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Actual Economy

SOCIAL
CHALLENGES
AND FINANCIAL
ISSUES IN XXI CENTURY



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Destination Branding As A Tool For Effective Tourism Macro-Marketing (The Case Of Bangkok, Thailand)

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Abstract

In the context of tourism market globalization, universalization of tourists' preferences and the basic requirements to the tourism product's quality, tourism macro-marketing becomes the most effective instrument of tourist destinations' promotion. The government as a marketing entity has certain advantages in implementation of the global strategy for tourist destinations promotion (for example, substantial budget, access to local and industry information, possibility of strategic initiatives implementing and so on) including branding.

Paper analyzes the main factors of Bangkok tourism brand development and implementation, based on international experience studying presenters of Thailand tourism business surveys, offered research provides basic recommendations for the tourism branding strategy modernization in Bangkok, Thailand.

Key-words Tourist brand, branding, macro-marketing tourist market globalization, Bangkok

Introduction

In today's world, territories compete with each other, striving to self-affirmation and the choice of such economic structure that will be more able to ensure their reliable positions. In the conditions of constant competition's growth under equal economic conditions, marketing of any territory including it's branding, has a great importance for geographic locations comparing. In this regard, more and more countries and cities are purposefully engaged in the promotion of own territories and the formation of own brand, which determine a tourist attractiveness of the certain area. This trend is characterized by tourism transformation to the most important sector of the world economy, which determines the regional welfare and stability. The growing competition in tourists' attraction requires states to implement new promotional methods and approaches including branding of the tourism territory (destination).

The Kingdom of Thailand actively developing international tourism has achieved impressive results. In 2016, more than 30 million foreign tourists visited Thailand and it is an absolute record of the whole Southeast Asia (Tourist Arrivals to Thailand by Nationality in 2016). Also in 2016 Bangkok became the most visited city in the world, ahead by the number of foreign tourists' visitations - 22.5 million people – other globally recognized centers such as New York (19 million) and London (17.4 million). Thailand Government has been implementing the tourism destination branding strategy over the past 20 years.

There are successful branding companies such as "Amazing Thailand", "Thailand: once in the life-time", "Thailand: great invitation", "Unseen Thailand", "Thailand: Where Life Rules Everything" and number of regional programs for the main resort areas of the country, implemented for the most part since the early 2000s in TAT (Tourism Authorities of Thailand) portfolio.

The purpose of the study is to determine, based on the correlation of foreign tourists' and representatives of the tourism business (in Bangkok) survey results, the prior basic values of Thailand's tourism brand for defining the tools for Thai tourism product promoting in the future.

The set purpose determined the following research *objectives*:

- Theoretically justify the state marketing as a modern system for tourism market and the national tourism industry regulating;
- Define tourism destinations branding as a modern tool for national tourism product promotion, its structure and methods in context of the tourism industry globalization;
- Highlight the trends relevant for tourism macro-marketing in the Kingdom of Thailand;
- Explore opinion of Bangkok tourism business representatives about the values of the country's tourism brand;
- Conduct an analysis of the main values of Thailand's tourism brand from the positions of tourism industry representatives and foreign tourists;
- Set some recommendations on the modernization of Thailand's tourism marketing system in the sphere of national tourism brand formation and promotion.

The following *hypotheses* were tested in the study:

1. There is no common understanding of the prior National tourism brand's values between presenters of Bangkok tourism business.
2. The values of the country's tourism brand's evaluation depend more on marketing strategy, size, business features than on the localization of the tourist business and its age in the market.
3. Estimations of the prior country's tourism brand values by the sectoral business representatives are not adequate to the actual problems that national tourism industry faces (will face).

Literature review

According to H. Krippendorf, "tourism marketing is a systematic change and coordination of tourist enterprises activities, as well as private and public policy in the tourism fields. The purpose of such changes is to most fully meet the needs of certain groups of consumers, taking into account the possibilities of appropriate profits' receiving" (Krippendorf, 1987).

The tourist product's features and the nature of tourist trip consumer value directly affect the marketing activities in the tourism sphere, changing traditional marketing goals, structure and content.

Some experts (Ekinci, 2006; Morgan et al., 2002) distinguish several features of tourism marketing:

1. For tourism marketing, the task of demand stimulating is less important. Demand for travel services is constantly growing and the tourism industry less than many other industries depend on economic environment fluctuations. For tourism marketing, it is most important to "direct demand" in the right direction.
2. A reliable information policy regarding clients, especially at the stage of tourism services sales, as well as thoroughness in the tourist product development acquires great importance.
3. Taking in account the special role of subjective factor in the process of tourism services purchasing, travel agencies and Government should pay great attention to the consumers' rights protection.
4. The influence of seasonality determines the need for travel services diversification or special attention to marketing activities during the off-season (to make companies less dependent on the time factor).
5. In the process of marketing management, it is necessary to take into account not only material aspects, but also psychology, spiritual and emotional state and other consumer characteristics.
6. Due to the fact that the tourist product is, as a rule, a complex set of tangible and intangible components, a marketing coordination of all participants in the tourist services production (including tourist centers, government agencies and public associations) has a great importance for achieving the final effect of tourism marketing activities.

The situation in the tourism market can be regulated in three ways.

The first way is to provoke demand changes by forming an appropriate supply. The tourist product supply here plays the role of state influence means. The demand changes that consequently occur will be perceived as the result of such a tool use.

The second way is a reverse order scenario. Here, demand acts as a means, and any change of supply volume and structure would be perceived as a consequence of demand's pace and trajectory changes that government has managed before. Direct change in the total tourism demand can be achieved, for example, by changing the aggregate money income of local population through the additional money release (the method proposed by J. Keynes) or by working and leisure time restructuring in the country.

The third way is simultaneous influence on supply and demand in the tourism market.

State tourism marketing in modern conditions is carried out according to the third considered way (with simultaneous impact on supply and demand in the tourism market toward the national interests).

According to Pike, S. and C. Ryan (2004), to realize their target orientation, the tourism marketing develops a set of measures that ensure:

- Positive image of the territory formation and development, territorial prestige, business and social competitiveness;
- Expansion of the territory and its subjects participation in the international and domestic tourism programs implementation;
- Foreign tourist business attraction to the territory due to simplifies the procedure of target-oriented tourism product creating and promotion (Pankruhin, 2002).

The main goal of state tourism marketing is also creation, development and distribution of public recognition of the tourist destination's positive image.

Investigation Of The Basic Values Of Thailand's Tourism Brand

Considered significant advertising campaigns of Thailand tourism potential, their content, target audience and promoted values, we can figure out the following trends:

- transfer of emphasis from Thailand uniqueness and exoticism to its popularity, quality infrastructure, all-season attractiveness;
- diversity of leisure in Thailand, increasing the number of repeated visits;
- promotion of un-known regions of the Kingdom for foreign tourists, development of alternative types of tourism (medical, educational, cruise, extreme);
- development of a segment of expensive, individual and differentiated tourism.

Table 1 – Features of surveyed tourism business presenters, % (made by author)

A. Location		B. Business activity		C. Number of staff		D. Company's size (by own evaluation of surveyed representatives)	
Sukhumvit	29	Tour-operating	9	< 20 persons	59	Small	61
Silom – Sathorn	36	Tour-agenting	32	20-100 persons	36	Medium	34
Dusit – Rattanakosin	35	Hospitality	36	>100 persons	5	Large	3
		Entertainment	23			Multinational	2
E. Your product (services) are:		F. Your customers mostly are:		G. Your basic competitive advantage is		H. Length of company's presence on the market	
Very expensive, exclusive	12	Thais	6	Price	27	< 1 year	7
Expensive, for selected customers	18	ASEAN nations	27	Price – quality	21	1-3 years	6
Moderate, for middle class	49	AP nations	16	Quality	24	3-10 years	4
Cheap, mass product	21	EU nations	15	Trade mark	9	>10 years	
		USA, Australia, New Zealand	7	Technologies	7		
		No have any dominated nation	29	Staff	12		

In general, the identified trends in the country's tourism brand promotion are adequate to the dynamics of international travel market in the South-East Asia development, as well as to the problems Thailand's tourism industry is facing in recent years (such as the inadmissibly high dependence of the country's tourism industry on selected donor regions, for example, China, Korea, Russia; weak, inconsistent to the dynamics of foreign visitations, growth of tourism economic efficiency in the country, reducing investment attractiveness; concentration of inbound tourist traffic in limited territories of Thailand; growth of the number of backpackers, "hibernating tourists" who are not able to actively consume local tourism services; popularization of Thailand as a country of cheap, low-quality rest, unable to receive an individual and wealthy tourists; problems of Thailand "image heritage" of free will, poor local people and thousands of unsolved problems, etc.).

The author conducted a study of basic values that should be reflected in the strategy of country's tourism brand promoting. The logic of the research based on analyze of priority values of Thailand's tourism brand in the opinion of country's tourism industry (employees of tour operators, hotel companies, and a number of cultural institutions oriented to providing services to tourists) representatives (due to the limited time and budget, the study was conducted only within the capital of the Kingdom). Based on a comparison of the results, the hypotheses were tested and recommendations for modernizing the strategy of Kingdom's tourist image promoting in the future were suggested.

A survey of tourism industry workers was conducted during the period August-October, 2016 (before the high tourist season starts), representatives of 350 companies geographically concentrated in three districts of Bangkok - Sukhumvit street, Silom-Satom district, Dusit-Rattanakosin district - were interviewed. The information on the investigated enterprises is resulted in tab. 1.

Table 2 - Surveyed tourism business attitude to TAT campaigns (made by author)

You are familiar with the TAT campaign?		Which TAT campaign did you hear?	Which TAT campaign was most memorable for you?	Realized TAT campaigns are adequate to the needs of your business?			
Yes	92	"Amazing Thailand"	69	"Amazing Thailand"	49	Strongly agree	12
Not	8	"Thailand: once in the life-time"	52	"Thailand: once in the life-time"	26	Agree	49
		"Thailand: great invitation"	43	"Thailand: great invitation"	11	Disagree	33
		"Unseen Thailand"	41	"Unseen Thailand"	10	Strongly disagree	6
		"Thailand: Where Life Rules Everything"	9	"Thailand: Where Life Rules Everything"	2		
		No-one	7	No-one	2		
		Others	6	Others	0		

As can be seen from the Tab. 1, environmental friendliness and safety are the most significant values for interviewed enterprises, regardless of their geographic location; it can also be pointed out that the enterprises located in Sukumvit and Silom areas prefer to promote exclusivity and advancement of their services.

Greater emphasis on services' uniqueness is inherent for representatives of entertainment and hospitality industries, while employees of the tour operator and travel agencies noted an importance of services diversity and accessibility. Small companies are "proud" of their customers' care, while large companies are promoting their advancement and fashionability. Finally, it is worth noting that companies characterize their product as expensive and exclusive, at the same time do not consider it as affordable, exotic and differentiated.

In general, it is obvious that all representatives of Bangkok tourism industry most prefer following values of the national brand:

- security,
- care,
- environmental friendliness,
- diversity.

These basic values of the country's tourism brand outstripped, for example, accessibility and exoticism (with which Thailand tourism is still associated). It is worth noting the high positions of "uniqueness" and "exclusivity" (close to the leaders), which indirectly confirms the transition of Thailand tourism industry from extensive (due to the number of tourist arrivals increase) to intensive (due to differentiated quality) growth (Ushakov, 2016).

Recommendations

Based on the results of prior values of Thailand tourist brand assessing, a number of recommendations can be suggested to modernize the strategy for Thai national tourist product promoting:

1. Further promotion of international tourism in Thailand from the standpoints of destinations' uniqueness and exotic can be more considered as rational. Thailand has long ceased to be exotic both for foreign tourists and for country's tourism business. It is necessary to focus attention on such features of the national tourist product as its advancement, modernity, compliance with the best world standards.
2. The safety of all tourists should be the main value of the country's tourist image, especially in the external (world instability, growth of terrorism, spread of negative information about Thailand as a tourist destination) and domestic (terrorist acts in the Kingdom, natural disasters, car accidents) environmental challenges. As a tourist destination, Thailand should be perceived by the consumer primarily as a "quiet, green, clean harbor with a caring and participative local population" that, in the long run, will form a "new" uniqueness (against the background of, for example, becoming popular Myanmar, Cambodia or Vietnam) and country's competitiveness.
3. Ecology and health should also be in the priority of the tourist brand values, reflecting the basic principle of national tourist supply differentiation. Given that privacy, cleanliness of the natural environment, and effective health care are now the most expensive products on the world market, Thailand should lead this trend in South-East Asia and attract a segment of wealthy tourists from all over the world.
4. Given the modest (currently) influence of fashion as the prior value of Thai national product, we can recommend the implementation of the strategy of promoting Thailand as a tourist destination through the introduction of global fashion for all Thai (for example, Thai music and cinema, Thai food, Thai way of life, Thai Buddhism and so on). Undoubtedly, this strategy will require not only substantial investments, but also work coordination of many Ministries (for example, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, Education and Science) and leading representatives of all spheres of Thai society. Evaluation of other countries achievements (for example, the popularization of all Japanese in the early 2000s, which became the reason not only for increasing the sales of Japanese authors books, Japanese cartoons, sushi and rolls, but also stimulated development of inbound tourism in the Land of the Withering Sun) and also Thailand's ones (the popularity of the country's northern provinces among Chinese tourists after the release of the Chinese movie "Lost in the jungle") allow us to regard this strategy as very promising.

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