

PURCHASING INTENTION OF “SLOW TOURISM SERVICES” FOR SENIOR CITIZENS IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), some of the future market trends are, an increase in the number of elderly tourists, a change from active vacations to experience-based holidays with the different objectives or purposes of traditional travel. Therefore, factors affecting intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services of senior citizens should be explored. This study collected data from 155 senior citizens in Thailand using a questionnaire. Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, Chi-square (X^2 -test) and correlation analysis.

The findings reveal that the senior citizens in Thailand from different socio-demographic profiles (e.g. gender, age, monthly income, marital status, nationality, have different intentions to purchase Slow Tourism Services in Thailand (i.e. relaxation, self-reflection, escape, novelty-seeking, engagement and discovery). It was also found that there is a significant relationship between service marketing mix (7P's) (i.e. product, price, distribution, promotion, people, process of service and physical evidence) on the intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services for senior citizens in Thailand, at significant level of 0.05.

These results can be used as a marketing guideline to improve their marketing strategies to better capture the rapid changes in the tourism market in Thailand.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays Thailand is entering aging society due to higher development of medical profession as well as the decrease of birth rate after World War II. This leads to the increase of the great number of the senior citizens within 10 years. It would be that the aging society lives along with the changing society all the times and making that senior citizens would be left from the society (Mattayomburut, 2009). From this point, it also influences those senior citizens' mind to become desolate. Tourism for senior citizens, then, would be one factor that enhances the happiness both physicality and mentality. However to make senior tourism is as easy as general tourism is challenging owing to age involution. Referring to the need of senior citizens' tourism, it revealed that the destination of travelling was the places that they visited and they want to visit those places again due to the impression in terms of atmosphere, tour guides etc. (Chalongsri Pimonsompong, 2005)

Slow tourism is a popular trend for people in an urban because they would like to avoid busy, boring, and rush society travelling in a peaceful and plain place in order to relax their mind and their body. The countries in the west world can support their people in terms of Slow tourism since the weather and the atmosphere is suitable for travelling through year. What's more, old society and old culture, and sustainable economy in some areas of those countries also promote Slow tourism. Thailand but is one of the countries in the east world which provides massive beauty and uniqueness in terms of being a choice for Slow tourists. To develop the tourist's attractions to accommodate Slow tourism, good planning and management is a must because the needs of slow tourists often contrast with mass tourism

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which is focusing on the number of the tourists, convenience, and speed of doing activities. (Chondarong Tongsong, 2015).

The above mentioned raises a research question of this study: what are the factors affecting the intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services of senior citizens in Thailand?

Following the research question, this research aims to investigate the relationship between socio-demographic profiles (e.g. gender, age, monthly income, marital status, nationality, reason for Slow Tourism Service purchases, travel party size, average travel party size per visit and travel companion) and the effects of Service Marketing Mix (7P's), (i.e. product, price, distribution, promotion, people, process of service and physical evidence) on intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services (i.e. relaxation, self-reflection, escape, novelty-seeking, engagement and discovery) for senior tourists in Thailand. The conceptual framework of the study is depicted below in Figure 1.

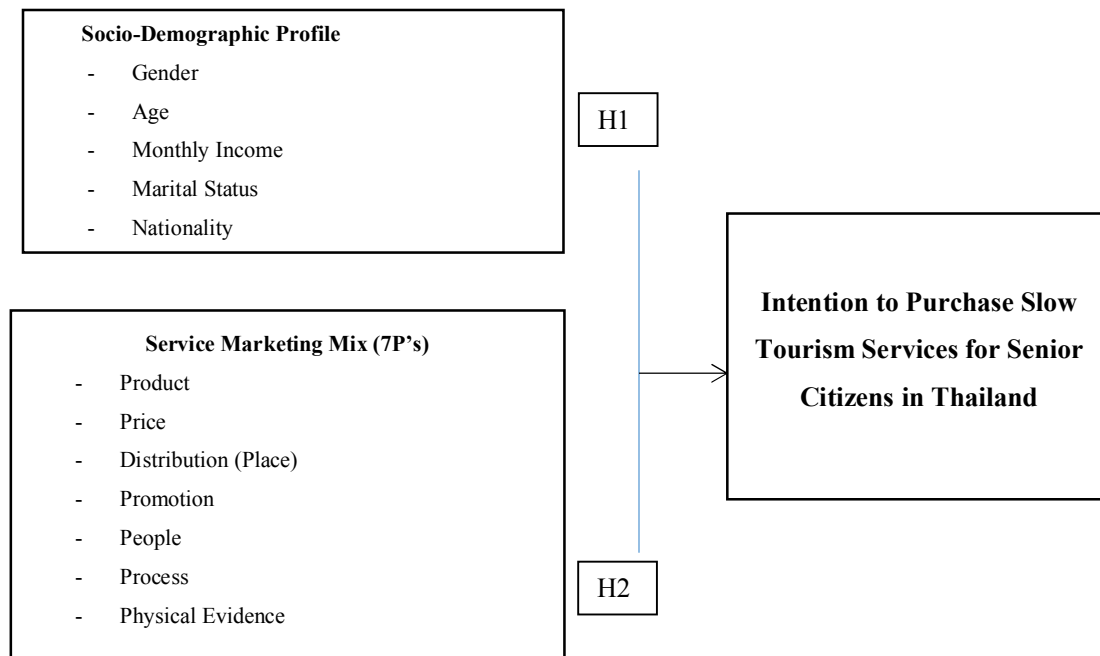


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

According to the above research aims and the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses of the study are as follows;

H1: Senior citizens with different socio-demographic profiles will have different intentions to purchase Slow Tourism Services in Thailand.

H2: Service Marketing Mix (7P's) has an effect on the intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services for senior citizens in Thailand.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population of this study is senior tourists age 45 years old and over including Thai and foreigner in Thailand. The sample is senior tourists age 45 years old and over who live in Nonthaburi and Songkla / Hatyai province, Thailand. This research is a survey research design using a questionnaire to collect data from respondents. This study employed a convenience sampling method because the respondents were available and able to complete the questionnaire survey (Malhotra 2007). According to Taro Yamane (1967)'s sample size table,

this study should collect data from 400 respondents. However, with a limited study period, this study has been able to collect data from 155 respondents.

155 questionnaires were distributed and received. In order to measure the constructs of the study, the research used the following items in each questionnaire section; Part 1: Socio-Demographic Profile: The first part of the survey consisted on only close-ended questions to collect the personal information of the respondents necessary for the research. The questions are made of dichotomous questions; Part 2: Service Marketing Mix (7P's): 31 items to measure the Service Marketing Mix (7P's) (i.e. product, price, distribution, promotion, people, process, physical evidence) using a five points Likert's scale; and Part 3: Purchasing Intention of Slow Tourism Services: 18 items to measure the purchasing intention of Slow Tourism Services (i.e. relaxation, self-reflection, escape, novelty-seeking, engagement, and discovery).

Each investigated construct was analyzed by using descriptive statistics such as, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The hypotheses were tested by using a Chi-square (X^2 -test) and Correlation analysis.

RESEACH FINDINGS

Results of Socio-Demographic Profiles

The majority respondents are female (56.1%) followed by male (43.9%) and are between ages 46-55 (54.2%), followed by 56-65 (23.2%), 35-45 (11.6%) and above 66 years old (11%). Most respondents have monthly income Baht 20,001-30,000 (29%) followed by Baht 30,001-40,000 (21.3%) , and were married (50.3%). 75.5% of respondents are Thai, followed by French (6.5%), British (4.5%), Australian (3.2 %), Chinese (2.6%), Singaporean and Myanmar are equal (1.9%) and Vietnamese (.6%).

Additional findings about reasons for intention to purchase Slow Tourism services are Relaxation (61.3%); self-reflection (24.5%); escape is a reason to purchase (16.8%); novelty-seeking (7.1%); engagement is a reason to purchase (7.1%) and discovery (5.2%). Moreover, the majority of respondents traveled with someone (family, friends (83.2%), followed by alone (14.8%) and others (.6%). The average travel party size per visit is 1-5 persons (66.5%) followed by 6-10 persons (33.5%). They mostly travel with family (55%), followed by friends (25.5%), alone (15%) and colleagues (4.5%).

Most respondents agree (mean 3.41-4.20) that they have considered service marketing mix strategies of Slow Tourism Services providers if they would purchase slow tourism service in Thailand: These are service strategy e.g. service packages, cultural involved activities; price strategy e.g. expenses for slow tourism service package is reasonable and the packages are worth its value; distribution channel strategy e.g. it is convenient to find tourist destination information through variety channels including offices and online channels; promotion strategy e.g. advertising through printed media, online media and online social media affect their purchasing intention; process strategy e.g. airport pick-up service and easy pay process affect their purchasing intention. They also stongly agree (mean > 4.20) that people stratgy e.g. good services from accomodation staff, tour guides, restaurants, shopping places ; and physical evidence strategy e.g. well-decorated and convenient location of accomodation, suitable toursist attractions for senior tourists affect their intention to purchase Slow Tourism services in Thailand.

Results of Hypothsis Test

Hypothesis 1*: Senior citizens with different socio-demographic profiles will have different intentions to purchase Slow Tourism Services in Thailand.

With regards to hypothesis 1, the study found that there is a partial relationship between socio-demographic profiles and intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services in Thailand ($p < 0.05$).

The findings show that different gender was found to have a significant relationship with 'self-reflection', 'novelty-seeking' and 'discovery' but no significant relationship with 'relaxation', 'escape' and 'engagement' when purchasing Slow Tourism Services. Age was found to have a significant relationship with 'relaxation', 'self-reflection', 'novelty-seeking', 'engagement', and 'discovery' but no relationship with 'escape' when purchasing Slow Tourism Services. Monthly income was also found to have a significant relationship with 'relaxation', 'self-reflection', 'novelty-seeking', 'engagement', and 'discovery' but no relationship with 'escape' when purchasing Slow Tourism Services. Marital status was found to have a significant relation with 'relaxation', 'novelty-seeking', 'engagement', and 'discovery', but no significant relationship with 'escape' and 'engagement' when purchasing Slow Tourism Services. Lastly, nationality was found to have a significant relationship with 'self-reflection', 'novelty-seeking', 'escape', 'engagement', and 'discovery' but no relationship with 'relaxation' when purchasing Slow Tourism Services.

The results was in line with the study of Oh, Assaf and Baloglu (2014) since they mention the motivations and goals for purchasing Slow Tourism Services are to relax, self-reflect, escape, novelty-see, engage and discover. The hectic life of people has had an impact to slow tourism so that relaxation and enjoying with time are having a great value. (Venesmäki, 2009.) Being part of the local culture drives tourists in slow tourism to engage in local life, not to visit top destinations fast around the world. In mainstream tourism, top attractions are listed to be visited, but in slow tourism the power is given to the customers to explore the location with no hurry. (Footprint choices, 2011.)

Hypothesis 2*: Service Marketing Mix (7P's) has an effect on the intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services for senior citizens in Thailand.

With regards to hypothesis 2, this study has found that there is a partial effect of Service Marketing Mix (7P's) and intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services for senior tourists in Thailand ($p < 0.05$).

The findings show that the respondents agree that service marketing mix (7P's) consisted of product, price, distribution (place), promotion, people, process of service and physical evidence do affect the intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services for senior tourists in Thailand. For example, services packages with interesting activities, cultural involved activities and can be customized to match tourists' needs; affordable packages fee; providing information about tourists destinations through both offline and online channels; advertising through printed and online media; good services from services related parties; airport pick-up and easy payment process; and having ancient remains attraction and suitable natural environment for senior tourists have influence on intention to purchase Slow Tourism Service of senior tourists in Thailand.

The result supports Jitthangwattana (2005) who suggested that promotion of tourism was a major marketing mix factor and can be used to manage tourist's satisfaction, probably in the context of Slow Tourism Service in this study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aims to identify the intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services for senior tourists in Thailand and to determine the effects of socio-demographic profiles and service marketing mix (7P's) on the intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services for senior tourists in Thailand.

From 155 senior tourists in Thailand, the study has found that there is a significant relationship between socio-demographic profiles (e.g. gender, age, monthly income, marital status, nationality) and intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services for senior tourists in Thailand. In addition, the study has found that Service Marketing Mix (i.e. product, price,

distribution, promotion, people, process of service and physical evidence). has an effect on intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services for senior tourists in Thailand (i.e. relaxation, self-reflection, escape, novelty-seeking, engagement, and discovery).

Implication of the Study

From the study, the majority of respondents which are senior tourists in Thailand with the intention to purchase Slow Tourism Services will be influenced by the elements of marketing mix strategy prioritized as follows: physical evidence of the destinations, followed by the people, the product or service provided to them that suits their needs as seniors, the price as Thailand is not an expensive country to get around, how well the destination is promoted on social media and printed media, then the place itself and its convenience of getting there. Lastly, the process of service as in easy pay process and pick-up service if needed. Therefore, Slow Tourism Services providers should consider this finding when developing or improving their marketing strategy.

Moreover, the most important reason to the purchase for Slow Tourism Services for senior tourists in Thailand is relaxation so destinations should be well placed in a relaxing environment away from all the city noises.

Recommendation for Future Study

This study collected data from 155 respondents in only 2 cities which were Nonthaburi and Hatyai. In order to have a better understanding and more reliable results, future researchers should try to cover more cities in Thailand. Future studies may replicate this study but move to focus on the different destinations that offer Slow Tourism Services in Thailand such as, Isaan, Nan, and Koh Kret Island. This may help to further understand the marketing guideline for Slow Tourism that suits Thai and foreign seniors in Thailand. Future studies may explore ASEAN countries and compare the availability of Slow Tourism Services and the difference of marketing strategies and intention to purchase of the different countries.

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