



Destination Branding as a Tool for Sustainable Tourism Development (the Case of Bangkok, Thailand)

Marca de destino como herramienta para el desarrollo del turismo sostenible (el caso de Bangkok, Tailandia)

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ABSTRACT:

In the context of tourism market globalization, universalization of tourists' preferences and basic requirements to tourism product's quality, tourism macromarketing becomes the most effective instrument of tourist destinations' promotion. This paper analyzes the main factors of Bangkok tourism brand development and implementation, based on studying the international experience directly from foreign tourists (who visited Bangkok) and using Thailand tourism business surveys. After the analysis of this information the research provides basic recommendations on tourism branding strategy modernization for Bangkok, Thailand.

Keywords: tourist brand, branding, macro-marketing tourist market globalization

RESUMEN:

En el contexto de la globalización del mercado turístico, la universalización de las preferencias de los turistas y los requisitos básicos para la calidad de los productos turísticos, el macromarketing se convierte en el instrumento más eficaz para la promoción de destinos turísticos. Este documento analiza los principales factores del desarrollo y la implementación de la marca de turismo de Bangkok, basándose en el estudio de la experiencia internacional directamente de los turistas extranjeros (que visitaron Bangkok) y el uso de las encuestas de negocios de turismo de Tailandia. Después del análisis de esta información, la investigación proporciona recomendaciones básicas sobre la modernización de la estrategia de marca turística para Bangkok, Tailandia.

Palabras clave: marca turística, branding, macro-marketing globalización del mercado turístico.

1. Introduction

In today's world, territories compete with each other, striving for self-affirmation and for choosing such economic structures that will ensure their more reliable positions. Under such conditions of constant competition growth, marketing of any territory including its branding, is of great importance for geographic locations' comparing. In this regard, more and more countries and cities are purposefully engaging into the promotion of own territories and

formation of a unique brand, which determines tourist attractiveness of a certain area. This trend is characterized by tourism transformations to become one of the most important sectors in the structure of the world economy, predetermining in many cases the regional welfare, economic and political stability. The growing competition in tourists' attraction requires from the states to implement new promotional methods and approaches, including branding of tourism territory (of a particular destination).

The problem field of this research is formed by several interweaving trends: the growth of international competition for the attraction of global tourists; the increasing importance of tourism in stimulation of national welfare growth; the growing mobility of the international tourism market; the changing consumer preferences and expectations of global tourists; finally, the growing strategic importance of macromarketing through which many countries worldwide are promoting the tourism potential of their economies.

This problem of increasing the efficiency of tourism macromarketing is especially relevant and topical for Thailand since this country in its active development of international tourism has achieved quite impressive results. In 2016, more than 30 million foreign tourists visited Thailand and it is an absolute record for the whole Southeast Asia (Tourist Arrivals to Thailand by Nationality in 2016). Also in 2016, Bangkok became the most visited city in the world, 22.5 million people visited the city that year. Thus, Bangkok left behind other globally recognized urban tourism, such as New York (19 million tourists) and London (17.4 million). It is important to note here that Thailand Government has been implementing the tourism destination branding strategy over the past 20 years.

A range of quite successful branding campaigns has led to this success, including: "Amazing Thailand", "Thailand: once in the life-time", "Thailand: great invitation", "Unseen Thailand", "Thailand: Where Life Rules Everything" and number of regional programs for the main resort areas of the country, implemented for the most part since the early 2000s within the TAT (Tourism Authorities of Thailand) portfolio.

The purpose of this study is to determine, based on the correlation the survey results of foreign tourists' and representatives of tourism business (located in Bangkok), the fundamental values behind Thailand's tourism brand so that later to define the tools for Thai tourism product promotion in the future.

The formulated purpose has predetermined the following research objectives:

- To provide theoretical grounding for the state marketing as a contemporary advanced system for tourism market and national tourism industry regulation;
- To determine tourism destinations branding as a modern tool for national tourism product promotion, its structure and methods in the context of tourism globalization;
- To highlight the trends relevant for tourism macromarketing in the Kingdom of Thailand;
- To explore the opinions of Bangkok tourism business representatives about the values behind the country's tourism brand;
- To perform the analysis of the main values of Thailand's tourism brand from the positions of tourism industry representatives and foreign tourists;
- To provide recommendations on modernization of Thailand's tourism marketing system in relation to national tourism brand formation and promotion.

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

- There is no common understanding or unity regarding the national tourism brand's values between the key representatives of Bangkok tourism business.
 - Values behind the country's tourism brand depend more on marketing strategy, size, business features rather than on localization of a particular tourist business and its age at the market.
 - Estimations of the country's tourism brand values by the tourism business representatives are not adequate to the actual problems the national tourism industry is facing these days.
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2. Literature Overview And Theoretical Background Of The Study

According to H. Krippendorf, "tourism marketing is a systematic change and coordination of tourist enterprises activities, as well as private and public policy in the tourism field. The purpose of such changes is to most fully meet the needs of certain groups of consumers, taking into account the possibilities of appropriate profits' receiving" (Krippendorf, 1987).

Tourist product features and the nature of tourist trip consumer value directly affect marketing activities in tourism, changing traditional marketing goals, structure and contents.

Some experts, including (Ekinci, 2006; Morgan et al., 2002) distinguish several features of tourism marketing:

For tourism marketing, the task of demand stimulation is less important. The demand for travel services is constantly growing and the tourism industry to a much lesser extent than many other industries depend on fluctuations in the environment. For tourism marketing, it is most important to "direct demand" in the right direction.

Situation at the tourism market can be regulated in three ways.

The first way is to provoke demand changes by forming appropriate supply. Changes in tourist product supply in this case are performed by means of state influence. Changes in demand will be perceived as the result of such tools' application.

The second way is a reverse order scenario. Here, demand acts as a means, and any change of supply volume and structure would be perceived as the consequence of demand changes pace and trajectory that the government has managed before. Direct change in the total tourism demand can be achieved, for example, by changing the aggregate money income of local population through additional money release (the method once proposed by J. Keynes) or by working and leisure time restructuring in the country.

The third way is related to the simultaneous influence on supply and demand at the tourism market.

State tourism marketing in today's conditions is carried out according to the third considered way (with simultaneous impact on supply and demand at the tourism market towards national interests).

According to (Pike, S. and C. Ryan, 2004), in order to realize its target orientation, tourism marketing is supposed to develop a set of measures to ensure:

- Positive image of the territory's formation and development, territorial prestige, business and social competitiveness;
- Expansion of the territory and its subjects' participation in international and domestic tourism programs' implementation;
- Attraction of foreign business tourists to the territory due to simplified procedures of target-oriented tourism product creation and promotion (Pankruhin, 2002).

The main goal of state tourism marketing is also related to creation, development and distribution of public recognition of tourist destination's positive image.

Contemporary tourist branding is directly related to the country's positive tourist image formation and promotion. Tourism image is a complex of ideas about a certain country as a tourism destination, which is formed and fixed in foreign public minds (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002).

Ideas about a certain country included in this complex must, firstly, contain indications of the unique tourist resources and tourism industry, secondly, idealize certain territory as a resting place, and thirdly, be dynamic in order to adapt to current situation and international tourist market environment requirements.

The necessity for positive tourist image development and its further implanting in foreign consumers' minds is caused by the priority of its performed functions. First of all, it is country's identification at the world tourism market and its positioning as the direction, optimal for certain types of tours; idealization is country's representation as created specially for tourism and tourists; constructive function is supposed to overcome the negative stereotypes developed around the country and damaging its population image.

Popularity of tourism branding since the late twentieth century is explained by:

tourist services' depersonalization;

increasing competition at the tourism market, accompanied by a shift from price competition to tourism services' quality competition;

need for tours' constant modification (as a result of growing competition at the tourism market);

strengthening of agent networks' role.

According to the definition of the famous marketer F. Kotler, "The brand is an obligation of the seller organization to provide the consumer with a service that meets a certain set of properties and advantages" (Kotler et al., 2002).

He also distinguished six features of the "brand" concept: attributes, advantages and benefits, company values, organizational culture, individuality, consumer.

The advertising guru David Ogilvy began countries' brand promotion back in the mid-1950s already, when he was approached by the government of Puerto Rico, a small Latin American state, extremely interested in attracting tourists. That government set then a seemingly impossible task: to change radically the Americans' attitude to their country.

The logic of state tourist brands' overall distribution at the end of the 20th century was very much obvious. Each person associates any country in one's own way.

Moreover, these personal associations were mostly determined not only by the place of work or by the level of one's erudition or education, but also by the popularity of certain facts about a particular state.

For example, for someone, huge China is associated with bazaars, warehouses, cheap products, unpretentious hotels and narrow streets; for another person China is seen as a huge opportunity to earn, open a business, realize investments etc. For yet another person China is the birthplace of one of the most ancient civilizations, a place of ancient battles, the cradle of a unique culture and traditions etc.

At the end of the twentieth century, governments of various countries were interested to expand the flow of incoming foreign tourists by means of promoting a peculiar image (brand) that evokes associations with country's tourism resources, not with its history, economy, welfare etc.

Hearing today "Malaysia - truly Asia" or "Unseen Thailand", no one will think, for example, about traffic jams, social inequality, floods, migrants, rising prices for rice or gasoline, but will imagine luxury hotels, picturesque resorts, exciting types of leisure and exquisite cultural program. Therefore, in our opinion, the main goal of tourism brand application at the state level is the inclusion of consumer associations into the group of main tourist resources and country's recreational opportunities.

In our opinion, in order to become most effective, the country's tourism brand should:

- Be simple. Tourism brand cannot be overloaded by complex geometric figures or images. Conversely, the brand will benefit if its image consists of irregular figures or broken lines. This trademark geometry makes it easily reproducible, simplifies the possibilities of its use in any advertising media (from a cheap black and white newspaper to an expensive full-color magazine);
- Be bright, visible, individual;
- Consist of flowers associated with the country or region national colors (for example, the tourist brand of Germany is decorated in orange-black tones, Russia - respectively - in tricolor, and the Spanish one is orange-red);
- The image of this trade mark should cause direct and obvious associations with a certain country or region, carry some information about the features of the country in question. For example, Spain chose a successful and recognizable logo - a stylized sun with the inscription "Espana" painted by the surrealist Joan Miro. And Italy is considering a curious action - to replace the marking "Made in Italy" by the profile of Pinocchio (Urde, 1999).
- Any tourist logo must necessarily be accompanied by a slogan;

But the main task at the stage before determining the brand and the trademark is to determine the basic values behind the tourist brand (Carmen et al., 2005). The tourism

brand essence, most preferably, must be expressed in one word (for example, Bulgaria - "the sun", Germany - "accuracy"). At one point of time in the UK history, the "Cool Britannia" program which implied nearly full rejection of "good old England" image and presenting this country as fashionable and enterprising, failed (Murphy et al., 2000). The project did not work out, because the historical capital of England is too large to be changed for the sake of just one commercial campaign.

Analysis of literature sources along with the practical cases of tourism macromarketing programmes' implementation allows us determine the key goals, guidelines, tactical tools used along with the factors of efficiency. At the same time, nearly all the authors agree that the programme of national macromarketing must be unique indeed and must take into account the peculiarities of national tourist service production. Also taken into account must be the specificity of perception of this programme by the potential consumers on a particular territory.

Table 1
Features of surveyed tourism business presenters (made by authors)

A. Location		B. Business activity		C. Number of staff		D. Company's size (by own evaluation of surveyed representatives)	
Sukhumvit	29	Tour-operating	9	< 20 persons	59	Small	61
Silom – Sathorn	36	Tour-agenting	32	20-100 pers.	36	Medium	34
Rattanakosin	35	Hospitality	36	>100 persons	5	Large	3
	100	Entertainment	23			Multinational	2
<i>E. Your product (services) are:</i>		<i>F. Your customers mostly are:</i>		<i>G. Your basic competitive advantage is</i>		<i>H. Length of company's presence on the market</i>	
Very exclusive	12	Thais	6	Price	27	< 1 year	7
Expensive, for selected customers	18	ASEAN nations	27	Price – quality	21	1-3 years	36
Moderate, for middle class	49	AP nations	16	Quality	24	3-10 years	24
Cheap, mass product	21	EU nations	15	Trade mark	9	>10 years	3
		USA, Australia, New Zealand	7	Technologies	7		
		No have any dominated nation	29	Staff	12		

Therefore, further in this research we have used the fundamentals of tourist macromarketing theory (specifically – in part related to the factors of macromarketing efficiency in tourism, strategic planning of state programs aimed at boosting the national tourism potential, formation of the country's positive image among potential clients), taking

into account at the same time the unique features of the already formed tourism image of the Kingdom of Thailand in general and Bangkok in particular.

After having considered the advertising campaigns of Thailand tourism potential, their content, target audience and the promoted values, we came up with the following trends:

- the shift of emphasis from Thailand's uniqueness and exoticism to its popularity, good quality of infrastructure, all-season attractiveness and other more pragmatic benefits;
- diversity of leisure in Thailand, which is increasing the number of the repeated tourist visits;
- promotion of the yet unknown for tourists regions of the Kingdom, development of the alternative types of tourism (medical, educational, cruise, extreme);
- development of a special segment of luxury, individually differentiated tourism.

In general, the identified trends in the country's tourism brand promotion are adequate to the dynamics of international travel market of the South-East Asia region overall, as well as to the problems Thailand's tourism industry has been facing in the recent years (such as the dangerously strong dependence of the country's tourism industry on several countries only, for example, China, Korea, Russia; weak, inconsistent to the dynamics of foreign visitations, growth of tourism economic efficiency in the country, which is indirectly reducing the overall investment attractiveness; concentration of inbound tourist traffic on a few limited territories of Thailand; growth in the number of backpackers and "hibernating tourists" who are not actively consume the local tourism services; popularization of Thailand as a country of cheap, low-quality rest, and not a destination for individualized and luxury tourism; problems with Thailand "image heritage" as the country of free will, poor local people and thousands of unsolved economic and social problems etc.).

3. Research methodology

The key idea behind this research is to assess the perception of own positioning at the world tourism market by the representatives of tourism business as applied to the perception of potential consumers. That is, the key aim is to formulate how tourism entrepreneurs themselves determine their unique competitive advantages as compared to the key priorities of the tourism business development.

The research has been carried out on the basis of the survey in which active players of the Bangkok tourism industry participated. Further, the results of this survey have been compared to the socioeconomic criteria of the organizations, the representatives of which were actually surveyed (size and age of a company, industrial affiliation, location, marketing orientation).

The established correlation has allowed us make a range of theoretical conclusions along with the practical recommendations concerning the similarities of the planned programmes of tourism macromarketing in the more general context of corporate strategies of the tourist enterprises in the capital of Thailand.

A survey of tourism industry workers was conducted during the period August-October, 2016 (before the high tourist season starts), representatives of 350 companies geographically concentrated in three districts of Bangkok - Sukhumvit street, Silom-Satorn district, Dusit-Rattanakosin district - were interviewed. The information on the investigated enterprises is resulted in tab. 1.

Table 2
 Surveyed tourism business attitude to
 TAT campaigns (made by authors)

You are familiar with the TAT campaign?	Which TAT campaign did you hear?	Which TAT campaign was most memorable for you?	Realized TAT campaigns are adequate to the needs of your business?

Yes	92	"Amazing Thailand"	69	"Amazing Thailand"	49	Strongly agree	12	
Not	8	"Thailand: once in the life-time"	52	"Thailand: once in the life-time"	26	Agree	49	
		"Thailand: great invitation"	43	"Thailand: great invitation"	11	Disagree	33	
		"Unseen Thailand"	41	"Unseen Thailand"	10	Strongly disagree	6	
		"Thailand: Where Life Rules Everything"	9	"Thailand: Where Life Rules Everything"	2			
		No-one	7	No-one	2			
		Others	6	Others	0			

Table 3

Correlation between the declared values of tourist brand and the features of companies from tab. 1 (made by co-authors)

		A				B				C			D				E				Total
		1	2	3		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
1	Availability	0	0	1	2	2	0	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	13
2	Exotic	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2		15
3	Fashion	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	0		15
4	Health	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1		16
5	Advanced	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	0	0		17
6	Uniqueness	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	0		19
7	Exclusivity	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	0	0		19
8	Diversity	0	1	0	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	0		23
9	Ecological compatibility	2	2	2	1	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1		24
10	Care	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	28
11	Security	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1		32

Total	14	14	12	11	16	11	11	9	9	13	15	10	11	13	17	19	9	7
	2			5			4			5			12					

As it can be seen from the answers in our survey, environmental friendliness and safety are the most significant values for the interviewed tourism players, regardless their geographic location. It can also be pointed out that the enterprises located in Sukumvit and Silom prefer to promote exclusivity and advanced level of their services.

Greater emphasis on services' uniqueness is peculiar for the representatives of entertainment and hospitality industries, while employees of tour operators and travel agencies noted the importance of services' diversity and accessibility. Small companies are mostly proud about their customer care, while large companies are promoting their advanced technological level and fashionability. Finally, it is worth noting that companies characterize their product as expensive and exclusive, and at the same time most of them do not consider it as affordable, exotic and/or differentiated.

In general, it is obvious that all the surveyed representatives of Bangkok tourism industry most prefer the following values behind their national brand:

- security,
- care,
- environmental friendliness,
- diversity.

These key values of the country's tourism brand outstripped, for example, accessibility and exoticism (with which Thailand tourism is still associated in the minds of many foreign tourists). It is worth noting the high positions of "uniqueness" and "exclusivity" (close to the leading one). This indirectly confirms the transition of Thailand tourism industry from extensive (based on the growing number of tourist arrivals) to intensive (based on differentiated quality) growth (Ushakov, 2016).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Thus, the conducted survey of Bangkok tourism industry representatives shows there is no common understanding and consensus on the priority values behind national tourism brand (Hypothesis 1 is thus accepted). The business representatives' attitude to these priority values behind the country's tourist brand depends on the sphere of their activity, orientation of their business on the consumer market, size of a company, and length of their company presence at the market in question.

We also can highlight the trend that with company's growth, as well as with the market price of its products, the priority of such values as exclusivity, environmental friendliness, and health is increasing. This confirms the worldwide trend in the service industry of orientation on exclusivity, inaccessibility and high cost of everything that is environmentally friendly and useful, as well as the trend of gradual transformation of clean environment and healthcare into the basic customer values and the most expensive products.

On the other hand, uniqueness and exoticism of Thai tourist product is already a history (Rungsrisawat, 2017), therefore, large and already well-established tourism businesses do not need the direct association of national tourism development and promotion with these values anymore.

As Table 3 shows, the biggest discrepancy in the assessments of the priority values of the country's tourist brand is in group D (marketing strategy of the company), and also group B (industrial affiliation of the company) and C (company size), while the smallest one is for group A (company's location). This confirms our hypothesis 2 that the values behind the country's tourism brand are directly correlated with the size of a business.

Taking into account the identified problems Thai tourism industry is facing these days, it can

be noted that the representatives of this sector understand and adequately assess them and this finds its expression in the desired values behind the country's tourist brand.

For example, solution of the problem of reducing economic efficiency in the tourism sector is possible through this industry's transition to more intensive growth, namely, through product qualitative differentiation, concentration of marketing efforts on attracting more affluent segment of consumers. This is reflected in popularity (especially among the representatives of large and investment-saturated businesses) of such tourism brand values as exclusivity, environmental friendliness and diversity.

Representatives of the tourist industry (especially small, niche players) see the solution of the problem of tourist flows' deconcentration in tourist programs' diversity, development of the alternative types of tourism accessibility in the provinces that are currently barely covered by tourism product as such. The problem of overcoming the image heritage of Thai tourism can be solved by replacing Thai tourist product features of uniqueness and exoticism by such new characteristics as advancement, manufacturability and fashionability. Finally, the problem of tourism product safety and environmental friendliness also found its reflection in the list of prioritized values behind Thai tourism product. Consequently, it cannot be asserted that these assessments of business representatives are not adequate to the challenges the Kingdom's tourism industry is facing today. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is rejected.

The main limitations of the obtained data reliability may be related to the limited number of the surveyed participants (by number, scope of activities, geographical location) and the limited time during which this research was carried out (thus, we did not have a chance to assess changes in the top-priority values related to the country's tourist brand). Therefore, it is advisable to continue this research, involving the representatives of tourism business from other provinces, as well as Thai and foreign tourists. It would also be logical to conduct research in different time periods (for example, after 1-2 years) in order to track the dynamics of priorities, and thus be able to predict the behavior of these values behind Thai national product (using the extrapolation methods).

In our view, this will make the results of the study more adequate to the realities and thus increase their practical value and contribution to the field.

Based on the results concerning the priority values behind Thailand tourist brand, a number of recommendations can be suggested concerning the modernization of the strategy for Thai national tourist product further promotion:

1. Promotion of international tourism in Thailand from the standpoints of destinations' uniqueness and exotics cannot be considered rational and desirable anymore. Thailand has long ceased to be viewed as exotic by both foreign tourists and from the local tourism businesses' prospective too. It is necessary to focus attention on such features of the national tourist product as its advancement, modernity, compliance with the best world standards etc.
2. Safety of all tourists should be the cornerstone value of the country's tourist image, when it comes to both external (world instability, growth of terrorism threats, spread of negative information about Thailand as a tourist destination) and domestic (terrorist acts in the Kingdom, natural disasters, car accidents) challenges. As a tourist destination, Thailand should be perceived by consumers primarily as a "quiet, green, clean harbor with a caring and participative local population". Such a vision, in the long run, will form a "new" uniqueness and country's competitiveness (which is especially relevant today, considering the rising popularity of other neighbouring destinations - Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam).
3. Ecology and healthcare should also belong to top priorities when it comes to tourist brand values, reflecting the basic principle of national tourist supply differentiation. Given that privacy, cleanliness of the natural environment, and effective healthcare are now the most expensive products at the world market of services, Thailand should lead this trend in the region of South-East Asia and thus be able to attract a segment of wealthier tourists from all over the world.
4. Given the modest (as of today) influence of fashion on the values behind Thai national

product, we can recommend the implementation of the strategy promoting Thailand as a tourist destination using the tool of "global fashion" for all Thai (for example, Thai music and cinema, Thai food, Thai way of life, Thai Buddhism etc.). Undoubtedly, this strategy will require not only substantial investments, but also well-coordinated work of several Ministries (including the Ministry of Culture, Sports, Education and Science) along with the leading representatives from nearly all spheres of Thai social life. Evaluation of other countries' achievements in this regard (for example, popularization of everything Japanese in the early 2000s, which became the reason for not only increased sales of Japanese books, cartoons, sushi and rolls, but also for extremely intensified inbound tourism to the Land of the Rising Sun) and also the already available Thai experience in the same (namely, popularity of the country's northern provinces among Chinese tourists after the release of the Chinese movie "Lost in the jungle") allow us assume that this strategy is indeed very promising in terms of boosting tourism further development.

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