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Factors Influencing the Decision-Making Process of Thai Tourists in Purchasing Travel Packages to South Korea

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Abstract

The research on Factors Influencing the Decision-Making Process of Thai Tourists in Purchasing Travel Packages to South Korea aimed to 1) Examine the factors influencing the decision-making process of Thai tourists in purchasing travel packages to South Korea, and 2) Analyse approaches for developing the service marketing mix (7Ps: product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence) in the tourism business. A questionnaire was employed as the primary research instrument for data collection. The sample group consisted of 400 respondents, selected using random sampling methods. The data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics, namely t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation coefficient, to examine relationships among variables.

The research findings were as follows 1) Most of the respondents were female, aged between 20 and 30 years, employed in private companies, with an average monthly income of less than 15,000 baht, and holding a bachelor's degree. 2) Regarding the service marketing mix factors, the most important aspect was personnel (service staff). 3) For the tourism-related factors, the most significant element was the country's geographical characteristics.

The hypothesis testing results were as follows 1) Regarding demographic factors, it was found that the educational level of tourists had a significant effect on their decision-making process in purchasing travel packages. 2) All factors of the service marketing mix (7Ps: product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence) were found to be positively correlated with the decision-making process. 3) Concerning tourism-related factors, the results revealed that geography, climate, exchange rate, culture and history, popular tourist attractions, and tourism promotion were significantly related to the decision-making process of Thai tourists.

Keywords: Decision-Making Process, Itinerary, South Korea

1. Introduction

When tourism plays an important role in a country, it leads to rapid expansion—not only in domestic tourism but also in international tourism. This development offers tourists the opportunity to get to know one another, exchange art, culture, and ideas, thereby fostering positive relationships among people and nations (Wanna Wongwanich, 2003) [1]. Moreover,

international tourism creates opportunities for learning, cultural exchange, and the establishment of a positive image among countries in the region (Boonchuay, K., 2024) [2].

South Korea is located in East Asia, to the northeast of Thailand, on the Korean Peninsula — a popular destination for tourists from Thailand. The country's tourism industry has continued to grow due to strong support from both the government and the private sector. This collaboration has led to the development of numerous beautiful and valuable tourist attractions throughout South Korea. For instance, Seoul, the capital city, is one of the nation's most significant cultural heritage sites and a renowned tourist destination among international travelers. One of its highlights is Changdeokgung Palace, a royal palace from the Joseon Dynasty in Seoul, which is widely admired for its harmonious blend of architecture and nature. Another attraction is Myeong-dong, one of the busiest and most vibrant shopping districts in South Korea. It is filled with luxurious and high-quality shops that attract both local and international shoppers across Asia, offering premium products such as designer clothing, cosmetics, and souvenirs. Historically, this district has also served as a hub for finance, culture, and trade since the Korean War era. Moreover, according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022) [3], South Korea is recognized as one of Asia's leading countries in the successful development of cultural tourism. The government has implemented policies to promote distinctive and valuable tourist cities such as Seoul, Busan, and Gyeongju, which represent the nation's cultural identity and heritage.

Regarding the travel choices of Thai tourists, most travelers have increasingly shown interest in travelling with tour companies. This is because tour operators offer a range of convenient services to their clients, leading to increased competition within the tourism industry. Consequently, many companies have adopted diverse marketing strategies to attract customers. Tour operators have become more proactive in enhancing their service models and travel programs to better meet the needs of tourists. Not only do the tourism programs have a good quality, but they also need good service procedures to satisfy and impress the clients. In addition, these tourism programs must be developed, reliable and trustful, so that they are more advantageous than those of the competitors. (Kerdpitak, C. et al., 2016) [4]. Airlines, hotels, and tour companies have also begun to collaborate and implement joint marketing promotions, which make travel package prices more attractive. As a result, the tour business has evolved into a key sector capable of responding effectively to tourists' demands. It has become one of the most popular options for travel, especially for international trips. Therefore, tour operators are considered a supporting factor influencing the international travel behavior of Thai tourists (Sumanee Peerakit, 2006) [5].

Therefore, the researcher is interested in studying the factors that influence the decision-making process of Thai tourists when purchasing travel packages to South Korea, with a specific focus on Thai tourists who opt to travel through tour operators or travel agencies. The findings from this research are expected to inform the improvement and development of international tour management, enabling it to better meet the needs and preferences of the Thai tourism market in the future.

1.1 Research Objective (TNR 12pt., bold)

1. To study the factors influencing the decision-making process of Thai tourists in purchasing travel packages to South Korea.

2. To analyze approaches for developing travel packages to South Korea that align with the factors desired by Thai tourists.

2. Literature review

This chapter reviews concepts, theories, and previous studies related to the factors influencing the decision-making process of Thai tourists in purchasing travel packages to South Korea. The review focuses on four main areas: the consumer decision-making process, the service marketing mix (7Ps), tourism-related factors, and relevant research studies.

1. Consumer Decision-Making Process

According to Kotler and Keller (2016), the consumer decision-making process consists of five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. This model helps explain how tourists identify travel needs and choose among various tour options. Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) noted that psychological, social, and personal factors influence this process. For Thai tourists, emotional motivations, convenience, and cultural interests—particularly in Korean culture—often play a key role in their decisions to purchase travel packages.

2. Service Marketing Mix (7Ps)

The concept of Booms and Bitner (1981) expanded the traditional 4Ps to 7Ps—Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence—which are essential in the tourism business.

Product refers to the quality and uniqueness of the tour program. Price relates to value for money and affordability. Place emphasizes accessibility and online booking. Promotion involves advertising and special offers. People highlight service staff, whose friendliness and expertise affect satisfaction. Process focuses on booking procedures and reliability. Physical Evidence includes tangible cues that create confidence, such as brochures or websites. Several studies (e.g., Unseri, 2011; Leelhasuwan et al., 2023) found that “People” and “Promotion” have the strongest influence on tourists’ purchase decisions.

3. Methodology

The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire, consisting of both closed-ended questions and rating-scale items. The questionnaire was designed based on the review of related literature and previous research studies and was divided into four sections as follows: Part 1: Demographic information of the respondents — including gender, age, occupation, monthly income, and educational level. The questions in this section were closed-ended multiple-choice questions, allowing respondents to select the answers that best described their personal characteristics. Part 2: Factors related to the service marketing mix, which consisted of product, price, place (distribution channel), promotion, process, people, and physical evidence. Part 3: Tourism-related factors influencing the decision-making process in purchasing travel packages to South Korea, which included geography, climate, exchange rate, culture and history, popular tourist attractions, and tourism promotion. Part 4: The decision-making process in purchasing travel packages to South Korea, which covered the stages of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase decision.

4. Results

Data analysis results

Part1: Results of the analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents include gender, age, occupational, and education, and salary as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Number and Percentage Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Data	Total (n=400)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	173	43.3
Female	227	56.8
Age		
Under 20 yrs	28	7.0
20-30 yrs	190	47.5
31-40 yrs	95	23.8
Over 40 yrs	87	21.8
Occupational		
Student	85	21.3
Private Company	117	29.3
Government Officers	96	24.0
Business Owner	63	15.8
Housekeeper	16	4.0
Unemployed	23	5.8
Education		
High School	109	27.3
Undergraduate	222	55.5
Postgraduate	63	15.8
Doctor Degree	6	1.5
Salary		
Not over 15,000 THB	131	32.8
15,000 - 20,000 THB	102	25.5
20,001 - 25,000 THB	70	17.5
25,001 - 30,000 THB	58	14.5
30,001 –35,000 THB	19	4.8
Over 35,001 THB	20	5.0

Part 2: Marketing Mix Factors

The results of the analysis of the Marketing mix factors consisting of product, price, place (distribution channel), promotion, process, people, and physical evidence as shown in Tables 2 - 7.

Table 2 Mean and standard deviations of the level of importance of the marketing mix factor in the product aspect

Product	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning
1. The travel package is unique and interesting.	4.09	.773	High
2. The itinerary can be modified or customized to suit your needs.	3.95	.836	High
3. The meals provided during the tour are clean and of good quality.	4.08	.837	High
4. The hotel accommodation is comfortable.	4.16	.742	High
5. Transportation is provided throughout the trip.	4.13	.785	High
6. The tour leader is knowledgeable and experienced.	4.15	.802	High
7. The tour package is of high quality and reliable.	4.16	.805	High
Overall	4.10	.588	High

Table 3 Mean and standard deviations of the level of importance of the marketing mix factor in the price aspect

Price	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning
1. The price is reasonable compared to the quality of the travel package.	4.15	.854	High
2. The package tour is cheaper than travelling independently.	3.98	.946	High
3. The prices of goods or services can be negotiated.	3.90	.918	High
Overall	4.01	.754	High

Table 4 Mean and standard deviations of the level of importance of the marketing mix factor in the place (distribution channel)

Place (distribution channel)	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning
1. The tour company's location is easy to find and convenient to contact.	4.17	2.64 6	High
2. The company participates in promotional booths at various locations.	3.81	.885	High
3. The company has a website where customers can browse and obtain information.	4.15	2.18 9	High
Overall	4.04	1.30 6	High

Table 5 Mean and standard deviations of the level of importance of the marketing mix factor in the promotion

Promotion	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning
1. The company advertises through various media, including brochures and magazines.	3.90	.955	High
2. The company advertises through online media, including websites and email.	3.94	.911	High
3. The company offers a variety of souvenirs, including travel bags and keychains.	3.79	.943	High
Overall	3.88	.743	High

Table 6 Mean and standard deviations of the level of importance of the marketing mix factor in the process

Process	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning
1. There are multiple payment methods available.	4.21	.936	High
2. The company regularly follows up with customers for updates and information.	3.99	.958	High
3. The service provided is fast and reliable.	4.13	.861	High
Overall	4.11	.803	High

Table 7 Mean and standard deviations of the level of importance of the marketing mix factor in the people

People	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning
1. The staff are knowledgeable and expert in providing information.	4.16	.815	High
2. The staff are cheerful, courteous, and friendly.	4.37	3.684	Highest
3. There is an adequate number of service personnel available.	4.13	.794	High
Overall	4.22	1.406	Highest

Part 3: Hypothesis Test Result

Hypothesis 1: Different demographic characteristics influence the decision-making process when purchasing travel packages to South Korea. The hypothesis was tested using statistical methods to examine relationships as follows: 1) A t-test was employed to analyse the differences in the decision-making process based on gender, with a level of statistical significance set at 0.05. 2) The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyse the differences in the decision-making process according to other demographic characteristics, including gender, age, occupation, average monthly income, and highest educational level.

Hypothesis 2: Different marketing mix factors influence the decision-making process when purchasing travel packages to South Korea. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis to examine the relationships between the marketing mix factors, which include product, price, place (distribution channel), promotion, process, people, and physical evidence.

Table 8 The effect of different genders of Thai tourists on the decision-making process in purchasing travel packages to South Korea.

Decision-Making Process	Gender	\bar{x}	S.D.	t	Sig (2tailed)
1. Need Recognition	Male	3.951	.751	1.730	.084
	Female	4.076	.682	-	-
2. Information Search	Male	4.095	.734	2.586	.010
	Female	4.270	.582	-	-
3. Evaluation of Alternatives	Male	4.173	.693	1.071	.285
	Female	4.244	.628	-	-
4. Purchase Decision	Male	4.192	.760	1.779	.076

Decision-Making Process	Gender	\bar{x}	S.D.	t	Sig (2tailed)
	Female	4.322	.680	-	-
Overall	Male	4.103	.615	2.170	.031
	Female	4.228	.511	-	-

According to Table 8, female Thai tourists had a higher overall mean score for the decision-making process involved in purchasing travel packages to South Korea than male tourists. However, when tested using the t-test according to the hypothesis, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the two groups of Thai tourists in their decision-making process for purchasing travel packages to South Korea. The correlation coefficient (r) and statistical significance (Sig.) values obtained from the hypothesis testing indicate that the relationship between the product factor and the decision-making process was not statistically significant.

Table 9 The relationship between the product factor of the marketing mix and the decision-making process in purchasing travel packages to South Korea.

Product	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Statistical Significance (Sig.)	Hypothesis Testing
1. Need Recognition	.454**	.000	√
2. Information Search	.542**	.000	√
3. Evaluation of Alternatives	.575**	.000	√
4. Purchase Decision	.434**	.000	√

From Table 9, it can be explained that all aspects of the decision-making process — need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase decision — were positively correlated with the product factor of the marketing mix in purchasing travel packages to South Korea, with statistical significance at the 0.05 level. This finding is consistent with the hypothesis, indicating that all components of the decision-making process have a moderate correlation with the product factor of the marketing mix, except for need recognition and purchase decision, which showed a low level of correlation.

5. Conclusion

The study on factors influencing the decision-making process of Thai tourists in purchasing travel packages to South Korea can be summarized as follows:

1. Demographic Characteristics

The study found that most Thai tourists who decided to purchase travel packages to South Korea were female, aged between 20 and 30 years, employed in private companies, with an average monthly income of not more than 15,000 baht, and holding a bachelor's degree. This finding is consistent with the concept proposed by Punyanuch Leelhasuwan (2022) [6], which states that the factors influencing tourists' behaviour derive from both internal and external factors. The internal factors include needs, wants, and motivations of everyone, while the external factors involve social and cultural influences. Furthermore, the result also aligns with the idea of Thanakrit Srisuk (2021) [7], who suggested that individuals with similar demographic characteristics tend to share psychological traits, thoughts, values, and needs that are not significantly different from one another.

2. Marketing Mix Factors

The study found that the marketing mix factors, which consist of product, price, place (distribution channel), promotion, people, process, and physical evidence, were given high importance by Thai tourists. Among these factors, people (service personnel) were considered the most influential in Thai tourists' decision-making process when choosing to purchase travel packages to South Korea. This finding is consistent with the research of Supapan Unseri (2011) [8], which stated that the factors influencing tourists' decisions in purchasing tour packages from travel businesses in Ubon Ratchathani Municipality include product, price, distribution channel, promotion, service process, personnel, and physical evidence. All these factors were found to be significantly related to tourists' decisions to purchase tour packages from local travel companies.

3. Tourism Factors

The study found that tourism factors, including geography, climate, exchange rate, culture, history, popular tourist attractions, and tourism promotion, were highly important to Thai tourists. Among these factors, geography, culture, and popular tourist attractions were considered the most influential in determining Thai tourists' decisions to travel to South Korea. This finding is consistent with the concept proposed by Lertporn Parasakul (2014) [9], which states that tourism-related factors—such as geography, climate, exchange rate, culture, history, popular tourist destinations, and tourism promotion—create the motivation and desire for tourists to travel to various destinations.

4. Decision-Making Process

The study found that the decision-making process, which consists of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase decision, was considered highly important by Thai tourists. Among these stages, the evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision were the most important factors influencing Thai tourists' decisions to purchase travel packages to South Korea.

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