

**Restoring The Image of A Tourism Destination in Crisis:
The Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) Strategic Crisis
Management Strategies and Destination Marketing Approaches
in Responding to Political Crises 2008-2009**

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Abstract

Despite the very positive prospects for long-term growth, 2008 and 2009 were difficult years for the Thai tourism industry due to local political upheavals, the global financial crisis and the ongoing H1N1 pandemic. This research study analyzes the strategies employed by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in its effort to restore the image of Thailand as a tourist destination during and after the human induced crises. The strategies were classified as crisis communication strategies and integrated destination marketing strategies, and the effectiveness of these strategies were further analyzed from a statistical perspective. Finally, TAT's strategies were analyzed using Mintzberg's model of strategy in terms of deliberate and emergent strategies. The statistical findings indicated that TAT's strategies were effective to some degree, as the number of tourist arrivals did not significantly decrease and regained momentum soon after the crises. Consequently, the identified crisis communication strategies adopted by the TAT at the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis stages can be regarded as effective. Indeed, the TAT has turned crisis into opportunity through the use of discourse in fostering renewal. By plotting TAT's strategies with respect to Mintzberg's taxonomy, it becomes clear that the TAT identified unrealized and emergent strategies as most appropriate and used them to accelerate the revitalization of its situation.

Keywords: *Destination Management, Destination Restoration, Crisis Management in Tourism*

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Introduction

Background

Tourism is an increasingly important sector within the Thai economy. In 2007, tourism accounted for 6.5% of Thailand's GDP, with a revenue of around US\$27 billion. It provides employment for hundreds of thousands of Thai citizens, and also brings in valuable revenue that supports families around the country (Watson, 2007). Thailand has recovered well from the tsunami in 2006 and it has continued to prioritize the tourism industry as a key source of foreign currency earnings.

In 2008, 15.7 million visitors were expected to arrive in Thailand. However, during March 2008, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) regrouped and reformed and, on August 29, 2008, its supporters violently seized airports in Phuket, Krabi, and Hat Yai and blocked major roads and highways. The crisis reached a climax on November 25 and 27, as the protesters stormed into the main commercial airports in Bangkok: Suvarnabhumi International Airport and Don Mueang Airport (TAT, 2008b). As a result, domestic and international inbound and outbound flights to Bangkok were forced to stop services.

The government declared a state of emergency for the areas of Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang airports (TAT, 2008a) and TAT opened 1672 hotlines to provide information for foreign tourists. The 35 TAT local offices were instructed to facilitate tourists travelling to various tourist destinations in Thailand as well as they could, in addition to waiting for flights at provincial airports. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports, in cooperation with the TAT and other relevant government agencies and

associations, set up a Crisis Networking Centre at Suvarnabhumi Airport (TAT, 2008b) and transferred the stranded passengers to hotels scattered around the country (*ibid.*).

Some hotels in Bangkok welcomed back those checked-out passengers who had been unable to fly out of the Kingdom. Four days after the airport closures, thousands of stranded tourists and business travelers were flown out of country using the U Tapao Air Force base. Don Mueang and Suvarnabhumi airports resumed operations on the 4th and 5th of December, respectively. The TAT offered their most sincere apologies to all those who were affected by the closure of the airports through their website (*ibid.*).

Thailand's tourism industry was struck again by a new episode of political unrest in April 2009. On 11 April, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) protesters occupied the Royal Cliff Resort in Pattaya (a province approximately 80 kilometers from Bangkok) where the ASEAN Summit was being held. Consequently, a state of emergency was declared in Pattaya. This was followed by another wave of protests as protesters used cars, buses and LPG tankers to take control of several locations in central Bangkok. A state of emergency was declared in Bangkok and surrounding areas on 12 April, 2009.

Impact of the Political Unrest on Thailand's Tourism

Thailand spent 1.9 billion Baht to help 350,000 stranded foreign tourists and about 1,000 Thai travelers stranded overseas, which included subsidizing accommodation and meal costs at 2,000 Baht per person per day (at an approximate exchange rate of 35 baht to US\$1). The overall projected loss in income (direct and indirect) incurred to the economy was 210 billion Baht, which accounted for 2 per cent of the nominal 2009 GDP (Bank of Thailand, 2009). In addition, many foreign tourists

cancelled Bangkok city tours and headed to other destinations, leading to a loss of 6 million Baht per day for the city's tourism business.

The destination felt not only a financial impact but also an emotional one. During the airport closures, as many tourists were trying to escape from the crisis using different routes, accidents and casualties were inevitable as tourists rushed to catch flights out of provincial airports. Meanwhile, some travel agents faced problems, as certain airlines from China refused to give refunds by denying all responsibility for cancellations on the basis that it was Thailand's problem (Bangkok Post, 2008).

As claimed in the academic literature, tourism in a post-crisis situation must be restored to the same situation as during the pre-crisis period (Pforr, 2006). In other words, the measures taken by the tourism industry in responding to actually existing crises will form the basis of crisis preparation plans for the future.

Research methodology

Research Questions

This study examines the crisis response strategies that the destination authority, TAT, employed following the political instability of 2008 and early 2009. This study will also examine how the industry has redesigned promotional messages and re-tooled marketing communication tactics (channels) to regain visitor confidence during and after the political crises. In addition, this study also examines TAT marketing strategies during and after the crises.

The research questions follow from the literature review on crisis communication, tourism and integrated marketing approach for destinations in crisis and they help to guide the investigation. They are:

RQ1: What crisis response, destination restoration and marketing strategies did the TAT employ in response to the 2008-2009 political crises?

RQ2: Were the strategies that the TAT employed effective?

Research Methods

This research study investigates the crisis communication strategies and marketing communication strategies employed by the Thai tourism industry following the 2008-2009 political crises. The research was qualitative in nature and involved the selection of an organization that was: (1) directly affected by the crisis; (2) had the means to respond to the crisis, and (3) generated specific strategies and messages in response to the crisis. The organization therefore selected was the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

As a qualitative assessment, this study attempted to identify TAT's strategies through various information sources. Principal among these were the communications made by TAT officials themselves through the media and, primarily, its own website. Media communications were noted as they occurred and recorded for subsequent analysis both in terms of discourse analysis and, subsequently, in light of the framework of strategies first provided by Mintzberg (1979;1994; Mintzberg and Waters, 2006: 257-272). Additional information sources were also employed. Information was collected that was initially published from August 1, 2008 to June 30,

2008 in the form of: marketing media, prices and the communications and distribution channels employed by the TAT. These were mainly but not exclusively internet-based communication channels. The sites monitored included TAT websites, the Office of Tourism Development website, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs websites, press releases from the TAT, marketing action plans, an English language newspaper (*Bangkok Post*) and other media reports.

Information published in English only was gathered to avoid possible problems with interpretation and translation: the Thai language can be used in quite a vague way in official communications and analyzing English language media can be more effective in analysis of this kind. The relevant analysis is presented within the context of secondary literature relating to the TAT and other agencies within a framework of discursive content analysis. Although this case study method has been criticized, with some justification (Tight, 2010: 329-39), it is nevertheless true that careful evaluation of the procedure employed, the data collected and the analytical techniques employed can still provide valid and robust analyses of specific instances (e.g. Burton, 2010: 36-41; Gibbert *et al.*, 2008: 1465-1474). The critical discourse analysis method follows Habermasian principles, which are widely accepted on a theoretical basis but have only begun to be tested on an empirical basis to a limited extent (e.g. Cukier, Ojelank, Robert & Catherine, 2009: 175-196). In order to improve the degree of external validity, the results of the analysis have been compared to other case study approaches in the tourism industry. Nevertheless, there are still grounds for improvement in the rigorousness of the case study approach and this is recognized as a limitation to this study.

Literature review

Defining Tourism Destinations in Crisis

The World Tourism Organization defines a tourism crisis “as any unexpected event that affects a traveler's confidence in a destination and interferes with the ability to continue operating normally” (Laws, Prideaux & Chon, 2007: 5-9). This is the definition employed in this paper.

Political Risks and Tourism Promotion

Hall (1994) asserts that political stability is an essential prerequisite for attracting international tourists to a destination and is a fundamental precondition to the successful establishment, growth and survival of a tourist industry. To define this more precisely, political instability refers to a situation in which the political legitimacy of conditions and mechanisms of governance and rule is challenged by elements outside the normal operations of the political system (Hall & Page, 2000). The different dimensions of political instability can include wars, civil wars, coups, terrorism, riots and political and social unrest and strikes. The tourism in Egypt, Israel, Northern Ireland and Peru illustrate how ongoing political violence can adversely affect tourist perceptions of destinations and travel behavior (Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, & Tarlow, 1999: 13-18). Protracted and unresolved political uncertainty exacerbates doubts in the minds of travelers and it is clear that the longer uncertainty lasts, the longer it takes for the destination to recover (*ibid*).

Marketing Communication Strategies Employed by Thailand in Past Crises

The Thai tourism industry has experienced various kinds of crises ranging from natural disasters to human made ones. When the SARS crisis struck Asia in 2003, the government of Thailand offered to every tourist a sum of US\$100,000 if he/she were infected by SARS during a stay in Thailand (Pike, 2008). Familiarization trips (Glaesser, 2003) have been used intensively as an instrument by the countries affected by the Tsunami in 2004. A total of 3,396 media and sales representatives were invited to Thailand as part of a mega-familiarization initiative in the aftermath of the Tsunami (Bangkok Post, 2005). In responding to the tsunami, Glaesser's guidelines (2003) were followed by the Phuket Tourism Association (PTA), which established the Tourism Recovery Centre website shortly after the disaster. Public relations efforts were also mounted via websites such as CNN, MTV Southeast Asia and MTV India.

In the aftermath of the tsunami, a 24-hour Crisis Communication Centre (CMC) was set up to disseminate updated information to all related organizations. In 2005, promotional materials, in DVD and VCD formats, including Andaman Today brochures, were distributed overseas to build up confidence in Thailand among travel agencies and overseas visitors.

Thailand also employed sponsorship as a crisis response communication strategy by hosting the Miss Universe pageant finals during May 2005 (Bangkok Post, 2005), although of course these events were organized quite far in advance. Even so, the opportunity was seized to add a new slant to the event. Major road shows were also organized in Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Japan, Europe, and Northeast Asia to woo visitors into returning. It is noteworthy that, in past crises, the TAT utilized various

crisis response measures so as to ensure that tour operators did not redirect customers to other countries (Bangkok Post, 2005).

Crisis Communication and Crisis Response

Crisis management refers to the management of tasks and processes before, during, and after crises. It also refers to the strategic management of technical and administrative activities during a crisis (Fall, 2004: 238-252; Glaesser, 2003). According to Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2006), all crises involve general communication strategies of reducing uncertainty, responding to the crisis, resolving it and learning from it. Glaesser (2003) defines crisis communication as a form of mass communication that is suddenly initiated and is dependent on the occurrence of negative events. In addition to mass communication and public relations perspectives, Fall (2004: 238-252) views crisis communication as a strategic management activity that guides crisis period communication between the organization and its internal and external publics. Combining strategic planning and communication forms into what has been termed "strategic communication" (Fall, 2004: 238-252), and incorporating them into an organization's public relations programs, provides a strong blueprint for a crisis management framework.

Coombs (1995: 447-476) has identified these organizational response strategies to crisis situations. Nonexistence strategies attempt to deny the presence of the crisis altogether, on either a passive or an active basis. Distance strategies accept the existence of the crisis but attempt to prevent the public from associating it with the organization. Integration strategies acknowledge the link between the crisis and the organization but attempt to deflect attention by concentrating on the good things that the organization has done in other contexts. Finally, mortification strategies simply

throw the organization on the mercy of the public and ask for forgiveness, taking such steps to encourage this to happen as might be required.

Concerning crisis management from the tourism angle, Gurtner (2007) considers communication and effective public relations as a central tenet in tourism crisis management, particularly in minimizing negative perceptions and images generated by the crisis. This is supported by Laws, Prideaux and Chon (2007: 5-9), who explain that public relations and marketing campaigns should be deployed in the post crisis phase to stimulate demand in order to compensate for some of the business lost through cancellations. These studies indicate that destination managers must redesign communication messages and revamp communication tactics in post crisis phases to revitalize the destination's reputation.

Findings

TAT's Crisis Communication Strategies

Within a few hours of the closure of the airports, the TAT set up a Crisis Management Centre at Suvarnabhumi Airport. The TAT worked closely with all the concerned organizations throughout the Kingdom to evacuate stranded passengers and to clear the backlog of passengers.

As a result of concerns regarding the political stability of the country following political demonstrations in Bangkok, the TAT dismissed the turmoil by arguing that demonstrations were a common practice of a democratic society. In the post crisis period, via roadshows and PR messages, the TAT reassured the audiences that Thailand was a safe place to visit. Analysis indicates that the TAT deployed a variety of well-defined crisis management strategies (Coombs, 2007).

Pre-Crisis Stage

In the pre-crisis stage, the TAT conducted a random survey which indicated that 50% of Thai tourists said that the unrest did not affect their tourism plans because their travel destinations were not close to sites of possible unrest, which were mostly in Bangkok. The TAT advised tourists to engage in activities such as shopping and visiting tourist spots, as long as they were not in the areas where protest demonstrations were occurring occurred (TAT, 2008b).

The TAT employed the distance strategy regarding provincial airport closures during August 2008. In 2008, prior to the airport closures, the TAT attempted to acknowledge the existence of all violent clashes, including the violent seizure of the three provincial airports, while reminding the public that these incidents were not as horrific as media reports suggested and would not have a significant impact on the tourism industry. The TAT insisted that the clashes happened only in limited areas near Government House, with the affected area spanning only three square kilometers, leaving other areas of Bangkok unaffected (TAT, 2008b).

Similar justification approaches were deployed again by TAT immediately after the 2009 Songkran incidents. The TAT's website was updated with the same information provided during press conferences, which was that the situation in Bangkok and Pattaya was back to normal and all attractions, transportation and services were operating as usual and that political protests had caused only minor disruptions to Thailand's tourism (TAT, 2009c).

Crisis Stage

Immediately after the protesters stormed into the terminals of Suvarnabhumi Airport, AOT's (Airports of Thailand) and TAT's first response was to try to control the situation and to identify the facts at the time of the crisis. The TAT has had its Tourism Intelligence Unit and Communication Centre (TIC) in place since 2007. The TAT displayed the suffering strategy after the Suvarnabhumi Airport incidents. The stakeholders, TAT, AOT and the nation were still unsure about what had happened to the passengers at the airport, which had suffered the first major airport closure. Later, AOT and the TAT wanted the public to understand that the organization could have been an innocent victim of the political unrest. The TAT issued a quick response, kept a close and open relationship with the media, used full disclosure, was honest and expressed sympathy and compassion for the passengers.

Post-Crisis Stage

This stage is when recovery efforts and cleanup begin, and rebuilding takes place along with heroes and leaders being recognized (Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer, 2003). Coombs (2007) also states that the mortification strategy attempts to win forgiveness and accepts the crisis. Mortification has three categories: redemption, repentance and rectification. Redemption offers some type of reimbursement in order to help the victims. Repentance involves asking for forgiveness. Rectification entails preparation in order to prevent a recurrence. The TAT employed the mortification strategy for the major airport closures. Redemption was displayed by the TAT by immediately dispatching TAT officials and by offering compensation and accommodations to the stranded passengers. The TAT used repentance during the post-crisis period by issuing a full apology for the incidents via email to passengers

and a public apology from its official websites. The Prime Minister, the ministers and the TAT governor apologized to the stranded passengers and tourism business representatives at press conferences and road show events during the post-crisis period. Likewise, rectification was used during the post crisis period. After the crisis, when a new government was installed, the AOT, TAT and the governing bodies implemented new procedures and laws as well as new safety measures to ensure that the incidents would not recur.

Marketing Management of a Destination Crisis

Beirman (2003) has identified the four steps to marketing management of a destination crisis as follows: (1) identify the event/problem as either a crisis or a hazard; (2) establish a crisis management team and define roles and coordinate with local tourism industry; (3) promote the destination during and after the crisis and (4) monitor recovery and analyze the crisis response. The TAT's destination marketing communication strategies are analyzed according to this framework below.

Identify the Event/Problem as Either a Crisis or a Hazard

During the airport seizures, the number of bookings and reservations cancelled increased immediately. In the 2009 Songkran demonstrations, tourists were not directly affected, although the initial Pattaya protest occurred in the tourist resort city of Pattaya. Consequently, the destination authority of Thailand, the TAT, treated both situations as crises.

Establish a Crisis Management Team and Destination Response Coordination with the Local Tourism Industry

Within a few hours of the airport closures, the TAT set up a Crisis Management Centre at Suvarnabhumi Airport. Although the crisis management team was not officially formed with the formal cooperation of airlines, hoteliers and restaurants, the TAT worked closely with all concerned organizations to evacuate the stranded passengers.

During the airport closures, the TAT closely collaborated with airlines and hotels all over the Kingdom to evacuate stranded passengers and to clear the backlog of passengers. Many hotels welcomed the passengers back with discounted fares. During and after the crises, marketers realized the need to keep the customers in the loop and to send out positive messages. Hotels took part in big promotional efforts, including generous discounts, and flexible and bespoke packages in order to bring back tourists to the resorts.

In 2009, the TAT and the national carrier, THAI Airways International, adopted a shared tourism marketing concept under which significant promotional activities were undertaken, such as co-branding a logo for the tourism promotional campaign and a co-marketing campaign in key global markets. Major road shows were organized in China, Japan, India, France, Dubai and the Middle East to restore visitor and investor confidence in Thailand and to promote investment and tourism during February.

Promoting the Destination During and After the Crisis

The 2008 airport closures and the 2009 Songkran riots were short-term crises which occurred within a more prolonged crisis. Beirman (2003) explains that during a short-term crisis, it is appropriate to suspend destination advertising briefly and to focus only on crisis response strategies. The TAT too adopted this approach by placing emphasis on crisis responses during the crisis period. As soon as the crises were over, they placed the focus on the recovery strategies. Based on the time line of events, the Thai political crisis was of indeterminate duration and the TAT employed several marketing methodologies. They included the following:

Isolation marketing

The TAT employed the isolation marketing method several times during the crises. During the provincial airport closures, emphasis was placed on promoting the north, northeast and the central region. During the Bangkok protests, the TAT distinguished between the crisis-hit zones and the accessibility and safety of the major tourist attractions elsewhere in the city.

Segmenting the Market into Stalwarts, Waverers and Disaffected

The stalwart segment comprises those with a strong affinity or feeling of solidarity with the destination (Beriman, 2003). During the crisis, the TAT sought to elicit the support of the domestic market. The TAT's strategies also included marketing the destination to the disaffected markets, especially India, ASEAN countries and Middle East markets. Waverers or fair weather friend tourist groups for Thailand

included European and East Asian markets. The disaffected or discretionary market of Thailand was mainly composed of the Japanese market and the Americas.

Incentives to Restore the Market

The Thai tourism industry offered various marketing incentive schemes during the post-crises period. These incentives covered a wide spectrum of tourism products, including airfares, hotel accommodation, tours, attractions, restaurants and visa fees. The incentives were in the form of discounts, value-added extras and contests with trips to Thailand.

Maintaining an Effective Website

During the 2008 crisis, when the protesters started the street protests and took over Government House, the TAT posted a map of the demonstration site on its website. The TAT maintained the Tourism Situation Update website and it was frequently updated. Moreover, when Bangkok's major airports were closed down, that website was updated with emergency hotlines for the TAT and other related associations, flight information from airlines and contact points at hotels for stranded passengers. The TAT posted interviews taken from tourists in Pattaya, Bangkok and Phuket to discuss the minimal impact on their trip caused by the political situation on their Thailand tourism update website immediately after the 2009 Songkran protests.

Monitor Recovery and Analyze the Crisis Response

As it is vital to the destinations for which tourism is a strategically- and economically-significant industry, the TAT conducted a serious, detailed statistical monitoring approach. Based on the statistical results and market research, the TAT

analyzed crisis restoration management strategies. Constant recovery and restoration monitoring processes helped the TAT in designing its marketing action plan for 2010.

Renewal Opportunity after Crisis

The argument has been made that such crises create threats to organizations and their stakeholders. However, as Fink (1986) indicates, crises have not only negative outcomes but positive ones as well. Ulmer and colleagues have taken Fink's idea and have expanded on it, developing what they refer to as the discourse of renewal. This approach argues that a crisis can be an opportunity for an organization to position itself better through strategic communication (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2006). Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, reinforced cockpits, heightened security at airports and legislation that enabled intelligence agencies to gather information on terrorists were corrective measures that emphasized a renewed effort to protect the nation following the attacks (*ibid.*).

Installation of Tsunami early warnings systems at six at-risk Andaman Coast provinces in Thailand can also be considered as a renewal measure where the tsunami disaster is also considered, in this sense at least, to be an opportunity to avoid or minimize the impact of possible future disasters. Other research studies also claim that past or potential crises should be catalysts for tourism organizations worldwide to review their overall strategic management plans (Pearson and Mitroff, 1993: 48-59).

In summary, as Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2006) have argued, the discourse of renewal provides an alternative approach to image restoration for an organization following a crisis. Similarly, if Thailand's tourism sector is considered to have the form of an organization, the ongoing political crisis and its negative

consequences can be regarded as an opportunity to re-build the Thai tourism brand image and to implement more sustainable approaches for crises in the future.

Discourse of Renewal for Thailand Tourism

A crisis can be an opportunity for an organization to position itself better through strategic communication (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2006). Three of the TAT's renewal effects for the industry and the stakeholders can be identified as follows. The first renewal focused on stakeholder commitment. During the crises, the TAT collaborated with all of the related organizations in order to evacuate stranded passengers. In the aftermath of the crises, the TAT, in collaboration with the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, requested a budget allocation for stimulus packages for tourism-related businesses in order to support them during hard times. Moreover, by coordinating with many agencies, the TAT organized road shows, trade shows and other promotional activities in order to restore tourist confidence in the industry.

A second type of renewal was the commitment to correction. Legislation was proposed and enacted in order to try to avoid further airport seizures. To form a centralized crisis management system, it was proposed that there should be a crisis management team for future crises.

Finally, the TAT was committed to rebuilding after the crises. Rather than focusing on causes or responsibilities, they focused their communications immediately on rebuilding the industry for the stakeholders by redesigning and retooling their strategies.

Consequently, to recap, it can be clearly seen that the TAT focused its attention not on issues of cause or blame but rather on overcoming the crisis. In other

words, the TAT was able to learn through failure and to be mindful and flexible in the effort to emerge successfully from crisis.

Typology of Strategies

Mintzberg's (1979) typology of strategies model first looked at a formal rational process of strategic planning and then observed that unexpected crises and opportunities and quickly changing environments may produce a significant gap between intended and realized strategies. His view on emergent strategies and organizational learning, where learning and designing go hand in hand on a trial and error basis, is best suited to organizations operating in a turbulent environment like the TAT. Consequently, Mintzberg's strategy framework is introduced and utilized for further exploration of the data.

Mintzberg (1979) describes strategy as involving a stream of decisions that incorporates "a complex multistage process" involving several elements, including "a change in environment." He categorizes strategies as follows:

- Intended strategies that are realized (deliberate strategies);
- Intended strategies that are not realized, perhaps because of unrealistic expectations, misjudgments about the environment, or changes during implementation (unrealized strategies);
- Realized strategies that were never intended, perhaps because no strategy was developed at the outset or perhaps because the strategies somehow were displaced along the way (emergent strategies).

Mintzberg and Waters (2006: 257-272) bridge the gap between strategy formation and organizational learning. They consider the fact that unrealized strategies are a source of learning, as managers find out which of their intentions do not work, rejected either by their organizations themselves or else by environments that are less than acquiescent. Deliberate strategies provide the organization with a sense of purposeful direction. Emergent strategy implies that an organization is learning what works in practice. Mixing the deliberate and the emergent strategies in some way will help the organization to control its course while encouraging the learning process (*ibid.*).

In summary, Mintzberg (1994) concludes that the strategy formation walks on two feet, one deliberate and the other emergent. Consequently, managing this process requires the ability to co-ordinate actions with respect to realizing actions while responding to changes in the external environment. This can be a difficult undertaking.

Taxonomy of TAT's Strategies in Mintzberg's Model

In this section, all kinds of strategies, ranging from crisis communication and destination image restoration to marketing strategies, are used as catalysts in categorizing the strategies in Mintzberg's framework. Based on the framework, the TAT's strategies are categorized as intended, realized, unrealized and deliberate.

2008 & 2009 Marketing Action Plan

- To posit Thailand as a quality destination
- To promote with eMarketing alternatives
- To expose the Kingdom destination more in the global market
- To expand market by opening new offices and participation in travel marts, and travel shows
- To diversify tourism products in golf tourism, wellness and spa tourism

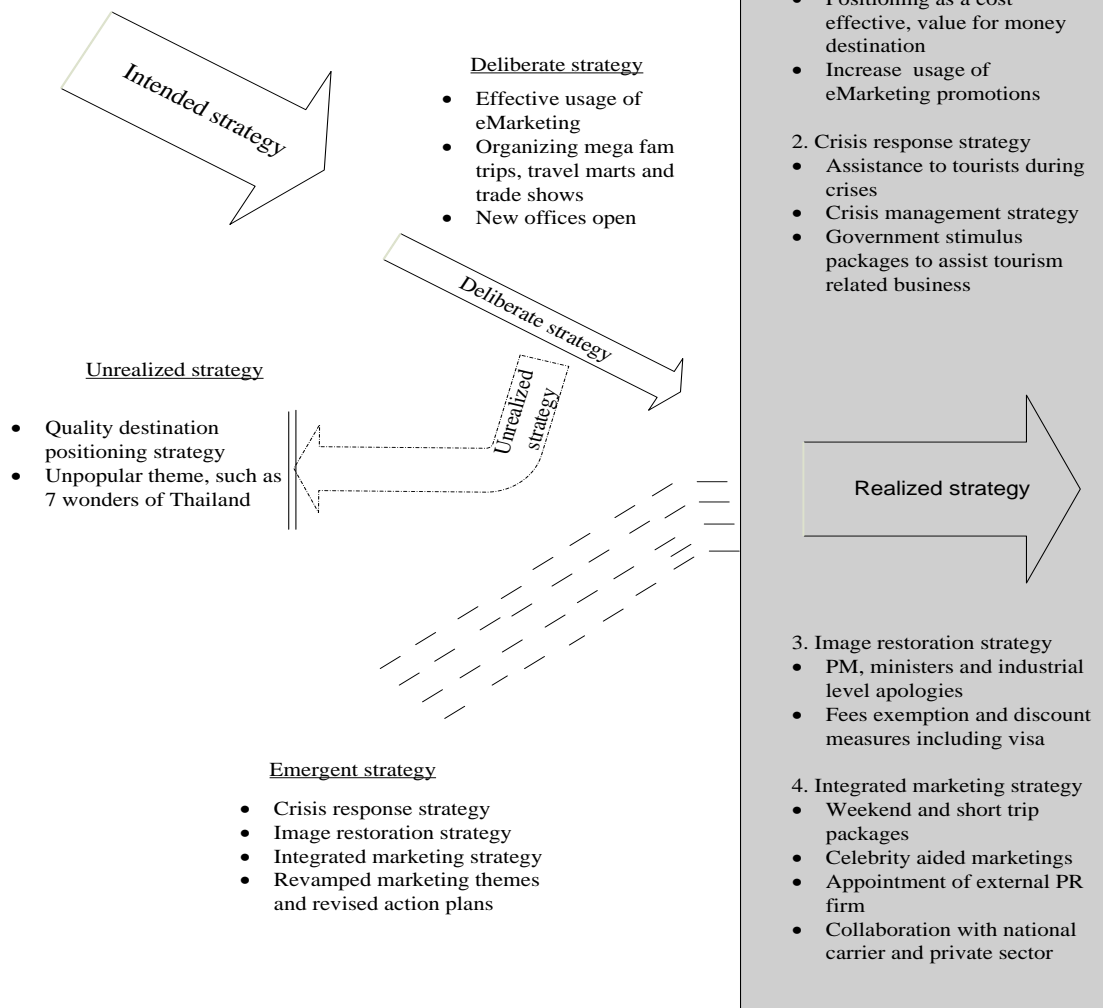


Figure: Forms of strategy

Figure1: TAT's strategies in Mintzberg's Model

Intended strategies

The TAT's 2008 marketing plans are applied as intended strategies to Mintzberg's framework. Strategies from those plans become realized strategies, some became unrealized and were dropped halfway through the implementation process and some were unrealized during the crisis but were realized subsequently.

Realized strategies

The following strategies are identified as realized strategies.

Expose Thailand more: The TAT planned to open new offices in Kunming, China, and Mumbai, India within the year 2009 and in Jakarta, Indonesia by 2010. For the All England Lawn Tennis Championship 2009 at Wimbledon, the TAT, in collaboration with THAI Airways International and the ESPN Starsports TV channel, co- sponsored a competition to predict the tournament's winners.

Promote the use of e-marketing channels: The TAT adjusted its website and database to become a marketing and profiling database for local tourism companies, covering both foreign and Thai tourists. The TAT also encouraged small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises to adopt information and communication technology to enhance their marketing activities and to make them more efficient. In 2009, The TAT planned to extend its global outreach by making it available via Twitter and Youtube. Interviews with foreign tourists during and after the crises, and testimonials and marketing promotion videos, have been uploaded to Youtube as a complement to informing the world about the real situation.

Promote domestic tourism: The domestic marketing plan apportioned great importance to promoting the distribution of tourism revenue to all regions of Thailand. Efforts to promote domestic travel and tourism have been included as key elements of the overall tourism promotion and development plan since 2008.

Expose Thailand more in emerging markets: The TAT has participated in overseas travel trade shows and international road shows and organized international road shows to mature markets as well as the new, emerging markets of Vietnam, the Middle East, Russia, former members of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Emergent strategies

Crisis management strategy: Within a few hours of the airport closures, the TAT set up the Crisis Management Centre at Suvarnabhumi Airport. Although the crisis management team was not officially formed with airlines, hoteliers and restaurants, the TAT worked closely with all the relevant agencies across the Kingdom to evacuate the stranded passengers and to clear the backlog of passengers.

Promote short haul market: The TAT targeted the short haul market based on accessibility and convenience. The TAT positioned Thailand as a short-break destination for 72-hour trips over long weekends in key markets like China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Product diversification with new packages: To counter the impacts of political crises on the tourism industry, a new transit-passenger tourism scheme was initiated by the TAT in 2009. The transit-passenger packages were aimed at travelers

waiting 12 hours or more for their next flights to take short tour packages around the vicinity of Bangkok with exempted transit visa fees (TAT, 2009d).

Celebrity-aided marketing programme: In 2009, the TAT utilized celebrity-aided marketing campaigns to encourage locals to take up more domestic trips to boost the ailing travel sector in the Kingdom (TAT, 2009a). The TAT has also invited famous Indonesian actresses to feature in television commercials for booming tourism products, which were then distributed through different media in Indonesia (Travelweekly, 2009).

Deliberate strategies

Deliberate strategies can be visualised as a combination of realized strategies and emergent strategies.

Statistical Findings

From the earlier estimation, the number of foreign tourist arrivals in 2008 and 2009 was projected to fall to 14.0 and 12.8 million persons, down by 3.0% and 8.8%, respectively. However, in contrast to the preliminary estimation, the actual turn out in December 2008 indicated a drop of foreign tourist arrivals of only 38.5% (eTurboNews, 2008). In January–April 2009, visitor arrivals to Thailand totaled 4.7 million (TAT, 2009d). The arrivals sharply dropped to a critical level and in June 2009, the number of tourist arrivals dropped from 165,000 during the same period in 2008, to 27,000 in 2009, presumably due to the Influenza A (H1N1) outbreak, or 33.5% year-on-year (MCOT Public News, 2009).

According to the AOT, the number of transfer passengers at Suvarnabhumi International Airport totaled 1.5 million (-9.79%) in 2008 and 446,997 passengers during January-April 2009, a decline of 9.3%. (TAT, 2009d). Further, the number of transfer passengers at Suvarnabhumi International Airport totaled 1.5 million (-9.8%) in 2008 and 446,997 passengers during January-April 2009, a decline of 9.3% (TAT, 2009b). Although the TAT and tourism business operators tried to promote tourist spots in provinces other than Bangkok during Songkran, the hotel occupancy rate in Phuket declined to 65-70 percent, down from 90-95 percent year-on-year.

Answers to the Research Questions

RQ1: What crisis response strategies and destination restoration and marketing strategies did the TAT employ in response to the 2008-2009 political crises? The strategies employed by TAT in restoring the destination can be classified as crisis management strategies, image restoration strategies and integrated marketing strategies, which were discussed in detail in the previous section.

RQ2: Were the strategies that the TAT employed effective?

It is difficult to determine the effectiveness of the strategies employed by TAT by considering the tourist arrivals figures solely, as several other factors might have contributed to the low tourist arrival numbers, such as the ongoing international financial crisis and the outbreak of the H1N1 pandemic in 2009. Moreover, although the Kingdom saw recovery in the first half of the year, it will be more appropriate to determine the strategy's effectiveness in the long term. It can be concluded from the fact that the number of arrivals is gradually increasing (although still lower than projected figures) that this is a sign of recovery, in addition to the contribution of

several other factors. Consequently, the strategies employed by the TAT are deemed to be effective to some degree but not completely.

Strategies in Mintzberg's Model

Based on the previous research findings, combined with those obtained for this paper, it is evident that new strategies have emerged, while existing intended strategies have been revitalized owing to changes in demand from external organizations. It is important that the TAT's plans be flexible enough to adapt to changes in the external environment. Planners at the TAT have to foresee and prepare for unpredictable yet probably unavoidable crises and design their intended strategies accordingly.

By categorizing strategies as intended, emergent, unrealized and realized strategies, the TAT can identify unrealized strategies and emergent strategies based on the crisis situation, and from these strategies they can accelerate the revitalization of their intended strategies in implementation. Moreover, their learning process can be speeded up by distinguishing between intended and emergent strategies. Consequently, this is a means by which the TAT may obtain a competitive advantage through future crisis strategy management.

It is important to note that learning from a self-experienced crisis is insufficient for the TAT, which had to engage with a vicarious learning approach in order to recognize risk, wherein organizational leaders observe the failures or crises experienced by other destination markets and take action to avoid making the same mistake. The TAT can learn lessons from destinations that have quite recently experienced political crises, such as Fiji and Indonesia. From those learning

experiences, the TAT can determine whether the organization should adopt emergent strategies as intended strategies in the future.

Conclusion

In summary, without learning from their own and other's mistakes, the TAT might stagnate and fail to respond to potential threats in an ever-changing world. The TAT needs to choose one at the expense of others and try, thereby, to strike the best possible balance between deliberate and emergent strategies.

Clearly, political uncertainty is negatively affecting Thai tourism and the longer it lasts, the more ingrained negative perceptions about safety in Thailand become, irrespective of the calm realities on the ground. However, crises can be viewed not only as a threat, but also as an opportunity (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2006). The TAT can take as challenges the crises presented and can turn them into opportunities to inspire renewal as well as new and improved approaches in conducting business following a crisis.

As described by Markides (1999), strategy formation and implementation are an on-going, never-ending, integrated process requiring continuous reassessment and reformation. As the destination management organization of Thailand, the TAT's tourism and destination management strategies should be formulated and implemented with continuous reassessment and reformation, with a different taxonomy of strategies. The most important thing for the TAT is to build a stable destination via realized and intended strategies based on learning experiences, while recognizing emergent situations that might be used to revamp existing strategies along with *ad hoc* strategies. By considering them all together, the organization (TAT) will be better prepared to meet the planned objectives and targets.

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