

CONSTRAINTS IN TRAVEL PARTICIPATION: A CASE OF THAI TOURISTS TAKING AN OUTBOUND TRIP

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Abstract - This study examines travel constraints and perceived risks faced by Thai tourists in travelling abroad. As the primary aims of this study is to gain rich, in-depth, and holistic understanding of how Thai tourists perceive and interpret their constraints and risks in taking an outbound trip, it employed an interpretive paradigm utilising qualitative research approach. The data were drawn from 33 respondents who had never taken an outbound trip, neither by themselves nor with a tour operator. The number of the respondents was justified by the saturation point, which is when no theme was found to emerge from the data. These respondents were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The methods used to collect the data include semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The collected data were analysed by thematic analysis technique. The findings indicated that all the respondents in this study had faced limitations or constraints in travelling abroad. These constraints could be classified into 3 main groups: (i) intrapersonal constraints (i.e. fear of travelling with certain modes of transportation, language barriers; fear of terrorism and/or natural disaster, and having health problems); (ii) interpersonal constraints (i.e. do not have appropriate person to accompany when travelling, and having family burden); and (iii) structural constraints (i.e. insufficient time to travel, and insufficient budget to travel). The findings of this research could give a valuable insight for tour operators and other tourism-related businesses on the factors or causes that obstruct Thai tourists to take an outbound trip and how to overcome these constraints and perceived risks.

Index Terms – travel constraints, travel participation; Thai tourists; outbound trip

I. INTRODUCTION

The tourist is the key player of the tourism industry. This is because in terms of economics, tourists represent the demand side of the tourism system as their behavior in travelling generate incomes for tour operators and other tourism-related businesses as well as local residents in the tourist destinations. It could be said that without tourists, there would be no tourism industry, and an increasing number of tourists could lead to the growth of tourism industry. Therefore, all related stakeholders in the tourism industry need to have a thorough understanding of tourists. Specifically, they need to understand what element are included in tourist behavior, what factors influence tourist behavior, what motivate tourists to travel to a certain destination, and importantly, what factors limit or obstruct tourists to travel.

Previous studies on tourist behavior focus more on the investigation of tourist motivations and travelling experiences. On the contrary, the issue of tourist constraints has been relatively received little interest from researchers and scholars. The understanding of such constraints is very significant for the development and promotion of tourism activity. Asreference [1] state that travelling constraints and benefits that tourists gained from travelling serve as the basic factors influencing tourist decision-making process. They also add that the knowledge of travel constraints are beneficial for tourism-related stakeholders as it could provide them with an insight on how to develop strategies to overcome such constraints appropriately. Reference [1]also point out

that once travel constraints have been eliminated, more tourists are likely to travel.

As for the outbound tourism situation in Thailand, during the last few decades, there have been an increasing number of Thai tourists taking outbound trips. This is a result of a number of factors including more convenient transportation, reduced travelling cost, having access to travel information. However, there are still many Thai people who have never take an outbound trip before. This study believe that an understanding of what impede or prevent these people to travel abroad is needed because it could provide an insight for outbound tour operators and all related stakeholders on these travel constraints. Upon realising the significance of the understanding of travel constrains, this study aims to investigate travel constraints that are perceived by Thai tourists and impede or prevent them to take an outbound trip.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term ‘‘constraint’ has been defined differently across academic disciplines and context [2]. In the field of economic, a constraint refers to boundaries or obstructions[2],[3]. In the context of business management, it means a factor or factors which may limit the performance of the organization relative to its goals [2],[4]. In the context of tourism, a constraint can be defined as a factor or factors that may impede an individual from participating in a certain tourism activity or visiting a certain destination[2],[5].

To date, there are a number of researchers and scholars who have attempted to defer ‘travel

constraints'. The examples include: [6] who state that travel constraints refer to as "...any factor which intervenes between the preference for an activity and participation in it"; and [7] who refers to travel constraints as a barrier factor against leisure activity participation, or as a cause of frustration to participate in leisure activities such as traveling or golfing. In a broad sense, leisure activity participation constraints would include a limitation/restriction on motives, and other factors such as personal or social situation preventing one from participating in leisure activities. Examples of these situations can include lack of time, finances, partners, or recreational facilities.

It could be seen that both definitions are similar in terms that they view that travel constraints are factors that impede or prevent tourists to participate in tourism activities. The definition given by [7] also add examples of travel constraints which include limitations related to tourist motivations, personal factors, and social or external factors. Another definition belongs to [1] who state that constraints are the factors that restrict development of tourism market and limit the potential of tourism destination development.

This definition highlight the negative consequences of travel constraints on the development of tourism market and tourism destination.

Reference [8] develop a model for the understanding of travel constraints. This model is called 'the hierarchical constraints model'. According to this model, travel constraints can be classified into three main groups: intrapersonal constraints; interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints.

Intrapersonal constraints refer to limitations or barriers related to psychological conditions that are internal to the individuals such as stress, anxiety, health, fear, and other personality factors. Interpersonal constraints are those factors related to interaction with others such as family members, relatives, friends, colleagues, and others. The major example of the interpersonal constraints is lack of appropriate accompanying persons to travel with. Structural constraints are factors that external factors such as barriers related to family life cycle, insufficient time to travel, and insufficient budget to travel, climate, and travel seasonality. According to this model, individuals usually starts to realise intrapersonal constraints first, then they move up to be aware of interpersonal constraints. Individuals tend to perceive the structural constraints at the latest. This model has been tested by a number of researchers such as [9],[10],[11]. The study of [11] which conducted a survey from 1,278 tourists reports that the most influencing travel constraints are the structural constraints, whereas the least influence factors are interpersonal constraints.

The study of [1] which examines tourists' perception of travel constraints and the relationship between travel constraints and destination image of young travelers to Brunei reveals that there is a significant relationship between destination image and travel constraints during the early decision-making process. In summary this study found that apart from three group of travel constraints proposed in the hierarchical constraints model, a new category of travel constraints was also identified, which is unfamiliar cultural constraints.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed an interpretive paradigm because its primary aim is to gain rich, in-depth understanding of what prevent Thai tourists to take an outbound trip. It utilized a combination of qualitative data collection methods including semi-structured interviews and participant observation. This data collecting approach enabled the researcher to use a triangulation strategy to cross-check the data as well as to identify the similarities and differences in the data. Moreover, with the use of these two qualitative methods, a more complete picture of the travel constraints impeding Thai tourists to travel oversea could be obtained. All in-depth interviews were video-recorded upon receiving a permission via a consent form from the informants and they were ensured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their information by the use of pseudonyms.

Before undertaking the main study, a one-month pilot study was conducted with the aim to test the effectiveness of the data collection methods to ensure that they could enable the researcher to achieve the research objective. The main study was undertaken over a period of three months between January and March 2017.

The data were drawn from thirty-three Thai tourists aging between eighteen and sixty years who had no previous experiences in taking an outbound trip, neither by themselves nor with a tour operator during the last five years. These informants were selected by purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The total number of the respondents was justified based on the data saturation.

The respondents consist of fourteen males and nineteen females. Their ages range from nineteen to fifty-six years old. In terms of marital status, sixteen were married, the rest respondents were single. The educational background varied from high school education to postgraduate studies. As for the professional background, five were the owners of the business, eight were students, two were recent graduates and had no work at that time, one was a

home maker and the rests were workers in either a government agency or a private company.

The data analysis was conducted during the data collection and continued after data collection was completed. The researcher chose to analyse the data manually by utilising the thematic analysis which consisted of six steps: (i) becoming familiar with the data; (ii) generating initial codes; (iii) searching for themes; (iv) reviewing themes; (v) defining and naming themes; and (vi) producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The analysis of the data followed the hierarchical constraints model proposed by [8] which was used as the framework in this study. To briefly reiterate, [8] state that travel constrains can be classified into three hierarchical groups with the intrapersonal constraints at the bottom, followed by interpersonal constraints; and structural constraints in that order. Generally individuals are aware of the intrapersonal constraints before realising the interpersonal constraints. Their perception of the structural constrains normally comes in their mind at the latest. The findings of this research showed that all of these three groups of travel constrains were identified. Figures 1-3 displays the summary of travel constraints categorized in each group of three constraints according to the hierarchical constraints model.

(i) Intrapersonal constraints. This group of travel constraints consists of fear of travelling with certain modes of transportation, language barriers, fear of terrorism and/or natural disaster, and health limitations.

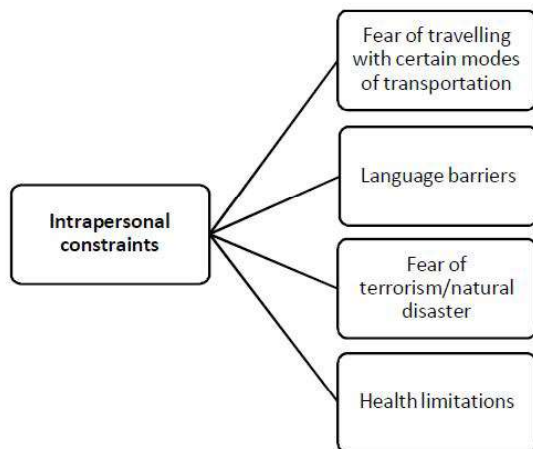


Figure 1: Intrapersonal constraints of taking an outbound trip

Five respondents stated that they were scare of travelling with a plane and two among these said that they feared travelling with a private car. All of these respondents explained that their fear or anxiety was a result of their perception of accidents newssuch as airplane crash and car accidents. They were afraid that they might have to face those accidents if they

travel. Language barrier was another intrapersonal constraints encountered by many respondents. In the opinion of the respondents, they believed that an ability to communicate in English was very significant and necessary for traveling abroad. They said that as they could not communicate in English, they would face difficulties during travelling. Some respondents stated that they had never travelled abroad because they were afraid of terrorism and/or natural disasters which may occur at the tourist destination.

The respondents also explained that they had been heard about the incidents of terrorism and/or natural disasters happening in many countries such as USA, Japan, and some countries in Europe. One respondent said that she would like to travel to the countries in Europe but recently she had learnt from the news that there were many incidents of terrorism occurring in those countries and was afraid that such incidents might happen during the time that she visit those places. Some respondents stated that limitations related to their health condition was the main constraints impeding them to travel oversea. They explained that they had congenital disorder or medical problems which prevent them to travel and do any physical activities.

(ii) Interpersonal constraints. This category of constraints refer to the factors related to interactions with other people that prevent Thai tourists to take an outbound trip. The data analysis identify two main interpersonal constraints including lack of appropriate persons to accompany when travelling, and having family burden

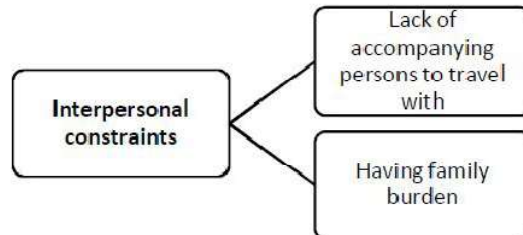


Figure 2: Interpersonal constraints of taking an outbound trip

Six respondents said that they did not want to travel abroad because they did not have appropriate accompanying persons to travel with. They added that travelling would be fun if they travelled with certain persons such as family members, close friends, relatives, and spouse. These respondents gave a variety of reasons that made them not to take an outbound trip alone. For them, having right accompanying persons were important and necessary for travelling abroad because these people could make them confident and feel warm during the trip. Moreover, travelling with the right persons would prevent them from getting bored, and these people could help them solve problems that they occurred during the trip, take pictures for them, and share travelling experiences. T10 stated about her constrain

that If I don't have friends to travel with, I would not like to travel alone. I always want to travel with close friends. If I travel alone, I think I will be bored and cannot be fun... If I travel abroad alone, I think I have to face many problems alone.

Family burden was another interpersonal constraint found among the respondents. This constraint was found to be a major barrier for the respondents who had to take care their parents who were old or had health problem. It also served as a constraint for the respondents who had little children whom they thought were not ready to travel abroad. The respondents who mentioned this constraint thought that they had to spend their free time in taking care of their family members, instead of spending it on leisure or tourism purpose. This is illustrated by T30 that

I have a little daughter. She is still a baby therefore I don't want to her to meet a lot of people or to be in a crowded place which is full of diseases. It may be dangerous to my baby...I also don't want to leave her at home and travel with my husband. I think I may be very worried.

iii) Structural constraints. This category of travel constraints consisted of two factors:having insufficient time to travel, and having insufficient budget to travel.

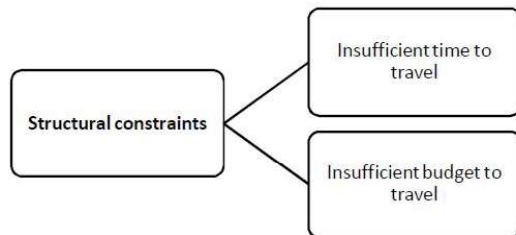


Figure 3: Structural constraints of taking an outbound trip

The factor of having insufficient time to travel was the most cited constraint of taking an outbound trip. Specifically, it was cited by all of the respondents. They similarly stated that they had to spend most of their working or studying which was their major responsibility. In their view, travelling abroad would take a long time, generally around 5-6 days at the least. Therefore, it would be difficult or impossible for them to take a leave for that long. For the respondents who are the owner of business, they stated that they had to manage their business which normally require most of their time. When being asked why they did not take an oversea trip during long holiday such as during the New YearDay, they said that they did not like to travel during those times, because there were normally a lot of tourists and they had to face with a long queue when used the services. Some said that they had to go to their hometown to visit their family. For example, T28 who is a university student stated that

I have to study from Monday to Friday and have to do a part-time job during the weekend. I cannot

take a leave for many days. Actually I would like to travel to South Korea and Japan, but it normally takes 4-5 days which I cannot take a leave for that long.

Having insufficient budget to travel also serves as one of the major travel constraints preventing Thai tourists to travel abroad. Most of the respondents stated that they had to spend their money on other important things such as household expenses, education fee of their children, education fee for themselves, and saving for the future. For them travelling abroad required a lot of money which usually accounted for around 30-50 per cent of their income per month.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that someof the respondents were aware of all these three groups of travel constrains, while some perceived only one or two groups of travel constraints. This study suggests that the tourist's decision not to travel oversea was not necessary a result of tourists' awareness of all these three groups of travel constraints, on the other hand, such decision could come from tourists' perception of one or two groups of these constraints.

V. IMPLICATION

The findings of this study could provide a valuable insight for an outbound tour operator in Thailand as well as other tourism-related businesses on the travel constraints that impede Thai tourists to take an outbound trip. They can use this knowledge to plan and develop strategies to overcome or eliminate these constraints as well as find the appropriate ways to encourage these tourists to travel abroad.

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