

Comparison between the Decision-Making Process of Russian and Chinese Tourists Traveling to Thailand

การเปรียบเทียบระหว่างกระบวนการตัดสินใจท่องเที่ยวประเทศไทยของนักท่องเที่ยวรัสเซียและนักท่องเที่ยวจีน

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Abstract

The purpose of this research were (1) to study the decision making process of Russian tourists traveling to Thailand; (2) to study the decision making process of Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand; (3) to compare the decision making process between Russian and Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand; and (4) to study the perception of travel agents towards the decision making process of Russian and Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand. This research covered both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Population and samples were 400 Chinese and Russian tourists visiting Thailand. Purposive sampling was used in collecting data together with a self-administered questionnaire. In quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics including percentage, frequency, mean, variance, and standard deviation were utilized to analyze the data. Hypothesis tests were conducted by using statistical techniques t-test and f-test. For qualitative approach, data were collected by personal interviews of 10 travel agents targeting Chinese and/or Russian tourists. Judgment sampling was adopted along with structured interviews in collecting data.

The research results show that there is difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Information search factor, Evaluation of alternatives factor, Post-purchase decision factor at the 0.01 significant level; whereas, there is no difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Purchase decision factor at the 0.01 significant level. Finally, the author has recommended five strategies: (1) focusing on novelty seeking dimension; (2) developing referral programs, and partnership with tour operators in their home country to guarantee numbers of tourists, as well as providing special promotions for Thai tour companies supporting Thailand tourism; (3) emphasizing on Thailand natural beauty, weather, cost-value relations, overall costs of the trip, different culture, and a variety of tourist attractions; (4) developing travel programs that suit tourists' needs and behavior and bundle some products together to show cost-value relations; and (5) maintaining goodwill of people and infrastructure and beauty of tourist destination.

Keywords : Thai tourism, decision making process, Tourist behavior, Russian, Chinese

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ (1) ศึกษากระบวนการตัดสินใจมาท่องเที่ยวยังประเทศไทยของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวรัสเซีย (2) ศึกษากระบวนการตัดสินใจมาท่องเที่ยวยังประเทศไทยของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีน (3) ศึกษาเปรียบเทียบระหว่างกระบวนการตัดสินใจมาท่องเที่ยวยังประเทศไทยของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวรัสเซียและชาวจีน (4) ศึกษาการรับรู้ของบริษัทนำเที่ยวที่มีต่อกระบวนการตัดสินใจมาท่องเที่ยวยังประเทศไทยของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวรัสเซีย รายงานวิจัยฉบับนี้เป็นการวิจัยทั้งเชิงคุณภาพและเชิงปริมาณ ประชากรและกลุ่มตัวอย่าง คือ นักท่องเที่ยวชาวรัสเซียและชาวจีนที่มาท่องเที่ยวที่ประเทศไทยจำนวน 400 คน โดยใช้วิธีการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจงและใช้แบบสอบถามที่ให้กลุ่มตัวอย่างกรอกข้อมูลด้วยตัวเอง ในการเก็บข้อมูล การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณใช้สถิติพรรณนา คือ ค่าความถี่ ร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน และสถิติเชิงอนุมานใช้ การทดสอบค่าทีและการทดสอบค่าเอฟ ในส่วนของข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพ ใช้วิธีการเก็บโดยการสัมภาษณ์บริษัทนำเที่ยวจำนวน 10 บริษัทที่มีกลุ่มลูกค้าเป้าหมาย คือ นักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีนและชาวรัสเซียโดยใช้การเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างแบบใช้วิธีการสุ่มและใช้การสัมภาษณ์แบบมีโครงสร้างในการเก็บข้อมูล

ผลการวิจัยแสดงว่า มีความแตกต่างในชั้นการหาข้อมูลการท่องเที่ยว การประเมินทางเลือกพฤติกรรมภายหลังการซื้อ ระหว่างนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีนและชาวรัสเซียที่ค่านัยสำคัญ 0.01 ในขณะที่พบว่า ไม่มีความแตกต่างระหว่างขั้นตอนการตัดสินใจซื้อของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีนและชาวรัสเซียที่ค่านัยสำคัญ 0.01 โดยสรุปนักวิจัยได้แนะนำกลยุทธ์ 5 ประการดังนี้ 1) มุ่งเน้นไปที่มิติด้านการแสวงหาความแปลกใหม่ของนักท่องเที่ยว 2) พัฒนาระบบแนะนำสมาชิก และความร่วมมือกับบริษัทนำเที่ยวในประเทศต้นทางเพื่อรับประกันจำนวนนักท่องเที่ยว รวมถึงมอบสิทธิพิเศษให้กับบริษัทนำเที่ยวของไทยที่ช่วยส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวไทย 3) เน้นย้ำถึงความงดงามตามธรรมชาติของไทย สภาพอากาศ ความคุ้มค่าเงิน ค่าใช้จ่ายทั้งหมดในการเดินทางท่องเที่ยว วัฒนธรรมที่แตกต่างและความหลากหลายของสถานที่ท่องเที่ยว 4) พัฒนาโปรแกรมการท่องเที่ยวที่เหมาะสมกับความต้องการและพฤติกรรมของนักท่องเที่ยวและใช้เทคนิคการขายแบบควบรวมเพื่อแสดงถึงความคุ้มค่าเงิน 5) รักษาความนิยมของผู้คนและสาธารณูปโภคพื้นฐาน รวมถึงความงามของสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวให้ได้

คำสำคัญ : การท่องเที่ยวไทย กระบวนการตัดสินใจซื้อ พฤติกรรมนักท่องเที่ยว ชาวรัสเซีย ชาวจีน

Introduction

One of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world over the past six decades is tourism. Numbers of international tourist arrivals worldwide have grown uninterruptedly – from 25 million in 1950 to 1087 million in 2013. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)'s long term forecast tourism towards 2030, international tourist arrivals worldwide are expected to increase by 3.3% a year from 2010 to 2030 to reach 1.8 billion by 2030. International tourism figures in 2013 showed that Asia and the Pacific region was the strongest growth with a 6% increase in arrivals (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2014). With 248 million international tourists visiting Asia and the Pacific in 2013, this represents 15-million increase of international tourists from 2012, or an increase

of 6% compared to 2012. The region also recorded USD 359 billion of tourism earnings, USD 30 billion more than 2012, or 8% increase. In particular, arrivals in the region accounted for 23% of the world's total and receipts in the region accounted for 31% (WTO, 2014).

As in 2012, South-East Asia is noted as the fastest growing sub-region in Asia and the Pacific region and in 2013 the fastest growing sub-region in the world, accounted for 11% increase in international tourist arrivals. Thailand also reported strong growth (+19%), with 27 million tourists in 2013, which is 4 million more than in 2012 (World Tourism Organization, 2014). Tourism is thus one of a key driver of socio-economic development in Thailand, provided that it is one of the biggest sources of revenue and the fastest growing industries in Thailand. Around 7% of Thai economy's gross domestic product (GDP) is from international tourism revenue (Tourism Authority of Thailand [TAT], 2014) and the total contribution of tourism industry in Thailand GDP in 2012, as well as its effects on the supply chain, investment, and induced income impacts, was 1,896.7 billion Baht, or 16.7% of GDP, and is expected to rise by 7.4% to 2,038.0 billion Baht, or 17.0% of GDP, in 2013 (Tourism Authority of Thailand [TAT], 2013). To be specific, in 2013 the number of 26,735,583 foreign tourists has visited Thailand, which is accounted for a 19.60 percent increase from last year (Department of Tourism, 2013).

Specifically, tourists from China and Russia are among the top three nationalities traveling to Thailand (Department of Tourism, 2013) and are the fastest-growing tourism markets for Thailand in 2014 (Oxford Business Group, 2014). At a worldwide level, the number one tourism source market in the world is from China, with total spending of USD 129 billion on international tourism (WTO, 2014). In Thailand, according to the Department of Tourism report on December 2013, there were 4,705,173 Chinese tourists travelling to Thailand during January to December 2013, which was an increase of 68.83% compared to last year. They were also the highest spenders among other tourists, or 182,299.12 million Baht on tourism receipts. Similarly, there were 1,736,990 Russian tourists travelling to Thailand during January to December 2013, which was an increase of 31.93% from last year. Their tourism receipts were accounted for 114,834.55 million Baht which was second to Chinese tourists.

The abovementioned figures therefore should alert Thai tourism marketers, both from government and private sectors, to develop effective marketing strategies to attract more international tourists to the country, especially those two nations who were high-ranked in term of numbers, growth, and their spending, as well as to develop tourism packages in response to the needs of the targeted tourists.

Given the importance of tourism industry to Thailand's economy and the importance of the Chinese and Russian markets to Asia and the Pacific region, the need to understand the reasons behind their tourism behavior is of fundamental importance. Studies on

decision making process and tourism behavior therefore were recognized since in the 1960s. Started with Andreason (1965) model, which was one of the early models of consumer behavior, it emphasized the importance of information and consumer attitudes in the consumer decision-making process. However, its limitation was that it failed to include attitudes toward repeat purchase behavior. Next is a model developed by Nicosia (1966) with a focus on the buying decision for a new product, his model contained 4 fields: Field One were company's attempts to communicate with the consumer and the consumers attribute, especially predisposition, to act in a certain way; Field Two referred to consumer's search evaluation stage as a result of attitudes from Field One; Field Three was the actual purchase stage; and Filed Four was the post-purchase feedback. Still, it was criticized that the model was not empirically tested, with undefined variables. Another study is one of the most popular quoted consumer behavior models which belonged to Howard-Sheth (1969), focusing on the significance of inputs toward the consumer purchase process – they are Significant, Symbolic and Social factors. These inputs impacted the perceptual and learning constructs before influencing the final purchase. Even if it did not clarify all buying behavior, but theory of buyer behavior was developed from an empirical research.

Later model such as Solomon's in 1996 (as cited in Swarbrooke, 2001) has moved toward the marketer's viewpoint toward the process and suggested that different actors involved in the consumer buying process – purchaser, user, and influencer. It also noted that organizations, for example "family", can also influence in the buying process. In 1994, Foxall and Goldsmith (as cited in Swarbrooke, 2001) pointed that other aforementioned models were beneficial only in academic term given their absence in overall consideration of how consumers act. Therefore, their model suggested a sequence of four problem-solving stages – (1) the development and perception of a want or need, (2) pre-purchase planning and decision making, (3) the purchase, and (4) the post-purchase behavior which may lead to repeat buying, repeat sales and disposition of the product after consumption. They also suggested that it is easier to stimulate an already-existed want, by means of advertising or sales promotion, rather than to create it.

Moving toward consumer behavior in service industry, Horner and Swarbrooke (2001) also noted that tourism is different in nature comparing to products in general, giving its intangible nature. As a result, consumer behavior of tourism service should be fundamentally different. Thus, more definitions and models of consumer behavior in relation to tourism have also been developed. For example, in 1994, Middleton (as cited in Swarbrooke, 2001) suggested a stimulus-response model of buyer behavior by basing on the four components sequentially – stimulus input, communication channels, buyer characteristics and decision process, and purchase outputs (or response), noting that firms can influence the consumer

buying process by using communication channels. In 1976, Wahab, Crompton and Rothfield (as cited in Swarbrooke, 2001) made a simpler model of the decision-making process in tourism that it started with Initial framework, Conceptual alternatives, Fact gathering, Definition of assumptions, Design of stimulus, Forecast of consequences, Cost benefits of alternatives, Decision, and Outcome. However, these two models hardly showed connection with actual consumer behavior since empirical research has not been conducted to test their models. Schmöll's study in 1977 (as cited in Swarbrooke, 2001) turned a focus from the stimulus's influence to traveler's decision-making process by suggesting that consumer decisions were as a result of four elements – (1) travel stimuli, (2) personal and social determinants of travel behavior, (3) external variables, (4) characteristics and features of the service destination. In relation to factors affecting travel decisions, in 1991, Gilbert (as cited in Swarbrooke, 2001) suggested that there were two levels of factors affecting the consumer, the first one was closer to the person such as psychological influence, while the second level was developed during the socialization stage such as reference groups and family influences. At a larger level, Mathieson and Wall in 1982 (as cited in Swarbrooke, 2001) had introduced a five-stage model of travel buying behavior as follows: Felt need/ travel desire, Information collection and evaluation image, Travel decision, Travel preparation and travel experiences, and Travel satisfaction outcome and evaluation.

Considering application of models in academic textbook (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011), common model on consumer decision-making, especially in service industry, introduced the three-stage model of service consumption as follows: pre-purchase, service encounter, and post-encounter. As quoted in Blythe (2013), Engel, Kollat and Blackwell introduced the consumer behavior's EKB model and afterward developed it into the Consumer Decision Process (CDP) model with seven stages as follows: (1) need recognition – individual recognizes missing part in his/her life, (2) search for information – it can be classified into internal and external search, (3) pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives – individual evaluates the possible alternatives to respond to his/her need, (4) purchase – individual makes final decision to select product and pay for it, (5) consumption – individual uses the product to fulfill his/her need, (6) post-consumption evaluation – individual assesses whether the product actually satisfies the need or not, and whether there are any problems arising from its purchase and consumption, and (7) divestment – individual disposes of the product, or its packaging, or any residue left from consuming the product. Later on, these models were adopted and depicted in a more general perception of marketing concepts and consumer behavior by Dewey (2007) as appeared in several marketing textbooks, specifically Marketing Management (Kotler, 2010), introducing the five-stages of the buying decision process as follows: problem/need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase

behavior. Although the process suggests that consumers pass through all five stages but in more routine purchases, consumers often skip or reverse some of these stages. The model is used to show all considerations that arise when a consumer faces a new and complex purchase situation.

In Thai context, several researches have attempted to get an insight of tourist's behavior traveling to Thailand or specific province or town, for example, a study of travel motivations and travel behaviors of international tourists to Thailand, Asian as opposed to European by Sangpikul (2009), or a study of tourism promotion for senior tourists from Europe to Thailand by Esichaikul (2012) or a study of Chinese tourists' behavior in Chiang Mai province, Thailand, by Jun (2010). However, very few had recognized and insightfully understood foreign tourist's decision making traveling to Thailand by breaking it into 5 stages of decision making process that are (1) need or problem recognition, (2) information search, (3) evaluation of alternatives, (4) purchase decision, and (5) post-purchase behavior (Kotler, 2010).

Therefore, this study aimed to elaborate more on international tourist's decision making process who travel to Thailand and focus particularly on two nationalities – Russian and Chinese.

Purposes

Given the importance of the tourism industry to the Thailand's economy, the need to understand the reasons behind tourism behavior is of fundamental importance. The researcher developed this research to find out and compare the relationship of Russian and Chinese tourists' decision making process. Later, the study's result was reaffirmed by an in-depth interview with the travel agents who are on the supply side and have a stake in this industry. Therefore, this study has objectives developed as follows:

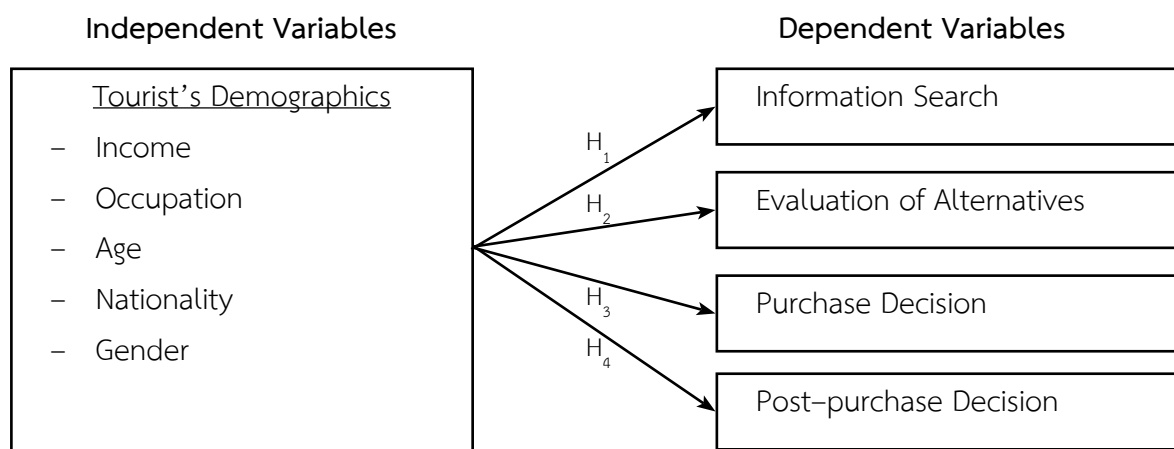
- (1) To study the decision making process of Russian tourists traveling to Thailand;
- (2) To study the decision making process of Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand;
- (3) To compare the decision making process between Russian and Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand;
- (4) To study the decision making process of Russian and Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand through the perception of travel agents.

Hypothesis

The developed conceptual framework shown below was modified from the Five-Stage Model of the Consumer Buying Process (Dewey, 2007). The researcher is particularly interested in Chinese and Russian tourists, due to their rapid growth in term of numbers and spending, to find out the relationship of their demographics and the five-stage decision

making process. According to the variables which the researcher selected for the conceptual framework, there is one set of independent variables which are Income, Occupation, Age, Nationality and Gender. The dependent variables consist of the stages of decision-making process: Information search, Evaluation of Alternatives, Purchase decision, and Post-purchase decision.

According to Zikmund (2003), a hypothesis is an unproven proposition that describes current facts or phenomena. To measure the relationship among variables in the conceptual framework, the following research hypotheses were designed.



Hypothesis 1

H_{1_o} : There is no difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Information Search factor.

H_{1_a} : There is difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Information Search factor.

Hypothesis 2

H_{2_o} : There is no difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Evaluation of alternatives factor.

H_{2_a} : There is difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Evaluation of alternatives factor.

Hypothesis 3

H_{3_o} : There is no difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Purchase Decision factor.

H_{3_a} : There is difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Purchase Decision factor.

Hypothesis 4

H_{4_o} : There is no difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Post-purchase Decision factor.

H_{4_a} : There is difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Post-purchase Decision factor.

Research Methodology

The research methodology of this research consisted of the research method, respondents and sampling procedures, research instruments and questionnaires, data collection and gathering procedures and the statistical treatment of data for verifying the research result.

A descriptive research approach was employed for this study because this approach served to better describe marketing problems, situations, or markets, such as the market potential for a product or the demographics and attitudes of consumers (Kotler, 2010).

Population and Sample

This research used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In quantitative approach, the total numbers of Russian and Chinese tourists visiting Thailand in 2015 were unknown which based on previous year data the figure exceeded 100,000 population sizes. Using the Yamane (1967) formula, the optimal sampling size is 400 respondents for the population of 100,000 or more than 100,000 (Israel, 1992). In this study, the size of population was unknown so 400 respondents were considered as an optimal and adequate for the research.

The questionnaires were used for collecting information from a sample of 400 target population which were distributed to male or female tourists who were convenient and willing to answer the questionnaire. The respondents were Chinese or Russian tourists visiting Thailand and were departing Suvarnabhumi airport. As for qualitative approach, the population of inbound travel agents targeting Russian and Chinese markets are 190 travel agents (Association of Thai Travel Agents, 2014) thus the sample of 10 travel agents will be interviewed.

Instruments

This research applied a survey technique, the most widely used method for primary data collection and best suited for gathering descriptive information. Its major advantage of survey research lies in its flexibility; it can be used to obtain many different kinds of information in many different situations. (Kotler, P.A. 2010). This research will use both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data is collected by personal questionnaire method with its strengths in flexibility, quantity of data that can be collected, control of sample, speed of data collection, and good response rate. Qualitative data was collected by personal interview of approximately 10 travel agents targeting Chinese and/or Russian tourists. The interview's questions were based on the self-administered questionnaire of the quantitative data.

Two types of data will be collected. First is primary data which was classified into 2 parts – quantitative and qualitative data as mentioned in Population and Sample section. The second type of data collected was secondary data, gathered from academic journals, academic books, statistical compilations, newspapers, magazines and the Internet.

The self-administered questionnaire was developed in relation to related literature review of various sources used for quantitative approach (Table 1); it was also validated by three experts in language and statistics, and later was pre-tested by 30 tourists and revised again to reach the Cronbach's Alpha value of more than 0.7. The questionnaire consisted of three main parts as follows: part I Demographic data, part II Travel motivation and travel behavior, and part III Opinions toward traveling abroad.

Table 1 : Sources of each factors and questions used in the questionnaire

Stage in the decision making process	Part	Questions	Sources
Need Recognition	II	Influencing persons toward your travel decision	– Dewey (2007) – EKB model (as cited in Blythe, 2013) – Schmöll's model in 1977 (as cited in Swarbrooke, 2011)
	III	Influent level of reasons to travel abroad	
Information Search	III	Influent level of sources you use to search for travel information	– Dewey (2007) – EKB model (as cited in Blythe, 2013)
Evaluation of Alternatives	II	Factors influencing your criteria to evaluate travel destination	– Dewey (2007) – EKB model (as cited in Blythe, 2013) – Sangpikul (2009)
Purchase Decision/ Travel Behavior	II	Number of times you have traveled overseas within 5 years	– Correia & Pimpão (2008) – Dewey (2007) – EKB Model (as cited in Blythe, 2013) – Esichaikul (2012) – In-touch Research & Consultancy (2013)
	II	Number of times you have visited Thailand	
	II	Your trip arrangement to Thailand	
	II	Your accommodation booking period in advance	
	II	Your periods of stay in Thailand	
	II	Your travel companions	

Table 1 : Sources of each factors and questions used in the questionair (continued)

Stage in the decision making process	Part	Questions	Sources
Purchase Decision/ Travel Behavior (continued)	II	Your trip destination in Thailand	
	II	Your average daily expense for accommodation	
	II	Your choices of accommodation in Thailand	
	II	Your average daily expense for food and beverage	
	II	Your average daily expense for shopping	
	II	Your preferred leisure activities in Thailand	
	II	Your most preferred leisure activities in Thailand	
	III	Factors influencing your decision to choose Thailand as your destination	
Post-purchase	III	Your planned action after visiting Thailand	– Dewey (2007) – EKB model (as cited in Blythe, 2013)

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics including percentage, frequency, mean, variance, and standard deviation were utilized to analyze the data. Hypothesis tests were conducted by using statistical techniques t-test and F-test.

Research Results

The data collected from 400 respondents was analyzed and tested according to the predetermined hypotheses (Table 2).

Table 2 : Testing influent level of decision-making process factors according to nationality

Factors	Nationality	\bar{x}	S.D.	t	Sig.
Information Search	Chinese	3.07	0.96	- 3.274	.001*
	Russian	3.19	0.82		
Evaluation of Alternatives	Chinese	3.39	1.05	3.424	.001*
	Russian	3.26	0.91		
Purchase Decision	Chinese	3.39	1.05	2.397	.017*
	Russian	3.27	0.90		
Post-purchase Decision	Chinese	3.29	0.29	3.236	.001*
	Russian	3.06	0.88		

*sig 0.01

The analysis of Independent Samples Test in Table 2 indicated that the two-tailed significance value is equal to 0.001 in three factors – Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, and Post-purchase Decision, which is less than 0.01. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, which means that there is difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, and Post-purchase Decision factors at the 0.01 significant level.

However, the analysis of Independent Samples Test of the Purchase Decision factor with the two-tailed significance value equals to 0.17, which is more than 0.01. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, which means that there is no difference between Chinese and Russian tourists in Purchase decision factor at the 0.01 significant level. This showed their similarity in several travel behaviors, for example, their trip arrangement, their accommodation booking, their period of stay in Thailand, their travel companions and their travel budget for food and shopping. Though, there is difference between their preferred destinations in Thailand but it is not at a 0.01 significant level.

Conclusion and Discussion

From the above research results, more detailed of explanation and conclusion were discussed according to the research objectives as follows:

Objective 1 : To explore the decision making process of Russian tourists traveling to Thailand

After analyzing the data, the important results are discussed in relation to the facts and related theories. With regard to Dewey (2007), the 5-stage decision making process are as follows: First, the need recognition stage of Russian tourists showed that when making travel decisions, the majority of Russian respondents were influenced by their couples

followed by making decision by themselves, being influenced by their boyfriends or girlfriends, being influenced by their friends, and being influenced by their parents or relative. This was confirmed by the qualitative result from the travel agents that they mainly came to Thailand as couple or family. Moreover, their very high and high influential level of reasons to travel abroad were explained in Sangpikul (2009) as novelty seeking dimensions which is one type of push factor.

Second, the information search stage of Russian tourists showed that their sources of travel information were from word of mouth, touring company or travel agent, forwarded mail or e-book or e-magazine, and social network. This was in accordance with the qualitative results that they used Internet and contact travel agents for travel information. Third, the evaluation of alternative stage of Russian tourists showed that criteria influencing Russian tourists in making travel decision were natural attractions, weather, cost-value relations, overall costs of the trip (air fares, accommodation, or food), and culture (people, society, or history). The result was in accordance with a survey conducted by TAT in 2013, as well as the qualitative results showing that Russian tourists preferred to visit beaches in many regions of Thailand and were influenced by weather conditions.

Fourth, the purchase decision stage of Russian tourists showed that Russian tourists have traveled 2–3 times overseas within 5 years and have visited Thailand 2–3 times before. Their other travel behaviors included: they arranged their trip to Thailand mainly with a tour company, made their accommodation booking or purchased package tour less than 15 days in advance, stayed in Thailand for 6–10 days in one trip, traveled with their couples (husband or wife), have visited or planned to visit the South (Phuket, Samui, or Pang-nga) during this trip to Thailand, used on average USD100 – USD199 for accommodation a day, preferred first class hotel (or 4-star hotel), used on average USD10 – USD19 for food and beverage a day, used on average USD100 – USD199 for shopping a day, and preferred to visit beaches or islands, natural or eco-tourism, and visit cultural or historical sites respectively. Last, the post-purchase decision stage of Russian tourists showed that Russian tourists were satisfied with their trip to Thailand and likely to revisit again, as well as recommending Thailand to family, friends, relatives or acquaintances.

Objective 2 : To explore the decision making process of Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand

After analyzing the data, the important results are discussed in relation to the facts and related theories. With regard to Dewey (2007), the 5-stage decision making process are as follows: First, the need recognition stage of Chinese tourists showed that when

making travel decisions, the majority of Chinese respondents were influenced by themselves followed by being influenced by their couples, being influenced by their boyfriends or girlfriends, being influenced by their friends, and being influenced by their parents or relative. Moreover, their very high and high influential level of reasons to travel abroad were explained in Sangpikul (2009) as novelty seeking dimensions which is one type of push factor.

Second, the information search stage of Chinese tourists showed that their sources of travel information were from word of mouth, touring company or travel agent, social network, travel guidebook, television, website, and forwarded mail or e-book or e-magazine. This was in accordance with the qualitative results that they used Internet and contact travel agents for travel information. Third, the evaluation of alternative stage of Chinese tourists showed that criteria influencing Chinese tourists in making travel decision were natural attractions, culture (people, society, or history), a variety of tourist attractions, overall costs of the trip (air fares, accommodation, or food), and by cost-value relations.

Fourth, the purchase decision stage of Chinese tourists showed that Chinese tourists have traveled 2–3 times overseas within 5 years and have visited Thailand for the first time. Their other travel behavior included: they arranged their trip to Thailand mainly by traveling with a tour company, made their accommodation booking or purchased package tour less than 15 days in advance, stayed in Thailand for 6–10 days in one trip, traveled with their couples (husband or wife), have visited or planned to visit Bangkok during this trip to Thailand, used on average CNY624 – CNY1241 (or USD100 – USD199) for accommodation a day, preferred first class hotel (or 4-star hotel), used on average CNY62 – CNY117 (or USD10 – USD19) for food and beverage a day, used on average CNY624 – CNY1241 (USD100 – USD199) for shopping a day, and preferred to visit beaches or islands, to taste local food, and shopping respectively. Fifth, the post-purchase decision stage of Chinese tourists showed that Chinese tourists were satisfied with their trip to Thailand and likely to revisit again, as well as recommending Thailand to family, friends, relatives or acquaintances.

Objective 3 : To compare the decision making process between Russian and Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand

After analyzing the data, the important results are discussed in relation to the facts and related theories. With regard to Dewey (2007), the 5-stage decision making process are as follows: First, the need recognition stage of Russian tourists showed that when making travel decisions, the majority of Russian respondents were influenced by their couples, which was similar to Chinese tourists. Their reasons to travel abroad as explained in Sangpikul (2009) were also the same which were regarded as novelty seeking dimensions which is one type of push factor.

Second, the information search stage of Russian tourists showed that their sources of travel information were from word of mouth, touring company or travel agent, forwarded mail or e-book or e-magazine, and social network. Whereas, Chinese tourists' sources of travel information were from word of mouth, touring company or travel agent, social network, travel guidebook, television, website, and forwarded mail or e-book or e-magazine. The first two sources were the same and the rest were different.

Third, the evaluation of alternative stage of Russian tourists showed that criteria influencing Russian tourists in making travel decision were natural attractions, weather, cost-value relations, overall costs of the trip (air fares, accommodation, or food), and culture (people, society, or history). Whereas, the criteria influencing Chinese tourists in making travel decision were natural attractions, culture (people, society, or history), a variety of tourist attractions, overall costs of the trip (air fares, accommodation, or food), and by cost-value relations. It was apparent that to both Russian and Chinese tourists, they regarded natural attractions as one main criteria when choosing travel destination.

Fourth, the purchase decision stage of Russian tourists showed that Russian tourists have traveled 2-3 times overseas within 5 years and have visited Thailand 2-3 times before, which was the same as Chinese tourists. Their other similar travel behaviors included: they arranged their trip to Thailand mainly with a tour company, made their accommodation booking or purchased package tour less than 15 days in advance, stayed in Thailand for 6-10 days in one trip, traveled with their couples (husband or wife), used on average RUB6,714 – RUB13,360 (or USD100 – USD199) for accommodation a day, preferred first class hotel (or 4-star hotel), used on average RUB671 – RUB1,274 (or USD10 – USD19) for food and beverage a day, used on average RUB6,714 – RUB13,360 (or USD100 – USD199) for shopping a day. On the contrary, their different travel behavior included: Russian tourists have visited or planned to visit the South (Phuket, Samui, or Pang-nga) during this trip to Thailand, while Chinese tourists aimed at Bangkok. Also, Russian tourists preferred to visit beaches or islands, natural or eco-tourism, and visit cultural or historical sites respectively; whereas, Chinese tourists preferred to visit beaches or islands, to taste local food, and shopping respectively.

Fifth, the post-purchase decision stage of Russian and Chinese tourists were the same, being that they were satisfied with their trip to Thailand and likely to revisit again, as well as recommending Thailand to family, friends, relatives or acquaintances.

Objective 4 : To study the perception of travel agents towards the decision making process of Russian and Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand

From an in-depth interview with 5 travel agents targeting Chinese tourists, their perception toward Chinese tourists were as follows: they came from several parts of

mainland China, there were no specific regions, their age range covered from 6 years old to even 70 years old, marital status mainly were married, and their education level were high, above undergraduate level, occupations were varied which could be both government employees or private company employees, as well as business owners, their household income were also varied but mainly around CNY50,000 – 100,000 (or USD312,155 – USD624,310). This was in accordance with Lei Jun study of Chinese tourists' behavior in Chiang Mai province (2010) that the majority of them had bachelor's degree and worked with private companies or government offices. They wanted to experience new things and because their country had just opened for outside world, so many of them have never been to any country before. They usually were influenced by their friends and family, when you saw people going to exotic place like Thailand, you would want to come too. Also, they saw a lot of advertisement, beautiful pictures of temples and beaches, so they wanted to come here. They received travel information from television and travel expo. They also used Internet.

Chinese tourists wanted to go to new places, around their country such as Korea, Japan, or Thailand. They also concerned about costs, Thailand was inexpensive to them so a lot of them came here. Natural beauty of the destination was also what they would look at. They concerned most about nature and cost-value relations. Some have traveled abroad before, at least one time each year. Some have never left the country, usually old people. For some Chinese tourists, this was their first time but to many Chinese tourists they have visited Thailand so many times because it was easy to come and they love Thailand. They preferred to buy package tours or come with a tour company. They liked to come in group and made their accommodation booking not so long, 2 weeks in advance sometimes. But some really booked in advance because they were afraid that the tickets or the hotels would be full. For Chinese tourists, usually it took them 4–5 days for first visit – Bangkok and Pattaya area, then next time they would go to the South or the North.

Chinese tourists usually came with friends or family, or sometimes girlfriends or boyfriends. But most of them came in as a group of 4–5 people. Many groups would demand different trips and travel agents can arrange and customize for them too. They preferred 4–5 star hotels with good discount. The least will be 3–star. So on average it should be around THB1,000 (or USD30.66) per night or even less. Their average daily expense for food and beverage already included in their package. It varied depending on whether there was seafood menu on that day or not, but usually around THB400 – THB500 (or USD12.26 – USD15.33) per day. Their average daily expense for shopping should be around THB300 – THB1,000 (or USD9.2 – USD30.66) for Chinese tourists. They loved to see exotic show, such as Alcazar show, Cabaret show, and Lady boy show. They also loved

to taste local food and went to temples, famous tourist destination such as Grand Palace and Wat Poh, and beaches. To see those exotic shows was what they like the most. There were a lot of factors influencing their decision to choose Thailand - food, weather, low price products, natural attractions, exotic shows, unique destinations such as temple and local people. They also loved Thai people. One famous movie in China “Lost in Thailand” also made Chinese people wanted to experience Thailand. Lastly, very few Chinese tourists would hate Thailand, most of them loved Thailand and wanted to come back again if they had a chance. They would recommend friends and family to come to Thailand.

From an in-depth interview with 5 travel agents targeting Russian tourists, their perception toward Russian tourists were as follows: they came from several parts of Russia, both men and women, usually there came as couple, their age range was really varied, some were really young such as 16 years old while some were really old such as 75 years old, not sure about marital status but they came as couple or family, their education level were undergraduate level, and occupations were varied from government employees, private company employees, to business owners, their household income were not high but mainly around RUB 500,000 (or USD7446) but because of low currency exchange rate, they were more rich to travel abroad. They had lived in a very cold weather and now they had a chance of more income and good exchange rate, more and more Russians are now traveling to Thailand. They made their travel decisions by themselves or sometimes made decisions within the family. They searched for information by using Internet and going to travel agents in their country. If they were repeated customers, they will just e-mail and book their trip.

Russian tourists mainly looked for things different to their home country, such as nature and beaches and good weather. They concerned most about the weather and nature. They have traveled abroad around 2–3 times within 5 years. Though their English was not good but they went to many places already. Some of them have never been to Thailand before, some were really expert here, and they knew what to do and where to go already. They bought package tours with tour agents and if this was their first time, usually they will come with a tour company. Sometimes they just walked-in to ask for price of accommodation. But if they bought with travel agents, usually they would do it around 2 weeks before their trip. For Russian tourists usually it took them more than 5–7 days to visit Thailand, depends on their holiday period too. Some who already retired would come for a month or more, they considered Thailand as their second home now, during winter season. They often came with family and kids. Some came as couple as well.

The South was the most popular region to them, with good weather and beaches, which is in accordance with a survey conducted by Tourism Authority of Thailand in 2005. Sometimes, Pattaya too. They would pay around THB 2,000 (or USD61.33) or more

if it's high-season but normally if they can negotiate they will ask for discount. To estimate, it should be around THB1,500 – THB2,000 (or USD46 – USD61.33). They preferred 4–5 star hotels with pools. If they purchased food on the beach area, it would be high price. Some meals were already included in the package, so it depended on their choice afterward. To estimate, it should be around THB500 (or USD15.33) or more per day. They did not shop a lot, they preferred all day on a beach, only buy souvenir and food sometimes. It should be around THB200 – THB500 (or USD6.13 – USD15.33). They preferred to go to beaches the most, followed by visiting any natural attractions, and snorkeling. They also went for shows sometimes. For them, weather and natural attractions should be main influent factors. They also loved Thai food, especially Tom Yam Goong. Good value was also one of the reason for them. In general, Russian tourists also loved Thailand, the weather, food, and people were so nice. They would definitely come back.

Recommendation

As a result of the above conclusion and discussion, strategies for private and public sectors to promote more Russian and Chinese tourists to Thailand are recommended as follows:

For private sectors, particularly the touring companies, accommodation providers, and owners of restaurants and tourist places:

1. Focusing on novelty seeking dimension in the communication message: the research found that during the tourists' need recognition stage, they tend to be aroused by something new and exciting, different culture experience, learning new things from a foreign country, country or city that they have never visited before, and fun and adventure. All these attributes are push factors, novelty seeking dimension. Thus, the private sectors should focus on this dimension in their communication message via website, brochures, print advertisement, and event marketing.

2. Developing travel programs that suit tourists' needs and behavior and bundle some products together to show cost-value relations: it was found in the research that Russian tourists have traveled 2–3 times overseas within 5 years and have visited Thailand 2–3 times before, which was the same as Chinese tourists. Their other similar travel behavior included: they arranged their trip to Thailand mainly with a tour company, made their accommodation booking or purchased package tour less than 15 days in advance, stayed in Thailand for 6–10 days in one trip, traveled with their couples (husband or wife), used on average RUB6,714 – RUB13,360 (or USD100 – USD199) for accommodation a day, preferred first class hotel (or 4–star hotel), used on average RUB671 – RUB1,274 (or USD10 – USD19) for food and beverage a day, used on average RUB6,714 – RUB13,360 (or USD100 – USD199) for shopping a day. On the contrary, their different travel behavior

included: Russian tourists have visited or planned to visit the South (Phuket, Samui, or Pang-nga) during this trip to Thailand, while Chinese tourists aimed at Bangkok. Also, Russian tourists preferred to visit beaches or islands, natural or eco-tourism, and visit cultural or historical sites respectively; whereas, Chinese tourists preferred to visit beaches or islands, to taste local food, and shopping respectively. Therefore, travel program should be developed in line with the abovementioned behaviors.

For public sectors, particularly Tourism authority of Thailand:

3. Developing referral programs, and partnership with tour operators in their home country to guarantee numbers of tourists, as well as providing special promotions for Thai tour companies supporting Thailand tourism: the research found that during their information search stage, both Russian and Chinese tourists relied heavily on receiving information from word of mouth and from touring company or travel agent. Other sources were forwarded mail or e-book or e-magazine, and social network. It is therefore recommended to have a referral program – if friends recommend friends, they will get special discount or privilege – such as free one-day sky train tickets or free entrance to Grand Palace. What TAT could do is to provide tour operators in tourist's home country with enough materials so that they can serve customers better or give them special discount if they reach the customer target.

4. Emphasizing on Thailand natural beauty, weather, cost-value relations, overall costs of the trip, culture when promoting, and a variety of tourist attractions: it was found that during their evaluation of alternative stage, it is apparent that to both Russian and Chinese tourists, they regarded natural attractions as one main criteria when choosing travel destination. Therefore, when TAT promoting to these groups, the message should emphasize on Thailand natural beauty. While Russian tourists evaluated travel destination by natural attractions, weather, cost-value relations, overall costs of the trip (air fares, accommodation, or food), and culture (people, society, or history) and Chinese tourists evaluated travel destination by natural attractions, culture (people, society, or history), a variety of tourist attractions, overall costs of the trip (air fares, accommodation, or food), and by cost-value relations; therefore, these factors should be emphasized while promoting as well.

5. Maintaining goodwill of people and infrastructure and beauty of tourist destination: it was found that both Russian and Chinese tourists love Thailand and would like to revisit again if possible, also they would recommend friends and family about Thailand. However, natural resources are limited and may disappear if they are not well-maintained. Therefore, TAT's campaign promoting a preventive measure of natural resources, targeting both domestic and international tourists, as well as local operators is needed in order to maintain and sustain our country's nature at its best.

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