

Visitors' Attitude towards the Service Marketing Mix and Frequency of Visits to Bangpu Recreation Centre, Thailand

Siri-Orn Champatong

Abstract—This research paper was aimed to examine the relationship between visitors' attitude towards the service marketing mix and visitors' frequency of visit to Bangpu Recreation Centre. Based on a large and uncalculated population, the number of samples was calculated according to the formula to obtain a total of 385 samples. In collecting the samples, systematic random sampling was applied and by using of a Likert five-scale questionnaire for, a total of 21 days to collect the needed information. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Pearson's basic statistical correlations were utilized in analyzing the data. This study discovered a high level of visitors' attitude product and service of Bangpu Recreation Centre, price, place, promotional activities, people who provided service and physical evidence of the centre. The attitude towards process of service was discovered to be at a medium level. Additionally, the finding of an examination of a relationship between visitors' attitude towards service marketing mix and visitors' frequency of visit to Bangpu Recreation Centre presented that product and service, people, physical evidence and process of service provision showed a relationship with the visitors' frequency of visit to the centre per year.

Keywords—Frequency of Visit, Visitor, Service Marketing Mix, Bangpu Recreation Centre.

I. INTRODUCTION

DESPITE the economic crisis of the last decade, Thailand with strong cooperation efforts and supports from stakeholders in both the private and public sectors, has been progressing economically. It was a hard time for tourism industry as well as other industry that aimed to elicit foreign currency. Budget reduction was executed during a weakening of Thai baht, there was also a national tourism promotion campaign called "Amazing Thailand" during the year 1998-1999. It was a successful campaign. This was followed by other campaigns resulting in an increase of tourists and an increase of national revenue. Thailand has been marked in the world tourism map for decades. New types of tourist patterns and tourist motivations have emerged. One of them is eco-tourism. Managing resources for eco-tourism requires thoughtful consideration and an understanding of how to operate tourism in a sustainable way. However, tourism consumption has to a great extent impacted on ecological resources. Budget from the public sector has been allocated

for ecological conservation and rehabilitation with attempts to recover natural conditions as well as indirectly regain the number of tourists and visitors. Tourism for the first time was put on the Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001), which is now in the eleventh edition (2007-2011). An emphasis has been placed on tourism as a source of national economic generation whereas sustainable development on tourist attractions has also been spotlighted. Bangpu Recreation Center is one of eco-tourism destinations in Samutprakarn Province, a neighboring province of Bangkok located approximately 29 kilometers southwards.

What is tourism? Tourism comprises many activities of persons traveling and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, pleasure, business, and other purposes. It is the total of relationships arising from the interaction among tourists, service providers, local communities, local business, and others in the process of attracting, transporting, hosting and managing both domestic and international tourists. Thai culture and tourism often creates a significant relationship. Thai culture is the main support of tourist destination such as Bangpu Recreation Center. Tourists travel not only to relax but to satisfy their need for uniqueness and their interest to see how other people live in environments different from their own as well as how people behave in their daily life. Thai culture and tourism can be illustrated through religion, festivals, costumes, cuisine, arts & crafts, architecture, music and dance, folklore, and literature. In fact, most of domestic tourists travel for the specific purpose of visiting the great monuments and places of interest all over Thailand. Thai cultural heritage, historical sites, and even Bangpu Recreation Center often have been preserved by using funds generated by tourism revenue. The higher number of tourists, the more tourism revenue it can generate, in turn, the better chance the tourist destination will be preserved. In other words, one of the great benefits of a sustainable tourism is that it creates steady revenue to finance and support the historical sites. In fact, those Thai cultural remainders which have been abandoned often suffer decay and poor maintenance from lack of interest from tourists. Nowadays, Thai cultural tourism is rapidly developing as one of the major growth segments of the tourism industry. This explosive growth in popularity has caused many scholars to search for causes to explain the huge demand. The explanations that have been offered for the popularity of Thai cultural tourism are confused, but many

Asst. Prof. Siri-Orn Champatong is with the Faculty of Management Science, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, 10300 Thailand (Phone: 662 1601490; fax: 662 1601491; e-mail: siri-orn.ch@ssru.ac.th).

scholars tend to conclude that both domestic and international tourists appreciate Thai cultural tourist destinations, even though there are sometime less meaningful and less authentic or offered in a shallow form of entertainment.

On many occasions, Thai culture can be commercialized and simply offer as a commodity to serve the quick need of tourists. In the process, many tourist destinations have been despoiled and degraded. Thai culture and tourism must be mutually supportive of each other in order to make the relationship sustainable. The significance of this relationship needs the full cooperation of both local government and local business working alongside with local communities. Tourism industry can be defined as a service industry, which means that it sells both tangible and intangible products which are perishable by their very nature. In other words, this means that tourist business owners must work hard to obtain maximum usage or occupancy of everyday. For instance, if a tourist bus departs when it is only half full it certainly will be losing valuable revenue. If Bangpu Recreation Center continues to operate with a fraction of tourists, it will be shut down soon due to lack of profit. Therefore, the tourist business owner and operator that are relying on high volumes of tourists to maximize profits will have to work hard to gain profitable sales. Therefore, marketing mix includes Product, price, place, and promotion plays an important role for the success of tourist destination.

The tourism product can generally be defined as the combination of tourist attractions and tourist services. Certainly, the tourism product should be designed and adapted to satisfy consumer needs and wants. One of the key objectives for any tourist business owner is to offer product positioning which was defined by many researches as the way in which the tourism product focus on important attributes – in order to increase customer satisfaction and persuade them to repurchase. The more customers should to repurchase, the higher level of customer loyalty. Customer loyalty often related to a steady demand for a particular product or service. Pricing is often used as a major competitive advantage tool in tourism in a number of ways to try and influence consumers in their purchasing and repurchasing. In general consumers often are able to notice a link between the price charged and the product quality. Many tourist business owners charge a high price, but it must be able to show consumers a reflection of the special features of the product in terms of superior quality, and better design or service delivery. The different pricing strategies often encourage new consumers to purchase or, in certain circumstances, to encourage old customers to repurchase or loyal to an organization. Poor pricing strategies can also force consumers to leave the organization or even a market. Pricing is a key strategy for any organization in tourism industry when it is marketing products and services. The price that an organization charges for its products and services must be equilibrium between what the organization is trying to achieve in financial objective, and most importantly, the ability to satisfy the needs and wants of specific target consumers. The pricing decisions of organizations are affected

by many important factors including the pricing goals, legal and regulatory, stage of rivalry, costs, and specific industry changing environment. The most important factor, however, is the perception of the consumer of price in relation to quality of the product and service received by consumers. Place in the marketing mix can be identified as information, image, and distribution channel. A distribution channel has been defined by many marketing researchers as the set of firms and individuals that take and transfer title or asset in transferring title, to the particular good or service as it moves from the producer to the final consumer. Therefore, place is important or great significance to consumers because consumers may like the product, and be able and willing to pay the price asked, but if they are unable to gain access to it, no sale will happen and no profit will be generated. Consumers in general are affected by the intermediaries in the distribution chain. Without the middleman, there will be a missing link between consumers and producers. Retailers and wholesalers have the most powerful effect on consumers that is to bring the products and services to where consumers are able to make their purchase decisions. The final part of the marketing mix is promotion is the way in which the tourism organization communicates in the most effective way with its target customers either to persuade them to purchase the products and service or to inform them about products and services. Therefore, the goals for promotions must be set clearly and it must be clearly established in the eyes of consumers. What is required of the promotion include numbers of customers to reach as well as when, where, and how to reach them.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In previous years, Thailand had put less concern on the idea of sustainable tourism due to economic acceleration as the focal point. Travel patterns and tourist behavior were not appropriately managed as a consequence resulting in lowering the conditions of natural resources and deteriorating the environment. Details in the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan denote the significance of tourism as an important source of income, as it enjoys a continuous annual growth. Furthermore, Thailand is proud of its ownership of diverse touristic natural resources, for instance mountains, waterfalls, beaches and seas, forests and mangrove. The fact is these resources are recognized as national assets and may have value in terms of environmental economics. The policy places a focus on eco-tourism in which the roles of local communities are participation, with idea of sustainable management of natural and cultural resources. Under a scheme of environmental management, local participation and learning, the idea aims to preserve ecological uniqueness and attractiveness and authenticity of local culture [1]. Bangpu Recreation Centre is one of the attractions considered as an eco-tourism attraction with its abundant mangrove forest resources, under the care taking and management of the Royal Thai Army. Bangpu Recreation Centre is opened for public visits as a non-profit centre for

recreation with financial management under the Royal Thai Army. Income occurred from this management has been circulated within the Army Welfare Department [2]. One concern that needs to be discussed is the governmental management style of Bangpu Recreation Centre. The number of visitors reported in the visitation records has decreased 5 percent from 2010 to 2011 [3]. The satisfaction survey revealed that visitors complained of two things - the service provided and the price of food. These complaints were reflected in lower satisfaction level of most visitors. The visitors had a low satisfaction towards level of comfort of the service space which could not meet their level of expectation, and towards pricing. These two issues should be considered for any future improvements. Therefore, this research paper aimed to examine the relationship between visitors' attitude towards service marketing mix and visitors' frequency of visits the Bangpu Recreation Centre. The findings may benefit future service development of the attraction.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research paper was to examine the relationship between visitors' attitude towards the service marketing mix and the visitors' frequency of visits Bangpu Recreation Centre. The hypothesis of this research was that there was a relationship between attitude towards the service marketing mix and the behavior of visitors of Bangpu Recreation Centre. Based on the theory of service marketing mix reviewed by Siriwan Serirat et al. [4] and Kotler's service behavior [5], the conceptual framework was established to examine the relationship between visitors' attitude towards the set of service marketing mix namely product and service, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and process of service provision, and visitors' frequency of visits. Based on an infinite population, the number of samples was calculated according to the formula to get a total of 385 samples [6]. In collecting the samples, systematic random sampling was applied during Wednesday- Sunday during 10.00 am - 6.00 pm. Using a questionnaire for a total of 21 days, where 18-19 samples were collected each day. In addition, a pilot study of 40 respondents was conducted to find the reliability by measuring the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient if its values were higher than 0.70.

TABLE I
 TEST OF CRONBACH'S ALPHA COEFFICIENT

Factors	α Coefficient	Pass or not
1. Product	.77	Pass
2. Price	.75	Pass
3. Place	.79	Pass
4. Promotion	.71	Pass
5. People	.76	Pass
6. Physical environment	.78	Pass
7. Process of service	.73	Pass
8. Process of the future	.81	Pass

IV. FINDINGS

The demographic findings revealed that the majority of the respondents were female, aged between 31- 40 years old with a married status. A bachelor degree was their highest level of education. Most of the respondents were officers of government offices and government enterprises with an average income per month between 20,001- 30,000 Baht. The exploration of the visitors' attitude presented a high level of the attitude towards the product and service of Bangpu Recreation Centre, in regards to price, place, promotional activities, people who provided service and physical evidence of the centre. The attitude towards process of service was discovered to be at a medium level. Moreover, the findings revealed a relationship between the visitors' attitude to the marketing mix and the frequency of visits.

TABLE II
 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKETING MIX AND NUMBER OF VISITING

Factors	Pearson Correlation	Sig 2 tailed	Level of Relationship
1. Product	.137**	.007	Low/same direction
2. Price	.061	.231	No relationship
3. Place	.090	.079	No relationship
4. Promotion	.085	0.96	No relationship
5. People	.194**	.000	Low/ same direction
6. Physical environment	.142**	.005	Low/ same direction
7. Process of service	.300**	.000	Low/ same direction

**It is significant at .01

From Table II, the findings revealed that price, place, and promotion had no relationship with number of visiting while product, people, and process of service had low relationship with the same direction.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings that showed a relationship between visitors' attitude towards the service marketing mix and the frequency of visits coincided with the findings of Vorapat Leungrujiwong [7]. Vorapat's research studied the marketing mix and behaviour of spa customers. The study found that the spa product and service had a relationship with the frequency of purchase of service per month. Moreover, the finding that reported a relationship between the visitors' attitude towards service staff of Bangpu Recreation Centre and the customers' frequency of visits per year agreed with the finding revealed in the study of Suphak Sanguanwanichawong [8]. Suphak's study found that the marketing factor of service staff of Riverside Dinner Cruise appeared to correlate with its customers' monthly purchase of dinner cruise service. Furthermore, the relationship between the physical evidence and service process of Bangpu Recreation Centre having a relationship with its visitors' frequency of visit per year concurred with Thampaphon's finding [9]. His study featured the result, that customers' attitude towards the physical evidence and service process of Starbucks Coffee shops in Bangkok showed a connection with the customers' frequency

of coming back to experience Starbucks coffee and service consumption.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research paper provide some suggestions for improvement of the marketing factor of physical evidence which is considered an essence of the first impression. More of the budget may be allocated for decorating and increasing the attractiveness and comfort atmosphere of the service premise. Moreover, training the staff in terms of cleanliness awareness and practice should be promoted due to the fact that the main income of Bangpu Recreation Centre comes from providing food and restaurant service. This is part of controlling and monitoring of service provision for higher quality. Due to the spacious area of Bangpu Recreation Centre and the location of each room within the area, the service process is slow. Thus, speed in providing service skill with quality should be augmented, both of its staff and service flow management, for example provisions of equipment storehouses near the accommodation zones and staff to be assigned to take care of guests at each zone. In addition, there could be a holistic approach of improvement to be done for all service marketing mix found to have a relationship with visitors' frequency of visit to Bangpu Recreation Centre.

VII. FUTURE STUDIES

One of the most important limitations of this paper came from the sampling technique. Therefore, in order to get more specific results, the future research should survey different types of tourists based on their province of residence to obtain representative opinions from a variety of domestic tourists in Bangpu Recreation Centre, Thailand. Then, the findings may be able to generalize to find more specific answer to devise a proper marketing plan. Therefore, future research should use a proportion and random sampling technique with a diverse group of domestic tourists. Moreover, future studies should use small group interviews to investigate the reasons behind their choices to visit Bangpu Recreation Centre, Thailand.

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