Analyzing the Effects of Past Visits, Image, and Satisfaction on the Loyalty of Foreign Tourists: A Model of Destination Loyalty

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to examine the causal relationships among past visits, image, satisfaction, and loyalty of foreign tourists to destinations in Thailand. The paper reviews the literature and identifies the observed variables used to measure the four latent constructs: past visits, image, satisfaction, and loyalty of tourists. The population of this research was 9,815,466 foreign tourists at the departure terminals in Suvarnabhumi International Airport, who were about to leave Thailand. Following Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2000), the sample size of 360 respondents was derived from 18 variables multiplied by 20 times, and the usable number of questionnaires was 400. The research instruments used were self-administered questionnaires. The sampling technique used was simple random sampling. The results demonstrate that destination image and satisfaction had strong positive effects on destination loyalty. Further, past visits also had a positive influence on image, satisfaction, and loyalty. Destination marketers should therefore focus on designing and implementing marketing strategies and programs that improve tourist image, satisfaction, and loyalty. This paper is an attempt to fill a gap in the tourism research in Thailand by proposing and testing a causal model of destination loyalty using structural equation modeling (SEM) technique

Keywords: Destination Image, Destination Satisfaction, Destination loyalty, Structural Equation Modeling

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การวิเคราะห์ผลกระทบของการกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำ ภาพลักษณ์และความพึงพอใจที่มีต่อความจงรักภักดีของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติ: โมเดลความจงรักภักดีต่อแหล่งท่องเที่ยว

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อสำรวจความสัมพันธ์เชิงสาเหตุระหว่างการท่องเที่ยวที่ผ่านมา ภาพลักษณ์ ความพึงพอใจ และความจงรักภักดีของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างประเทศที่มาท่องเที่ยวในประเทศไทย โดยได้ทบทวนงานวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องเพื่อค้นหาตัวแปรสังเกตได้ที่ใช้วัดตัวแปรแฝง 4 ตัวแปร คือ การท่องเที่ยวที่ผ่านมา ภาพลักษณ์ ความพึงพอใจ และความจงรักภักดีของนักท่องเที่ยว ประชากรของการวิจัยนี้ คือ นักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติจำนวน 9,815,466 คนที่กำลังดำเนินทางออกจากประเทศไทยที่สนามบินระหว่างประเทศสุวรรณภูมิ กลุ่มตัวอย่างจำนวน 360 คน คำนวณจากคำแนะนำของ *Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2000)* โดยใช้จำนวนตัวแปร 18 ตัวคูณด้วย 20 เท่า กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่เก็บและใช้ได้จริงจำนวน 400 วิธีการสุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้คือ การสุ่มอย่างง่าย ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ภาพลักษณ์และความพึงพอใจมีผลเชิงบวกระดับสูงต่อความจงรักภักดีของนักท่องเที่ยว นอกจากนี้ ยังพบว่า การท่องเที่ยวที่ผ่านมามีอิทธิพลต่อภาพลักษณ์ ความพึงพอใจและความจงรักภักดีของนักท่องเที่ยว ดังนั้น นักการตลาดท่องเที่ยวจึงควรกำหนดกลยุทธ์และโปรแกรมการตลาดท่องเที่ยวที่ส่งเสริมภาพลักษณ์ ความพึงพอใจ และความจงรักภักดีของนักท่องเที่ยวเพื่อทำให้นักท่องเที่ยวต้องการกลับมาเที่ยวประเทศไทยอีกในอนาคต งานวิจัยนี้เป็นความพยายามที่จะส่งเสริมการวิจัยด้านการท่องเที่ยวโดยนำเสนอและทดสอบโมเดลเชิงสาเหตุความจงรักภักดีต่อแหล่งท่องเที่ยวด้วยเทคนิคโมเดลสมการเชิงโครงสร้าง

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Introduction

Academics and practitioners understand the importance of customer loyalty in business success. Many studies confirm this statement with empirically-derived figures. Reichheld (1993), for example, has reported significant growth rates of 60 percent of an American credit card company by enhancing the retention rate of its customer base by 5 percent. Rust and Zahornik (1993) found that it can be five times more expensive to attract new customers than to retain existing customers. Yoon and Uysal (2005) found that the success of a destination strongly depended on a thorough analysis of tourist motivations and on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, Faullant, Matzler and Fuller (2008) also have reported Alpine ski resorts with the highest satisfaction ratings and the highest image ratings had the highest loyalty scores.

Customer satisfaction is regarded as a major driver of customer loyalty but not as a sufficient condition for loyalty. Many researchers assert that the image of a product or service essentially determines the extent of customer loyalty (Faullant, Matzler and Fuller, 2008). Among tourist behavioral studies, repeat visitation has been used to assess tourists' destination loyalty (Oppermann, 1998; Pritchard and Howard, 1997). Repeat visitation is conceptually similar to two of the three customer loyalty indicators: intention to continue buying and intention to buy more. However, repeat visitation alone may not truly represent tourists' loyalty. For example, those that do not return to a particular destination they had previously visited may simply want to seek different travel experiences in new destinations, and yet maintain loyalty to the previously-visited destination. In order to fill the gap in assessing destination loyalty, this study used tourists' willingness to recommend a destination and intention to revisit as two indicators of destination loyalty. Thus, destination loyalty was operationally defined as the level of tourists' perceptions of a destination as a recommendable place and a place to which to return.

Moreover, past research (Schreyer, Lime and Williams, 1984) has shown that prior product knowledge enables consumers to evaluate a product's utility, attributes, and applications. Chen (1998), in his review of tourists' decision-making processes, claims that it was vital to examine past travel experience, which often directly and indirectly influences tourists' choice behaviors. Recently, in an effort to determine if past international travel experience affects tourists' choice behavior, Sonmez and Graefe (1999) have found that past travel experience in certain regions both increased the intention to travel there and decreased the intention to avoid places that were considered risky. Further, prior product knowledge enhances one's internal memory and assists in choice behavior (Brucks, 1985). Thus, this study also addressed the influence of past trip experience on tourists' image, satisfaction, and loyalty. The primary objective of this study was to examine the effects of past travel experience, destination image, and satisfaction on destination loyalty.

Literature Review

Destination satisfaction and loyalty

Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive association between satisfied customers and repurchase intentions (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Reichheld and Sasser, 1990; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996). The positive effects of satisfaction on loyalty are reflected in the customer's intention to repurchase a product or service and his/her willingness to recommend it to other people. As a result, firms can be assured of a stable customer base, and thus reduce acquisition and transaction costs.

Word of mouth (WOM) is the second, most important indicator of customer loyalty, as new customers may be attracted by recommendations of other people. Due to the personalized form of word-of-mouth messages to receivers and the content of personal experiences, WOM is seen as a more reliable source of information in the decision process (Simpson and Siguaw, 2008; Swan and Oliver, 1989). In addition,

Almquist and Roberts (2000) have stated that customer advocacy is a major factor affecting brand equity. In destination marketing, WOM is defined as the willingness of tourists to recommend a specific destination or place to other people.

Loyalty research has tied into customers' purchase behavior of specific brands and products. The goal of studying consumer loyalty is to understand customers' needs and wants in order to create and maintain the repeat purchase of particular brands and products. In the service industry, research on customer loyalty is abundant, and academics have adopted various approaches to address problems and issues surrounding customer loyalty. Taylor (1998), for example, has determined that "likelihood to recommend a product or service to others," "likelihood to purchase a product or service again," and "overall satisfaction," indicated good indices of assessing customer loyalty. Hepworth and Mateus (1994) have stated that loyalty indicators, including intention to buy the same product, intention to buy more products, and willingness to recommend the product to other consumers, help to predict customer loyalty. Bloemer, Ruyter and Peeters (1998), in their examination of the structure relationships among brand loyalty, image of product, service quality, and satisfaction, concluded that there was an indirect relationship between image and loyalty via perceived quality, and a direct and indirect relationship between loyalty and service quality via satisfaction. More specifically, McIntyre and Peck (1998) have suggested a yin and yang approach to managing and measuring customer loyalty. According to their axiom, with yin referring to employee behavior and yang dealing with customer behavior, service providers should focus on what the customer wants instead of driving customers to demand what the provider makes.

Customer loyalty requires the development of a mutually-beneficial relationship between businesses and customers. In other words, loyal customers must perceive that the service provider is committed to them and meanwhile they are treated importantly (McGarry, 1995). Schmid (1997) implied that enhancing customer

loyalty is a significant element of relationship marketing. Furthermore, Peppers and Rogers (1998) have proposed the idea that in order to gain customer loyalty, service providers should become a one-to-one marketer that gathers information about each individual's preferences and further utilizes that information to win customer loyalty by rendering tailored products and services. Thus, understanding the relationship between customers' satisfaction and loyalty is critical for the implementation of effective marking strategies centering on customer loyalty.

Many studies of tourist intentions to make a repeat visit have focused on the factors that determine this intention. The determinants that are most often suggested are satisfactory previous experience, perceived quality, previous repeat visits to a destination, and motivation. Several studies have examined the interrelationships among these variables (i.e. quality, satisfaction, previous experience, and loyalty) using structural modeling (Alegre and Cladera, 2009; Um, Chon and Ro, 2006; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Pritchard, 2003; Bignee et al., 2001; Chen and Gursoy, 2001).

In the marketing literature, it is accepted that satisfaction has a positive influence on post-purchase behavior (Morrison, 2010; Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996; Cronin and Taylor, 1992). According to the prevailing theory, perceived quality leads to customer satisfaction, which in turn generates intentions such as word-of-mouth recommendations or intention to revisit a destination (Simpson and Siguaw, 2008). This relationship has been investigated in tourism research by many academics (Faullant, Matzler and Fuller, 2008; Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2007; Bignee et al., 2001; Oppermann, 2000). The impact that overall satisfaction and/or satisfaction with different aspects of a destination have on tourists' intention to revisit or recommend it to others has been examined by Alegre and Cladera, 2009; Alegre and Cladera, 2006; Um, Chon and Ro, 2006; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; and Pritchard, 2003.

In conclusion, tourism researchers should carefully employ appropriate variables to assess tourist satisfaction and loyalty for a specific touristic product, thus preventing marketers from receiving invalid information regarding tourist loyalty. In this case, tourism researchers should use different measurement variables or constructs for assessing loyalty to different types of touristic products. For example, for a product (e.g. an airline ticket) having the potential to be purchased routinely, all loyalty indicators, such as "likelihood to purchase a product or service again," are appropriate for assessing tourist loyalty to the product; conversely, when a product (e.g. a trip to a particular attraction) is unlikely to be purchased repeatedly, willingness to recommend the product to other tourists may be a suitable indicator to measure destination loyalty. The first hypothesis is thus proposed:

H1: Destination satisfaction has positive effects on destination loyalty.

Destination image

Brand image has been accepted as an important concept in consumer behavior (Hankinson, 2005; Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). The accepted definition of brand image is "the perceptions about a brand reflected as associations existing in the memory of the consumer" (Keller, 2008). These associations are created in three possible ways: direct experience with the product/service, from information sources, or from inferences to pre-existing associations (Martinez and Pina, 2003). Brand image is a multi-dimensional construct and consists of functional and symbolic brand benefits (McCartney, Butler and Bennett, 2008; Martinez and de Chernatony, 2004; Low and Lamb, 2000).

As for the area of tourism research, studies on destination image can be traced back to the early 1970s with Hunt's (1975) work examining the role of image in tourism development. In a review of the literature from 1973 to 2000, Pike (2002) identified 142 destination image studies exploring a variety of areas, such as the role

and influence of destination image in consumer behavior, image formation, and destination image scale development. Further, many empirical studies support the premise that destination image consists primarily of two components: cognitive and affective. Yet, the majority of destination image research focuses on its cognitive component and overlooks the affective component. Very few studies employ both affective and cognitive components in evaluating destination image (Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2007).

In the tourism industry, the perceptions of a tourist destination are critical to its image. Image can be either a mental image of a destination created by a company or an associative image of a destination developed by tourists. In image studies, destination attributes perceived and assessed by tourists have included climate, atmosphere, comfort, safety and security, sports, recreation, sightseeing, food, beaches, culture, shopping, tourism infrastructure, ease of communication, service quality, friendliness of local people, entertainment, value for money (Agrusa, 2008; Chen, 2001; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). The more tourists perceive that a destination will meet their needs, the more attractive the destination becomes and the greater the probability that it will be selected as the final choice of destination.

The attractiveness and image of a destination have a great influence on determining a person's destination of choice, expectations of satisfaction, intention to revisit, amount of money spent, and the duration of the stay (Agrusa, 2008; Chen and Uysal, 2002, Chen, 2001; Kim, Crompton and Botha, 2000). A destination's attributes contribute to determining its overall attractiveness and image. In the destination choice process, people are likely to evaluate these attributes for all destinations under consideration when searching through information sources. From a set of destinations selected for final consideration, people will then choose a final destination with attributes that are perceived to optimize the benefits within their travel constraints (Agrusa, 2008).

The benefits in the consumption of tourism services are primarily experiential. Faced with a variety of competing destinations, tourists must choose some options owing to money and time constraints. They are likely to choose the destinations with the most favorable image (Leisen, 2001; Gartner, 1989). Consequently, the images held by individuals are crucial to a destination's marketing success. The second hypothesis can then be formulated as follows:

H2: Destination image has positive effects on destination loyalty.

Previous visits (Past travel experience)

It has been suggested in the marketing literature that the intention to revisit is also influenced by the number of previous visits to a destination. A number of studies have shown that repeat visitors have a higher probability of returning to a destination than first-time visitors (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Court and Lupton, 1997; Gyte and Phelps, 1989). The positive relationship between previous visits and the intention to return may be a consequence of routine behavior (Odin, Odin and Valette-Florence, 2001; Oppermann, 2000) or a way to avoid the risk of a bad holiday by choosing a place that is familiar (Mitchell and Greatorex, 1993). A dissatisfied tourist might return to a destination because it is perceived to be less risky to go somewhere with known shortcomings than to visit a new destination that might be worse (Oppermann, 1998).

Bignee, Sanchez and Sanchez (2001) have indicated that a destination image plays a direct antecedent role in perceived quality, satisfaction, and tourists' intention to revisit a destination and their willingness to recommend it to others. Repeat visitors can be expected to have a better adjusted image of a destination than first timers. Consequently, for repeat visitors, there is less likely to be a discrepancy between their experiences and their expectations. Following this line of thought, if the

number of previous visits influences a tourist's image of a destination (Fayeke and Crompton, 1991), it will also affect their satisfaction and intention to revisit it.

With increased experience, attitudes toward a destination should be stronger, more accessible, and resistant to change (Faullant, Matzler and Fuller, 2008; Priester *et al.*, 2004). In a recent study, Faullant, Matzler, and Fuller (2008) were able to show that the importance of cognitive satisfaction evaluation for the prediction of loyalty intentions declined with increasing numbers of visits. In relation to overall satisfaction, the impact of image on loyalty increased, although the absolute values did not vary significantly. Following traditional attitude research, it is expected that attitudes evolve over time as the market develops, and as customers gather more experience. In the context of tourism, therefore, the attitudes of tourists toward a destination, such as a country or city, should improve as they make repeat visits. The third hypothesis is thus proposed:

H3: Previous visits have positive effects on destination image, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Research Methodology

Research Design

To collect the data for this study, a survey instrument assessing tourists' destination mage, destination satisfaction, and loyalty was developed that was based on a review of previous research. Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires. The measures for destination image, satisfaction, loyalty, and previous visits were adapted from previous research. Pilot testing with 30 graduate-level students was carried out at a private university in Thailand to ensure that all of the questions were clearly understood. The reliability analysis of the pre-testing data was found to be satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.94. Tourists' destination image variables were measured with 7 items. A five-point Likert-type scale was used

for the destination image variable, with 5 = absolutely important and 1 = absolutely unimportant. Tourist loyalty to destination was measured by two items, worded as: "I will recommend this destination to other people" and "I will revisit this destination in the future". A five-point Likert-type scale was used for the loyalty variable, with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. For the assessment of past trip experience, respondents were asked to indicate how many trips they had made to Thailand before.

The population of this study was 9,815,466 outgoing foreign tourists (Alpha Research, 2008). A series of on-site surveys was conducted at the Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Thailand during October-December (high season), 2009. During each week from October to December, survey trips were taken: some on weekdays and some during the weekends. Foreign tourists about to leave the airport were requested to fill out the questionnaires and return them to the team of researchers. A total of 450 individuals were contacted during the data collection period, and 400 respondents properly completed the questionnaires for the study.

Data analysis

In order to facilitate the research questions, structural equations modeling (SEM) was used to determine the structure of the constructs and to examine the causal relationships. SEM is a statistical technique utilized to examine the relationship between a single dependent variable and set of independent variables (Hair *et al*., 2010). As Reisinger and Turner (2003) point out, the primary aim of SEM is to explain the pattern of a series of inter-related dependence relationships simultaneously between a set of latent (unobserved) constructs, each measured by one or more manifest (observed) variables. SEM has been used in a number of social science disciplines, but it has not been widely used in tourism research outside the U.S. SEM was used in this study to examine the relationships among past visits, destination image, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty. The dependent variable was destination loyalty. The independent variables consisted of 4 choices of past visits, 21

attributes measuring tourists' satisfaction, 15 attributes measuring image, and 2 attributes measuring destination loyalty. According to Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2000), the sample size for SEM analysis should be at least 5 to 20 times the number of observed variables. The observed variables in this study were 18, so the appropriate sample size was 18 × 20 = 360. The usable questionnaires actually collected totaled 400.

The factor structure of the model of destination loyalty scale items was estimated using LISREL 8.1 (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996). PRELIS was used to generate the variance-covariance matrix as input. The assessment of the model's fit was done on the basis of: 1) the ratios of Chi-square to the degrees of freedom; 2) the sample size; 3) goodness-of-fit (GFI) values; 4) adjusted goodness-of-fit measures (AGFI); and 5) root mean square residuals (RMSR). Each of the indicators and constructs was also evaluated separately by examining: 1) the squared multiple correlation coefficients (SMC) for both x- and y-variables; 2) the total coefficient of determination (TCD) (R^2) for all x- and y-variables jointly; 3) the t-values for the paths; 4) the correlations between the latent constructs; 5) the standard errors (SE) for each coefficient and construct; 6) the fitted residuals (FR); and 7) the standardized residuals (SR).

Results

Of the 400 foreign tourists that completed the questionnaires, most of the respondents were male. Most of them were 35-44 years old, held a bachelor's degree, worked as private company employees, and earned a monthly income of $1,000-2,000. The majority of them (35.9%) were first-time visitors, came from ASEAN countries, and visited Thailand for vacation. The demographics of the sample are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the sample

Characteristics	Share (% of n = 400)
Gender	57.5
Male	42.5
Female	
Age (year)	
Under 25	13.7
25-34	24.9
35-44	25.4
45-54	20.4
55 and over	15.8
Level of education completed	
Primary	2.2
Secondary	12.5
High school	24.1
Undergraduate	58.2
Higher than undergraduate	3.0
Occupation	
Private company employee	25.8
Professional (doctor, engineer)	12.1
Student	10.2
Self-employed	14.5
Government official	6.5
Retired	5.5
Others	25.4

Table 1: Demographic profile of the sample (Continued)

Characteristics	Share (% of n = 400)
Monthly income	
< $1,000	14.8
$1,001-2,000	26.1
$2,001-3,000	20.0
$3,001-4,000	11.6
$4,001-5,000	7.4
$5,001-6,000	4.1
>$6,001	16.0
Past visits (number of times)	
First visit	35.9
2-5 visits	14.4
6-10 visits	25.1
More than 10 visits	24.6
Country of origin	
Europe	25.5
ASEAN	28.2
East Asia	26.4
Americas	12.1
South Asia	3.3
Middle East	4.1
Africa	0.5

Table 1: Demographic profile of the sample (Continued)

Characteristics	Share (% of n = 400)
Purpose of visit	
Vacation	82.4
Business	8.7
Convention	5.2
Others	3.7

Results of structural equation modeling

The results of the LISREL and all measures of fit suggested that the developed model of destination loyalty for foreign tourists fit the data well. The fit estimates for the model are shown in Table 2. The solution is standardized.

The Chi-square index is small in relation to the degree of freedom. The goodness-of- fit (GFI) value is 0.962 and indicates an acceptable fit. Adjusted for the degrees of freedom goodness-of-fit measure (AGFI) is 0.935 and also indicates an acceptable fit. Root mean square residuals (RMSR) have a value below a marginal acceptable level of 0.08 and indicate strong correlations in the original correlation matrix.
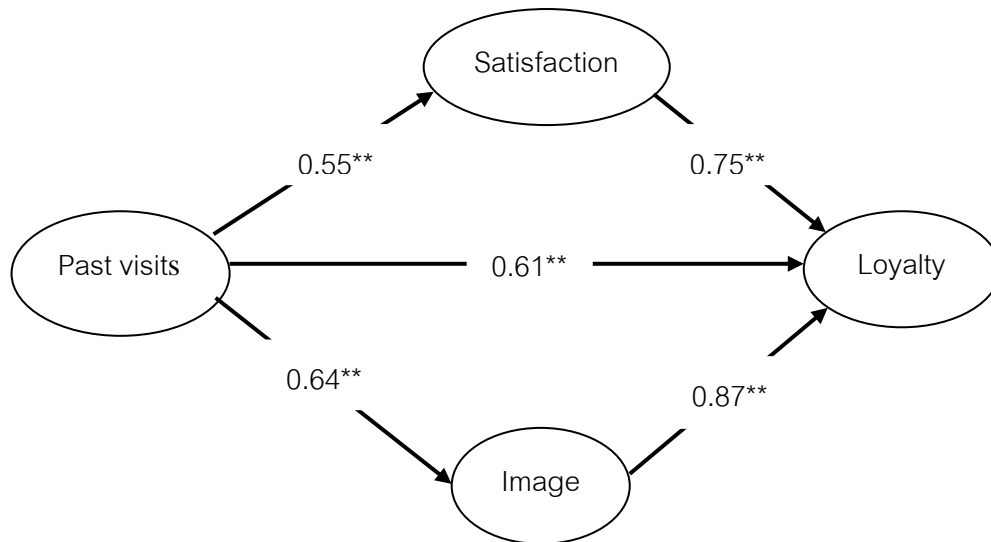
Table 2: LISREL fit estimates of the model

Measures of fit	Values
Chi-square	101.79
Degree of freedom	79
Probability	0.034
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	0.962
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	0.935
Root Mean Square Residuals (RMSR)	0.034
Total Coefficient of Determination (TCDx)	0.997
Total Coefficient of Determination (TCDy)	0.994

Analysis of the model

An assessment of the results suggests that destination image and destination satisfaction have positive effects on destination loyalty. Further, past visits also were found to directly influence destination image, destination satisfaction, and destination loyalty, and thus confirming *H1* and *H2*. The direct paths from destination image and destination satisfaction to destination loyalty are significant and indicate that the two constructs contribute directly and significantly to destination loyalty, and thus *H3* is supported. The direct paths of the number of past visits to destination image, satisfaction, and loyalty shows that past visits influence the three constructs more or less, depending on the number of visits. That is, the greater the number of visits, the more effects they have on destination image, satisfaction, and loyalty. The significant paths in the model are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Structural model of past visits, satisfaction, image, and loyalty

Note: * = significant at 0.05 or better probability level

Table 3 presents the decomposition of causal effects in the structural model. It shows the direct effects, indirect effects, and total effects for each variable. As shown in Table 3, destination image had the largest significant causal effect at the 0.05 significance level on loyalty (total effect = 0.87), followed by destination satisfaction (total effect = 0.75). The total effects of past travel visits on image, satisfaction, and loyalty were significant (total effects = 0.64, 0.55, and 0.61, respectively) at the 0.05 significance level. However, past trip experience had no indirect effects on loyalty via image or satisfaction. Further, satisfaction and image were not found to be correlated with each other.

Table 3: Decomposition of causal effects in the structural model

Variable	Image			Satisfaction			Loyalty		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
Past visits	0.64		0.64	0.55		0.55	0.61		0.61
Image							0.87		0.87
Satisfaction							0.75		0.75

Notes: n = 400; DE = direct effect; IE = indirect effect; TE = total effect

Factor analysis was performed on the 21-item attributes included in the questionnaire to measure past visits, image, satisfaction, and loyalty of foreign tourists to Thailand. This exercise resulted in the extraction of four factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1. The four factors accounted for 55.4 percent of the variance. Thus, a four-factor model was expected to be adequate to represent the data. Table 4 displays the factor loadings of the rotated matrix and the percentage variability explained by each factor for each variable, in rank order of the Eigenvalue for each factor.

Table 4: Components of variables as yielded by factor analysis

Factors and items	Mean	S.D.	Factor loadings	Eigen value
Factor 1: Past visits	3.72			4.5
First time	3.23	0.845	0.694	
2-5 times	3.87	0.754	0.589	
6-10 times	3.93	0.706	0.669	
More than 10 times	4.11	0.815	0.666	

Table 4: Components of variables as yielded by factor analysis (Continued)

Factors and items	Mean	S.D.	Factor loadings	Eigen value
Factor 2: Image	4.30			1.8
History and culture	4.28	0.823	0.632	
Nature, parks, wildlife	3.98	0.843	0.607	
Friendly people	4.63	0.803	0.577	
Beaches	3.41	0.716	0.645	
Food	4.25	0.845	0.687	
Recreation	3.78	0.754	0.542	
Infrastructure/communication	3.61	0.706	0.512	
Factor 3: Satisfaction	4.34			1.1
Hospitality	4.31	0.732	0.825	
Shopping	4.56	0.715	0.769	
Food	4.15	0.799	0.589	
Sun/sand/sea	4.63	0.603	0.632	
Value for money	4.10	0.615	0.588	
Factor 4: Loyalty	4.33			1.0
Intention to revisit	4.56	0.627	0.767	
Willingness to recommend	4.71	0.535	0.728	

Discussion of Results

The relationship between the 18 attributes was examined by utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM). The four constructs of past visits, image, satisfaction, and loyalty were found to be significant. The image attributes are perceived to be history and culture, nature, parks, wildlife, friendly people, beaches, food, recreation, and infrastructure/communication.

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The causal effects on destination loyalty of the past travel visits, destination image, and satisfaction had an impact on intention to revisit and willingness to recommend. These results are in line with previous studies (Alegre and Cladera, 2009; Um *et al.*, 2006; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Pritchard, 2003; Bignee *et al.*, 2001; Chen and Gursoy, 2001). In addition, the number of past visits directly affected destination image and satisfaction. These results are also in line with previous research (Chen and Gursoy, 2001; Mazursky, 1989; Schreyer   *et al.*, 1984), which indicated that past trip experience influences tourists' selection of their destination. However, the results of this study show that the influence of past travel experience on destination loyalty depends on the number of previous visits. These results are seemingly in agreement with Sonmez and Graefe's research (1999), which revealed that travelers having more travel experience tended to be more confident about the destination they selected. In other words, with the lessons learned from past trip experiences, tourists should perceive less risk and feel safer when they travel to overseas destinations.

Based on the results (Figure 1 and Table 3), it is evident that both satisfaction and image variables had strong direct effects on tourist loyalty, while the past visit variable had less direct effects on satisfaction, image, and loyalty. Therefore, it is recommended that travel firms devote their resources to increasing tourist satisfaction by focusing on making impressive and memorable tourist experiences. As for the image factor, both governmental and private agencies in charge of national parks, beaches, restaurants, hotels, and tourist destinations are advised to ensure that cleanliness, safety, and customer service are always maintained and improved. Further, the uniqueness of Thai culture needs to be emphasized as foreign tourists have been seen to be impressed with various aspects of "Thainess" and the hospitality of Thai people.

Today's destinations face their toughest competition in decades, and things will only get worse in the years to come. Therefore, destination marketers need

a better understanding of why foreign tourists are loyal to destinations and what determines their loyalty. This study provides important implications for understanding loyal visitors to destinations. The findings of this study indicate that the loyalty of foreign tourists was significantly influenced by the perception of previous travel experience, and destination image and satisfaction. From a marketing perspective, marketing practitioners should understand the importance of providing different experiences with shopping, food, culture, history and culture, nature, parks, wildlife, friendly people, beaches, recreation for foreign tourists, with an emphasis on creating good destination image and satisfaction. If experiences with these aspects of the country meet the expectations of foreign tourists, they are likely to want to return and recommend the destination to their friends and relatives. Therefore, tourism marketers should develop better strategies for relationship marketing programs that address the three important destination attributes of image, satisfaction, and loyalty. For instance, events and shows of local Thai dances, sub-cultures, ways of life, and history should be organized and presented to foreign tourists in popular tourist places, such as Chiangmai, Phuket, Pattaya, Hadyai.

Foreign tourist loyalty to destinations will be greatest if the tourism destination marketers focus on the development of diverse cultural resources. In order to create cultural-based products and to make use of culture events, characteristics, and heritage, practitioners need to hire individuals from different cultural backgrounds, helping to render the best culture-oriented programs to foreign tourists. Additionally, it is important to develop and maintain the best possible cultural attractions because tourists generally do not consume just one cultural product at a time; instead, they consume a cluster of cultural products. Therefore, it is important to cluster different cultural experiences in order to increase tourists' loyalty.

However, offering a cluster of cultural experiences might not be enough to create loyalty among foreign tourists because foreign tourists also seek other experiences, such as   convenient transportation and communication. Convenient

transportation not only means that destinations should be located close to an international airport but includes the time involved in traveling from airport to accommodations, beaches, cultural attractions, and amenities. Consequently, destination marketers need to make sure that the destination has convenient transportation and communication within the destination.

This study makes methodological contributions to the comprehension of tourists' loyalty to a destination. First, the measurement of tourist loyalty to a destination is comprised of the tourist's willingness to recommend their travel destination to other people and their intention to revisit the same destination. The resulting data help address the deficiency in previous destination loyalty studies, which used "repeat visitation" as an indicator of destination loyalty. Second, with path analysis, the influence of past trip experience on tourists' image, satisfaction and loyalty was revealed. The resultant path model assists marketers in effectively estimating the magnitude of past trip experience on tourist loyalty to destination, helping marketers determine if past travel experience is a significant factor influencing their relationship-marketing strategies.

Recommendations

A few studies on destination loyalty were reported in the literature (Faullant, Matzler and Fuller, 2008; Chen and Gursoy, 2001; Oppermann, 1998; Pritchard and Howard, 1997). However, integrating past research on foreign tourist behavior into the current study was difficult because little of the previous research studies foreign tourists' past travel visits, destination image, satisfaction, and loyalty simultaneously. Therefore, more destination behavioral studies on past visits, image, satisfaction, and loyalty in Thailand are needed to help cross-validate the findings of this study. Furthermore, consumer research (McGarry, 1995) suggests that if customers perceive that a business is committed to them and that they are treated as important individuals,

they are more likely to retain their loyalty. Thus, future investigations on destination loyalty are recommended to consider exploring the relationships between loyalty and the perceptions of service quality in order to help develop better strategies for tourist retention and service delivery. Moreover, previous research (Pritchard and Howard, 1997) has revealed that satisfaction and product image are two of the important factors impacting customer's loyalty to brand and product. For future studies, researchers may integrate tourists' product satisfaction and product image into the structural model reviewed by this study. This should help destination marketing academics develop a better theory on product loyalty and advance the current practice in the area of tourism and hospitality management. Finally, the model of this research may be adapted to examine other service contexts, such as hotels, hospitals, and banks in order to compare the results.

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