

World Conference on Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Tourist Perceptions to Cultural Identity: The Case of Thai Experience

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Abstract

Tourism is seen as one of the main drivers of socio-economic progress in both developed and developing regions. Many developing countries perceive tourism as a fast track to economic growth. Thailand tourism's industry contributes significantly to the Thai economy, which receives around 7% of its GDP from international tourism revenue. Thailand is often viewed as a wondrous kingdom, featuring temples, wildlife and tropical islands. Visitors are also attracted by its history, culture, modern capital city and reputation as the "land of smiles". Entrepreneurs in Thailand try to capitalize on these characteristics to create products or services to serve tourists. However, good design and good quality are not enough to survive in a competitive market. The make up of customers is constantly evolving and they are becoming more discerning and demanding. Thus, it is important to work closely with customers to make sure that products and services fulfill their needs and requirements, and to understand customers through study of their behaviors and preferences. This study explored customer perceptions of Thai cultural identity, and employed an emotional design approach to find out how products may fulfill customer perceptions and requirements. Data was collected by means of a questionnaire then statistically analyzed using the principal component analysis (PCA) approach. Results illustrate the relationship between customer perception and Thai cultural identity, and can be used to guide entrepreneur decision making to create new products or services following the Thai cultural identity and meeting of perceptions of customers.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Istanbul Univeristy.

Keywords: Emotional Design, Customer Perception, Principal Component Analysis, Cultural Identity

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1. Introduction

Thailand is often viewed as a wondrous kingdom, featuring Buddhist temples, exotic wildlife, and tropical islands. Along with a fascinating history and a unique culture that includes delectable Thai food and massage, Thailand features a modern capital city, and friendly people who epitomize Thailand's "land of smiles" reputation. Then, Thailand is one of the first players in Asia to capitalize on this then-new trend.

Thailand tourism's industry has also grown significantly in the past decade. It contributes significantly to the Thai economy, which receives around 7% of its GDP from international tourism revenue. Asian tourists primarily visit Thailand for Bangkok and the historical, natural, and cultural sights in its vicinity. Western tourists not only visit Bangkok and surroundings, but in addition many travel to the southern beaches and islands.

Entrepreneurs in Thailand try to capitalize on these characteristics to create products or services to serve tourists. They face a wonderful challenge from the increasing requirement of variety by tourists. Good design, good quality and good service are not enough to survive in a competitive market. They have to continually do to make the difference among competitors. Then, Entrepreneurs need to deal carefully with possible interaction problem between customers and product interfaces. The novelty for the XXIst century is that they mainly ask for personalized products and services (Koren, 2010). This trend leads to force design method to think a new partnership between designers and customers when designing or thinking. The place of customers in the design process is being rethought from design for customers to collaborative design with customers and sometimes to design by customers. Thus, it is important to work closely with customers to make sure that the products will fulfill their needs and requirements (Kongprasert, 2012).

To succeed in a competitive market, it is necessary to adopt the strategy coping with meeting of needs and requirements of tourists. This study is to explore tourist perceptions of Thai cultural identity, and employ an emotional design approach to find out how products may fulfill tourist perceptions and requirements. Data is collected by means of a questionnaire then statistically analyzed using the principal component analysis (PCA) approach. Results illustrate the relationship between customer perception and Thai cultural identity, and can be used to guide entrepreneur decision making to create new products or services following the Thai cultural identity and meeting of perceptions of customers. This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review. Section 3 describes the method. The results are discussed in Section 4. Conclusion is drawn in Section 5.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Emotional Design

In Emotion is crucial for everyday decision making (Norman, 2004). It is the complex psychophysiological experience of an individual's state of mind as interacting with biochemical and environmental influences. Emotion fundamentally involves physiological arousal, expressive behaviors, and conscious experience (Myers, 2004). Emotion is associated with mood, temperament, personality and disposition, and motivation. Customer's satisfaction is an affective behavior of customer. It relies on desires more than needs which desires are mainly depending on aesthetic, semantic and symbolic aspects of cognitive response to design (Crilly et al., 2004). This means that the customer purchases a product based on more subjective terms such as manufacturer image, brand image, reputation, design, impression, etc., although the products seem to be equal. A large number of manufacturers have started development activities to consider such subjective properties so that the product expresses the company image. This demand triggers the introduction of a new research field dealing with the collection of customers' hidden subjective needs and their translation into concrete products. Thus, it is important to work closely with customers to make sure that the products will fulfill the needs and requirements of customers.

Emotional design is relationship between the emotional responses and design appearance that focused on the user's need and experience. It is not only communicated through the style of design, function, form and usability, but also built up experience for the user on their needs and demands. There are three levels of information processing

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