to a particular destination will be predicated on the fact that the destination perhaps has unusual sights that they have not seen before, or the fact that they have new cultures and people which pull tourists to that destination.

Push And Pull Motives In Tourism

There has been immense scholarly investigation into push and pull motives in a wide range of studies investigating travel motivations. Some of these studies are reviewed in this research paper to explore an introductory review of the motivation behind international travel and what makes some destinations significant. To conduct this review, this paper will explore both push and pull factors.

Push Motives

According to Iso-Ashola, push factors are defined as “the mental preparation for human activities and linked to an individual level of optimal arousal.” Some of the most common

push factors in tourism as highlighted in research include the need to escape from a mundane everyday life, the need to relax, explore, seek social interaction, for the purposes of enhancing relationship and prestige purposes [8]. Jensen, in his study on the motivation factors of Danish travellers establishes that the Danish travellers are more motivated by the need to enjoy social relationships with family and friends and this was the most important motivation for travel. This is closely followed by the need to escape, seeking for relaxation, exploration, appreciating natural resources, exploration of amour sites and lowest in the list was the need for prestige and impression.

When comparing the results of studies assessing the motivations of travel, it is evident that some of these motivations are largely cultural, and thus it is expected to find that different cultures and countries would have different motivations for tourism travel. For example, the online study by Jensen (2011), [8] reveals that tourist motivations of Danish tourists are mainly motivated by the need to enhance social relationships whereas the study by Gilbert and Terrata (2001), [6] which explores tourist attractions of Japanese in the UK establishes that the Japanese are mostly motivated by the need to find new and unusual experiences and gain an escape from everyday life. Additionally, there is also a motivation by younger Japanese to advance a worldview, while also seeking novelty. Despite the fact that younger Japanese are known as enthusiastic shoppers, shopping was considered of lower importance in tourism. Finally, the key determinant on when and where to take the holiday is determined by the availability of finances and time.

In a study by Siri et al. (2011), [17] exploring the motivation and perception of travel by Indian tourists towards Bangkok, the researchers conclude that both push and pull factors have an immense role in determining these factors. Some of the push factors established includes having fun, creating experiences in newer destinations, doing exciting things, and stress reduction. According to Swabrooke and Honer (2007), [19] tourists from western countries such as Britain and Australia are largely motivated by their interest in foreign lands and indigenous cultures. This analysis reiterates the fact that push factors are highly reactive and they immensely depend on the specific countries from where the tourists come.

Table 1: Summary of Tourist Motivation Theories

| Author (Year) | Theory Name | Contribution |
|------------------|--|--|
| Cohen (1972) | Types of tourists | - Classifies tourists based on their travel behaviors and groups them as: 1) organized mass tourists, 2) individual mass tourists, 3) explorers and 4) drifters |
| Dann (1977) | Push and pull theory of tourist motivation | - Builds a theoretical framework based on two concepts: anomie and eco-enhancement. -Defines the anomie factor as the desire to transcend feelings of isolation, while eco-enhancement derives from personal needs |
| Crompton (1979) | Socio psychological motivations to travel | - Identifies seven socio-psychological motives and two cultural motives that drive individuals to travel |
| Iso-Ahola (1982) | Social psychology model of tourism | - Based on push and pull effects, asserts that personal escape and search and interpersonal escape and search motivate tourism and recreation - Combines the main elements (i.e. escape and reward) depending on the particular situation and tourists' goals |
| Pearce (1988) | Travel career ladder | - Lists five travel motivations: relaxation, stimulation, relationship, self-esteem and development or fulfilment - Categorizes travel motivations into two groups: needs that are self-centered and needs that are directed at others |

Source: Anish Y. (2018), [2]

Pull Motives

According to Swarbrooke and Horner (2007), [19] the key factors that motivate travel are not only the psychological push factors, there are also a range of motivations within the tourists themselves what motivates them to take the holiday to that particular destination they wish to travel. This means that the destination characteristics also have a significant impact on the decision to travel and these are called the pull factors. Investigating pull factors is important for tourism marketers because it enables them not only to investigate why tourists travel and their intention during the holiday in terms of their psychological drive, it also determines also on their motives related to tourist destinations [14]. It is important to consider pull motives in order to sustainably attract new and loyal tourists to the destination. Particularly in this era there is not only significant competition in the industry, but also both intrinsic and extrinsic constraints towards tourism seeking behaviour such as financial constraints and even the COVID-19 pandemic, which has placed constraints in travel and even social gatherings.

When determining pull factors, it is important to appreciate what they refer to as the destination as the product of tourism. These factors can be categorized into both the tangible and intangible aspects of a particular destination, which attract individuals and enable them to realize the need they had on the travel experience [14]. Morrison (2013), [11] opines that

some of the characteristics of the tourism destination that determines whether they are pull factors are activities, and the attractions in that destination and these are part of the 10 as framework, which show the particular attributes of a destination that enhance the satisfactory experiences by tourists. The first attribute is 'attractiveness' and this refers to the scope of appeal of attraction offered by the destination, whether by number or geographic extent. Morrison (2013), [11] reveals that activities refer to the array of activities that are available for tourists to engage in while engaging in tourism. Finally, Morrison (2013), [11] posits that 'appreciation' refers to the levels of hospitality that the tourists experience when visiting the area.

Kassean and Gazzetta (2013), [9] while exploring these attributes listed by Morrison (2013), [11] establish that for tourists, some of the top attributes which are sought after are the beaches, climate, exotic scenery and the hospitality and accommodation offered to the tourists and it is for that reason that Mauritius, who offers all these is considered a top destination for travel. Kassea et al. (2013), [9] go further by citing Couch et al. who claim that the destination experience offers to tourists can be grouped in two categories: The first is the service infrastructure and the second is the destination environment. Others include the service infrastructure in the travel services, accommodation services, shopping and recreation, and finally, the attraction services. On the other hand, the destination environment includes the physical and situation environments such as the political and legal factors, economic factors, ecological and cultural factors. Therefore, tourists seeking an experience in destination will be pulled by these factors.

Gilbert and Terrata (2001), [6] in their study establish that when it comes to pull factors, the Japanese consider factors such as the culture, tradition and customs of the country they intend to travel to. This is different from a study by Sookmark (2011), [18] who have found that Korean tourists are mostly pulled by competitive prices in the target destination alongside friendly services and the availability of a strong exchange. For Bangkok, the particular pull factors that would attract the Indian tourists include the scenery, beaches, and the beautiful environment whereas Western tourists are largely motivated by the natural tourist attraction, low cost of travel and the weather in the region.

At the BorsaInternazionale del Turismos (2014),[4] Holiday Trends 2014 reported on the tourist preferences and choices and in this ranking Thailand was portrayed as exotic due to its some less known places such as incredible beaches, pristine nature and the fact that the quality-price ratio is unbeatable as compared to other countries. Another implicit factor that is less known, but is also a significant aspect is food. According to Ardabili et al. (2011),[3] even though tourists do not choose their destination based on the types of food that they may experience during the vacation, the culinary experts happen to be a key determinant of satisfaction and for that reason, it is it can enhance how tourists consider a certain destination as attractive. This finding is echoed by Rousta and Jmashindi (2020), [16] who also states that tourists visiting Hong Kong identify food as the second-best attraction of Hong Kong. For that reason, a key determinant that most tourism marketers should consider is food.

Motivations for Tourism in Thailand

This paper has already shown that motivation for engagement in tourists is predicated on both push and pulls factors. Moreover, Neumann and Riechel as cited in Plangmarn (2012), [14] posit that these motivation factors are the set of needs that cause an individual to participate in the tourist activity. For that reason, in order to determine the tourist behaviour, it is important to highlight the motivation for tourism in Thailand. The previous analysis has exposed that certain motivations include the ability of a destination to help the tourists escape from day to day activities, or connect with family and friends, and the availability of different sites, exotic cultures and great accommodations. The other critical motivator for Thailand is that it provides great adventure through the abundance of exotic and natural sites such as beaches, the floating national park and a wide array of islands, each providing a great gateway for those seeking adventure. Besides that, Thailand boasts of a strong culture and this is attractive to most visitors from Western countries. However, to better identify the best tourist motivations in Thailand, it is important to conduct the 7Ps of the destination.

Product

This refers to the experiences offered by the site and in Thailand's case, there is a wide range of experiences that tourists get to enjoy [7]. Ranging from the exotic natural scenery, to exotic street food and the culture, Thailand offers a wide array of experiences that are bound to act as pull factors to the destination. Furthermore, for those that are pushed to tourism for personal or interpersonal escape, Thailand offers a wide variety of destinations meant for personal wellness and healing, key among them being the natural spas.

Place

This attribute describes where the experience can be obtained from and where the tourists can look for the product [7]. When making a decision regarding the destination to proceed to, most tourists are likely to select areas with a vast array and diversity in the tourist destinations in Thailand. While Thailand is best known for its exotic beaches, it is important to appreciate the fact that the country offers diverse tourism attractions such as the cultural sites, food and even location of ancient civilizations.

Price

The price attribute refers to what the tourist will have to part with, in order to enjoy their experience and it is often measured up against other destinations with Thailand offering the highest quality at the cheapest prices ranking top [7]. Unlike other tourist destinations, Thailand is often cited as one of the cheapest destinations to visit, especially during low tourist seasons. Part of the main reasons why tourism in Thailand is quite cheap is because of the low costs of labour. For that reason, the supply produces goods and services cheaply; in addition to the fact that even the service personnel still deliver the services cheaply, making the service more affordable as compared to other high cost destinations such as the UAE.

Promotion

Promotion refers to the efforts targeted towards raising more consumer awareness surrounding the product. They range from advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and social media [7]. They are communication tools that are employed to send the destination messages towards the correct audience. In order to promote Thailand, there are both private and public modes of promotion. The public mode is promoted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand under the government of Thailand and the Authority's main duty is promoting tourism [13]. The Authority's activities involve creating international advertising campaigns such as 'Discovering Thainess' and 'Amazing Thailand,' in addition to promoting the country's local traditions, cuisine and wellness centers. On the other hand, private companies similarly engage in their own promotion campaigns which predominantly revolve around advertising and promotional activities such as sales promotions where tourists are given an opportunity to visit the island at cheaper prices.

Physical Evidence

Physical evidence refers to the physical elements of the product or services. This is an effect from the intangible services offered as it involves the physical product form[7]. Aside from physical products such as the cuisine, tourists also have the opportunity to purchase souvenirs which include wood carvings, sap and spa products, handmade bags, snacks and finally, spices. These products are often sold in tourist hotspots like the cultural sites in duty free shops in the country.

People

The final aspect of the 7ps is the people and this refers to the individuals that participate in the service delivery including frontline personnel sales staff and even the managing directors [7]. These are important personally because having the right person is crucial in ensuring that the tourists enjoy their stay, in addition to guaranteeing that the country's tourism maintains a positive image. Most works that engage with tourists on a day to day basis are often overworked, and underpaid. This is because of the high demand for the country's tourism alongside the low labour costs in the country. As a result, service delivery in the country may be poorer than other destinations.

Customer Characteristics

Having established the critical aspect of Thailand tourism, in addition to the 7p's of the country tourism, it is important to evaluate the behaviours and characteristics of the tourists who visit Thailand. First and foremost, Thailand is a budget destination that allows for inexpensive stay and shopping, in addition to being a destination that allows for social consumption and this is due to the fact that most people of all ages can enjoy tourism in Thailand [5]. Due to its economic and social consumption factors, Thailand therefore becomes an attractive destination for people with families and those that seek interpersonal escape since it allows for a cheap getaway for large groups such as families, in addition to

being a destination that is friendly for people of all ages. For that reason, the first characteristic of Thailand customers is those individuals seeking interpersonal escape.

The second consumption value in Thailand is the emotional one and this refers to the extent to which the destination evokes emotional feelings in the traveler. Through its relaxing beaches and wellness centers, Thailand provides calm and relaxing locations for tourists who may be seeking a relaxing vacation [10]. This is therefore crucial for those people seeking personal escape through a relaxing vacation. As a result, the second characteristic of tourists in Thailand is those who seek a relaxing and calming vacation which is provided by the serene location in Thailand.

The penultimate value that is obtained from Thailand as identified is the epistemic consumption value. This is predicated upon the epistemic attributes of the destination which enable the tourist to partake in new experiences such as the new cultural experiences, new foods and even other experiences such as kayaking through the rivers. Tourists who enjoy these epistemic consumption values are those that enjoy new experiences and adventures. This therefore means that a third characteristic of the tourists that visit Thailand is those that enjoy adventure, in addition to new and exotic destinations.

Finally, there is the conditional consumption value. This is in line with the economic consumption value as it is dependent on factors such as the costs of travel as compared to other destinations that offer similar benefits including the UAE and Malaysia. According to Reitsamer et al. (2016), [15] these destinations are significantly more expensive than Thailand and therefore, the final characteristic of tourists in Thailand are those that seek budget destinations.

CONCLUSION

Identifying and understanding the needs of tourists in relation to particular destinations is crucial because it facilitates tourist marketers to better package their destination in a manner that would be attractive to the destination. Most importantly, it is essential to assess the characteristics of a particular destination in order to better market it to the appropriate audience. This paper has assessed tourism in Thailand, in a bid to assess the motivators that would pull or push tourists towards Thailand. Based on the analysis, this paper has identified that Thailand provides certain values for the tourists such as the economic value, social consumption value, epistemic value and conditional value. Consequently, the destination is appropriate for visitors seeking lower budget destination that they can visit either to seek a calm and relaxing holiday, or where they can pass time with their families and friends. For this reason, Thailand is a dynamic destination that can be for different groups of tourists.

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