Structural Equation Model of Causal Factors Influencing with The Decision Making Towards Traveling to The Secondary Cities in Central Thailand

By

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were 1) to investigate the relationship between tourism public relations, travel motivation, tourism image and perception of public policy and the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand; 2) to examine the role of travel motivation, tourism image and perception of public policy as mediating roles among tourism public relations and the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand; and 3) to test the relationship model between variables influencing with the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in central region of Thailand by comparing them with empirical data. The sample group used in this research was tourists traveling in 7 secondary cities in the central region of Thailand, totaling 419 samples from August to October 2021. In this analysis, the researcher tested the route coefficient of the target group using t-values in excess of 1.96. Model testing showed consistency with the empirical data (χ^2=181.14, df = 131, P-value = 0.00246, χ^2/df = 1.38, CFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.050, SRMR = 0.043). Therefore, testing variables such as tourism public relations, travel motivation, tourism image, and perception of public policy significantly influenced the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand. Finally, it was concluded that these variables could explain the variance in secondary city tourism decisions in central region of Thailand at 58 percent.

Keywords: tourism public relation; travel motivation; tourism image; perception of public policy

Introduction

Thailand boasts a diverse range of distinct tourist attractions that vary depending on the region. With such diversity, bringing revenue into the country is vital, particularly in the tourism business. It can be seen that 38.27 million international visitors visit Thailand each year, bringing in 2.01 trillion baht in revenue, whereas 164.24 million Thai tourists visit, bringing in 1,068 million baht. As a result, Thailand's tourism industry has developed enormously, propelling the country to fourth place in the world in tourism earnings (BLT Bangkok, 2019), with a larger proportion than in 2017 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018), and from the government's tourism policy of main city tourist attractions to secondary city

tourism. It also serves as a tourism booster, bringing in extra revenue for communities in secondary tourist locations.

Under the concept of Amazing Thailand "Go local, grow local," the situation of tourism in secondary cities was elevated from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports' strategy in 2018. This approach would emphasize generating incentives for spending in small towns and secondary cities, arranging tourism activities, forming partnerships with travel companies, public relations, and training tourism professionals. In order to attract more tourists to visit secondary cities, there is also a campaign in terms of tax deduction benefits. It can be noted that 83.67 million tourists visited secondary cities in 2018, which is expected to rise by 4.90 percent from 2017.

Central Thailand is a secondary city tourism group with significant economic potential. The goal is to enhance revenue by 5-10% from major tourist attractions that bring in money for secondary cities, especially those that are unique and crucial to provincial tourism (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018). It is clear that tourism promotion is part of the central region's tourism development strategy (Central Tourism Development Plan 2016-2020). Because it has the potential to become a tourism attraction in the province, more tourists will come to visit the province.

Table 1 Number of tourists in secondary cities in the central region, 2016 - 2020
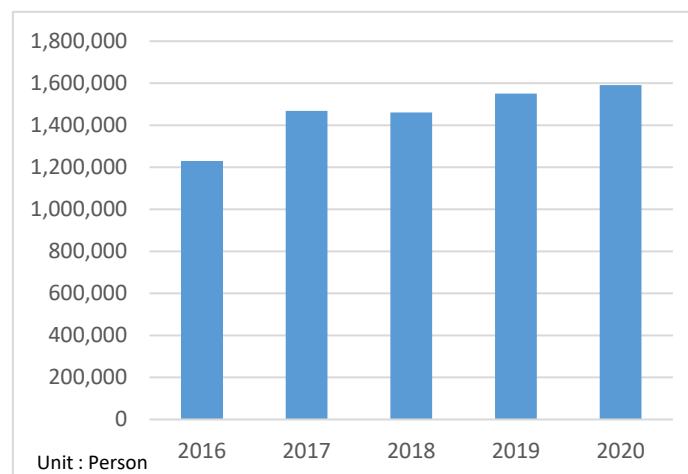
Source: Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020

Table 1 shows that the number of tourists visiting secondary cities in the central area is increasing. It was discovered that there were 1,231,208 tourists in 2016, 1,468,116 travelers in 2017, 1,461,004 tourists in 2018, 1,550,734 tourists in 2019, and 1,590,733 tourists in 2020. It might suggest the tourism potential of secondary cities that are developing in popularity with tourists. (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020). However, in order to increase market share, each province's tourist competition still seeks to demonstrate its particular potential. By attempting to adapt to changing visitor behavior (Krungsri, 2018), whether in terms of tourist incentives, i.e., attractiveness, facilities, accessibility, and services are the first things that travelers notice and wish to visit. These are additional considerations that will influence tourists' decision to visit tourist attractions. Furthermore, government tourism management measures have contributed to visitor travel, as seen by the secondary city's tourism development plan. It has prioritized the development of a tourist strategy, whether in terms of connecting tourism routes or otherwise. Tourism activities, tax benefits, and employees offering tourism services (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020), All of these are important

factors to consider when deciding whether or not a site is worth visiting (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020). All of which are important elements in determining whether or not to visit a secondary city, as well as marketing tourism in various ways to help tourists recognize and grasp the public relations messages that are transmitted. The more it has an impact on the formation of a positive image for sustainable tourism, the worse it is. On the other side, if there is a lack of good tourism management, it will harm the province's image and make tourists reluctant to travel, as well as have a negative impact on the province's tourism revenue.

From the above data, the researcher is interested in studying the causal factor structure equation model that influences the decision to travel in secondary cities in the central region of Thailand, such as tourism public relations, travel motivation, tourism image and perceptions of government policies influencing tourism decisions in secondary cities in the central region of Thailand to use the results of the study as recommendations for tourism management guidelines in accordance with tourist behavior. In addition, the results of the research will be useful as a basis for enhancing the efficiency and quality of tourism in policy formulation to develop targeted personnel related to tourism. and used to determine the direction of the development of tourist attractions to be more known together with the private sector involved. The results of the study can also be applied in the tourism-related business to generate income and sustainably maintain tourist attractions in the future

Research Objectives
1. Examine the relationship between tourist public relations, travel motivation, tourism image, perception of public policy, and the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand.
2. Examine the travel motivation, tourism image as well as perception of public policy as a mediating role between tourism public relations variables and the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand; and
3. Test the model by comparing it to empirical data to describe the relationship between variables affecting the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand.

Research Methods

Population and sample
Tourists visiting minor cities in Thailand's central region served as the study's sample group. Every year, around 150,000 people who are aware of the exact population. As a result, the formula for determining Taro Yamane's population size (Kanlaya, 2011) was employed, with a 95 percent confidence value and a maximum estimation error of 5%. By quota sampling from the number of tourist attractions in seven secondary cities, a total of 400 samples were gathered, with 5% reserved. Finally, a total of 419 persons were sampled, with 59-60 samples each province in Chainat, Ang Thong, Lop Buri, Suphan Buri, Ratchaburi, Samut Songkhram, and Sing Buri.

Sample size
Step 2: Convenience Sampling Method: The researcher will collect questionnaires from the sample with the greatest ease and readiness to respond. Until 419 samples were collected, the questionnaires were randomly dispersed in tourist regions of the seven secondary cities in the central region, including temples, archaeological sites, archeology, museums, traditions, folk culture, and floating markets. It is sufficient to use a Structural Equation Model (SEM) with a sample size of 20 times the number of Observed Variables (Hair et al., 2010). This study

continued processing using a structural equation model with 19 observable variables; thus, the sample size should be 20 times of the number of observable variables, or at least 380 samples.

Research Instrument

Questionnaires can be used as a research instrument. The following is the technique for producing a questionnaire:

1.   Research the literature, concepts, theories, and relevant studies to construct a questionnaire based on the data

2.   Create the questionnaire's framework and questions.

3.   Validity and reliability of the questionnaire should be tested:

- The questionnaire's content validity is determined by having an expert review it using the Item Objective Congruence Index (IOC) approach. However, questions having IOC values of less than 0.5 will be removed from consideration.

- Construct Validity Test uses Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to study the exploratory components and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to evaluate the elements to identify which latent variables are made up of observable variables validating whether the variables are consistent with the hypothesis

- Test for accuracy by administering a questionnaire to the target people who are not part of the experimental sample, which has been modified to be consistent with the structural validity test, to complete a questionnaire of 40 subjects and statistically analyze the results, which should have a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of not less than 0.70. (Suchart, 2012). Therefore, 0.871 indicates a high level of assurance.

4.   Improve the questionnaire's correctness and precision before putting it to use in research.

Data Analysis

To achieve the goals and put the study idea to the test It is processed in the following manner:

1.   Use frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and coefficient of distribution. Variation and standard score (Z - score)

2.   Use CFA to check the validity of the measurement model in each component. (CFA stands for Confirmatory Factor Analysis.)

3.   Validate the hypothesis model against empirical data using structural equation model analysis in model testing and research hypotheses. It is an analysis of the causal relationship between variables with a statistical program by analyzing the relationship of various variables based on a rational model from a clear conceptual framework and theory to determine whether does the data match the relationship with the theory? (Dumrong, 2011). By examining the structural equation model to validate the researcher's hypothesis model (Model Evaluation) to assess the model's validity. Finally, the evaluation was divided into two parts: 1) assess the overall model fit measure's harmony, and 2) assess the harmony of the outcomes in the model's major components (Component Fit Measure) will lead to more model development.

Results

The results of the analysis revealed that The respondents of 402 people, most of them were females, number 241 people, representing 59.95%, aged between 26 - 33 years, number 161 people, representing 40.04%, marital status of 211 people, representing 52.48%,

educational level lower than or equal to Upper secondary school of 150 people, representing 37.31%, the average monthly income is less than or equal to 15,000 baht, 223 people, accounting for 55.47%, are employees of private companies, 133 people, representing 33.08%, and domiciled in the central region. 267 people, representing 66.41%. respectively.

The researcher analyzed the causal relationship between tourist public relations, travel motivation, tourism image, perception of public policy, and the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand. The structural equation model (SEM) is broken down into two steps: the first is to assess the model based on concepts, theories, and hypotheses using data from the sample until the model matches the analytical data. The details are as follows:

The GFI = 0.90 indicated the model was very harmonic with the empirical data, AGFI = 0.89 showed the model was very harmonized with the empirical data, and CFI = 0.99 showed the model was very consistent with the empirical data, according to the statistical values collected from the sample group. Chi-square/df = 1.382 demonstrates a highly harmonic model with empirical data, with RMSEA = 0.050 exhibiting absolute harmony and RMSEA = 0.050 demonstrating absolute harmony. Every causative component variable could account for 58 percent (R^2 =0.58) of the resultant component variable, namely the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand as detailed in Figure 1
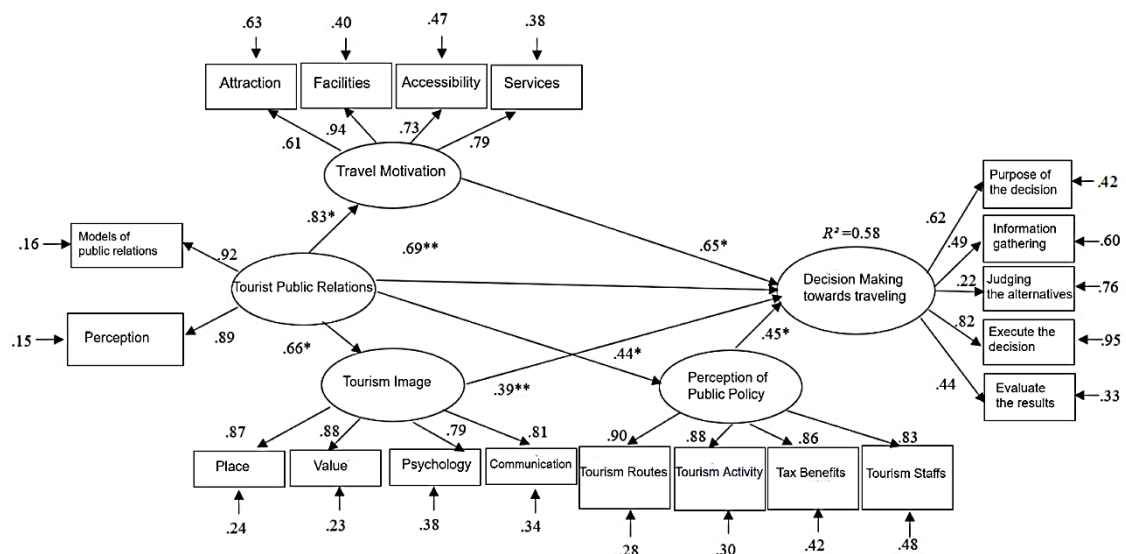
χ^2= 181.14, df = 131, P-value = 0.00246, χ^2/df = 1.38, CFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.050, SRMR = 0.043

Figure 1 Examine the relationship between tourism public relations, travel motivation, tourism image and perception of public policy, and the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand

The end outcome of altering the model till it is complete. The following is based on the sample:

1.   The model has a significant correlation of the discrepancy between all variables.
2.   The model had internal latent variables with a causal relationship between 7 pairs of statistically significant variables.
3.   Every causal component variable could explain the resulting factor, namely, the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand at a level of 58 percent (R^2 = 0.58)

4.   The findings of the linear structural correlation model analysis of the main model from the sample group revealed that tourist public relations and tourism incentives had the greatest total effect (TE). The tourism publicity component has the greatest direct effect (DE), whereas the tourism image elements have the greatest indirect effect (IE). Table 2 shows that the weight of the influence was consistent throughout the data from the sample.

Table 2 Compare the impact of the cause variable on the model's effect variable.

Cause Variables	Results	Effect Variables			
		Travel Motivation	**Tourism Image**	**Perception of Public Policy**	**Decision making towards traveling to secondary cities**
Tourism Public Relations	DE	0.83*	0.66*	0.44*	0.69**
	IE	0.11	0.23	0.21	-
	TE	0.94	0.89	0.65	0.69
Travel Motivation	DE	-	-	-	0.65*
	IE	-	-	-	-
	TE	-	-	-	0.65
Tourism Image	DE	-	-	-	0.39**
	IE	-	-	-	-
	TE	-	-	-	0.39
Perception of Public Policy	DE	-	-	-	0.45*
	IE	-	-	-	-
	TE	-	-	-	0.45
Coefficient of Determination $(R)^2$	Travel Motivation = 0.85, Tourism Image = 0.66, Perception of Public Policy = 0.69, Decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand = 0.58				

Remark DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect, TE = Total Effect, *p < .01, **p < .05

In a comparison of the model utilizing data from the sample group, it was discovered that there was no difference between them in terms of direct influence on the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand, which prioritized tourist public relations followed by travel motivation. For that indirect influence, the findings from the sample group demonstrate that prioritized tourism image followed by perception of public policy. This is in line with the findings of the study, which show that tourism public relations and travel motivation are crucial in increasing tourism in secondary cities in the central area. Simultaneously, the tourism image must be improved, as well as a better understanding of public policy perception, because it is a key supporting factor that influences the decision to travel to secondary cities in Thailand's central region.

Ten indicators were utilized to check for congruence and harmonization of empirical data, including p value, GFI, AGFI, CFI, PNFI, RMSEA, and CIMIN/*df*. According to Table 3, the model tested on the sample contained ten indexes to measure conformity and harmony with the actual data through the criteria.

Table 3 The Fit Indices of the research model with the empirical data after the Modification Indices (M.I.) was adjusted.

Fit Indices	Criterion Consideration	Statistical Value	Results
Chi-square (χ^2)	$p > 0.05$	0.00246	✓
Chi-square /DF (CIMIN/*df*)	< 2.00	1.382	✓
Goodness of Fit Index: GFI	> 0.90	0.900	✓
Standard Root Mean Square Residual: SRMR	< 0.05	0.043	✓
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation: RMSEA	< 0.08	0.050	✓
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index: AGFI	> 0.90	0.890	✓
Normal Fit Index: NFI	> 0.90	0.965	✓
Comparative Fit Index: CFI	> 0.90	0.990	✓
Parsimonious Normed Fit Index: PNFI	0 – 1 (1=perfect fit)	0.562	✓
Akaike Information Criterion: AIC	< saturated model	✓	✓

Discussion

Because the public relations model is based on message conveyance and presentation; therefore, tourist public relations is linked to tourism decision making in secondary cities in central Thailand. The media format, on the other hand, could be articles, Internet media, or other channels. The media to be advertised must have a clear, and uncomplicated format that is easy to read and listen to. As a result, it is possible to develop a proclivity for making decisions (Kazokiene & Stravinskiene, 2011). Furthermore, according to Natchamon (2002) research, the public relations model in terms of tourism information from mass media, personal media, and specialized media influences trends in travel decision-making behavior. By encouraging the planning and design of public relations media in many formats, such as social media and personal media, and by developing a public relations model that allows for easy access to information and intriguing features can be used to entice people to visit tourism places. This is in line with Pavitra (2015) revealed that the public relations model and media employed on tourist attraction websites may have an impact on motivation and visitor attractiveness. The public relations format, which is basic, accurate, and easy to understand or linked to a trip map, will attract more individuals by providing constant visitor information.

In line with Parsons (2017), the inclination to motivate and persuade visitors to travel will be influenced by the public relations model of social media. The channel design or good public relations model will help to establish an image of a tourist attraction by displaying the specialness of tourist attractions, attractive identity, and having attention to detail as well as delivering information that is always up-to-date. Consistent with Nonthawong (2015) discovered that the public relations model is effective. It can alter the temple's image by getting public relations through internet media that produce and exhibit religious and cultural attitudes. There are relevant agencies involved in deciding the function and activities of tourism, such as giving information on tourism public relations, presenting tourist attraction characteristics, or providing information services, in terms of the public's perception of the government's tourist management policy in the area. It can be viewed as a component or factor that promotes tourism (Panasiuk, 2007).

In terms of the mediating effect of tourist public relations and tourism decision-making in secondary cities in Thailand's central region. According to research by Hsieh (2016), travelers will pay more attention to tourism public relations such as architecture and decorative design, which are connected with historical history, distinctiveness, and attractiveness, and can give incentives for tourists to visit. In terms of government policy, tourism public relations agencies have placed a premium on the design of tourism activities to be fascinating and diverse, as well as the ability to generate tourism activities that are appropriate for tourists of all ages, so that good tourism activities can encourage more travel decisions. According to Haxton (2015), the policy to promote tourism in tourism activities by bringing the great identity of the local community is consistent. Furthermore, (Jin, Hu, & Kavan, 2016) discovered the activities within tourist sites and excellent administration will generate a tourism image, according to public relations. The ability to meet the requirements and contentment of tourists, as well as the ability to impress, can be used to assess this. All of this information will be used by travelers as an experience in making their next trip decision. Furthermore, according to public relations, Jin et al. (2016) discovered that activities within tourist attractions and excellent administration will build a tourism image. This can be measured by the ability to meet the needs and satisfaction of tourists, as well as the ability to impress. Travelers will utilize all of this knowledge as a learning experience when planning their future trip.

Straightness of the structure the harmonization value was found to be at a good level and was compatible with the empirical data when the model was tested to characterize the link between variables impacting secondary city tourism decisions in Thailand's central region according to Chi-square, Chi-square /*df*, GFI, SRMR, RMSEA, AGFI, NFI, and CFI values. It was found that travel motivation, tourism image as well as perception of public policy directly affects the decision to travel to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand. Furthermore, they play as a mediating role between tourism public relations and the decision making towards traveling to secondary cities in the central region of Thailand. Finally, the harmonious index criterion developed after the modification of the momentum was determined that the Modification Indices (M.I.) values passed all of the assessment criteria in the comparison between statistical values obtained from an alternative model. The adjusted alternative model was found to be in agreement with the empirical data (Jöreskog, Sörbom, & Inc, 1996; Wiratchai, 1999).

Conclusion and Suggestions

Government or other relevant organizations should be on expanding the information and understanding gained via the creation of a valuable image by making tourism public relations media more understandable including linking data together and providing accurate historical data. Therefore, it could provide data that demonstrates the attraction's worth and pride details of tourism information, on the other hand, may be offered in the form of a QR code or current website information in order to encourage the development of a positive image for the province's cultural attractions.

The form of public relations should be considered by collaborating with the private sector in the development and design of tourism media through the application system with basic information for travelers such as lodging, hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, hospitals, police stations, and other complete information presented in the form of media for promoting tourism through the application system. Besides, it will make more convenient to obtain tourist information.

To concentrate their efforts on raising public understanding of government policy by collaborating among three sectors: government organizations such as provincial tourism offices, the provincial chamber of commerce, and the private sector, which includes hoteliers, tourist commercial operators, community leaders and tourism stakeholders come together to create engaging tourism activities; for instance, maximizing the potential of existing tourism to be able to travel throughout the year, creating a link between historical facts and tourism attractions in each region to help them spread, and modifying the role of tourism activities to encourage participation in tourism and the inclusion of overnight stays, which will improve the value of tourism income within the province.

Emphasize the creation of tourism motivation by increasing safety of access to tourist destinations, such as increased illumination of tourist attractions; CCTV cameras have been installed inside tourist destinations in order to limit the number of problems that risk tourists' lives and property. Implementing steps to control traffic difficulties within tourist sites, particularly during peak seasons, in order to prevent traffic congestion and losses due to road accidents. Furthermore, there should be well marked transport routes to tourist destinations that are visible at regular intervals.

Acknowledgments

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