



Received: 8 July 2024

Revised: 30 July 2024

Accepted: 30 July 2024

MARKETING MIX FACTORS AFFECTING THAI TOURISTS' DECISION TO PURCHASE INTERNATIONAL TOUR PACKAGES

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(This article belongs to the Theme 1: Business Performance, Competitiveness, and Sustainability)

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Abstract

This research aims to 1) study the travel behavior of Thai tourists influencing their decisions to purchase international travel packages, and 2) analyze marketing factors that influence Thai tourists' decisions to buy international travel packages. It is a mixed-methods study with a population of Thai tourists aged 20 and above who have previously purchased international travel packages, totaling 385 respondents. Convenient sampling and online questionnaire distribution methods were used, with an IOC of 0.97 and a reliability coefficient of 0.945 for data analysis. Statistical methods employed include descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics like t-test, ANOVA, regression analysis, correlation analysis, and component analysis. Qualitative research utilized purposive sampling of 9 key informants who are executives or business owners of leading travel companies in Thailand, analyzed through content analysis. Findings reveal that 1) most tourists are female, aged 31-40 years, with education below a bachelor's degree and a monthly income of 30,001-40,000 THB. Tourists prioritize information search and comparison before making decisions, with word of mouth playing a significant role, while advertising and publicity have minimal impact. 2) Significant factors influencing purchase decisions include physical evidence, place, price, people, and creating positive experiences, comprehensive information provision, and promotion of word of mouth, enhancing the likelihood of Thai tourists' decisions to purchase international travel packages effectively.

Keywords: Marketing Mix Factors, Thai Tourists, International Tour Packages

Citation Information: Weerasophon, W. (2024). Marketing Mix Factors Affecting Thai Tourists' Decision to Purchase International Tour Packages. *Asian Administration and Management Review*, 7(2), 130-140. <https://doi.org/10.14456/aamr.2024.29>

Introduction

Tourism is a vital industry for Thailand's economic development, experiencing continuous growth over the past several years. According to the National Statistical Office of Thailand (2024), in 2023, the number of Thai tourists traveling abroad reached over 12.7 million, an increase of approximately 16% compared to 2022. This generated more than 675,800 million THB. in revenue from international tourism, demonstrating the high popularity of overseas travel among Thai tourists.

The popularity of international travel among Thais is primarily due to the ease of visa applications from many countries and the increase in low-cost airlines, allowing more opportunities for tourists to travel abroad (Department of Consular Affairs, 2023; Wongkaew & Indharapiroj, 2021). Additionally, there is a growing trend of Thai tourists preferring to purchase tour packages from travel companies due to the convenience of travel arrangements, receiving comprehensive services from flight bookings, accommodations, and tourism activities, which reduces the hassle of travel planning (Muangnoi et al., 2021; Liang & Xie, 2022).

Increased competition in the tourism industry has led travel companies to adjust their marketing strategies to attract customers, particularly by reducing tour package prices, which may affect service quality in the long run (Samruad, 2022). Utilizing appropriate marketing strategies, especially the marketing mix, which consists of seven main elements: product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Kotzé & van der Merwe, 2022), is crucial for service businesses, particularly in the tourism industry, to create market alignment and relationships, ensuring customer satisfaction and positive experiences for tourists.

The study will focus on analyzing the influence of each marketing mix factor on Thai tourists' decision to purchase international tour packages. This will provide significant benefits to operators in improving strategic plans and developing services that better align with customer needs, increasing opportunities to expand the market and generate revenue for Thailand's tourism industry effectively.

Literature Reviews

Tourism

Tourism is a popular activity that creates happiness, generates income, and promotes cultural exchange (Smith & Kelly, 2020; Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2018). International tourism is gaining popularity and is important in various aspects, such as generating income, creating jobs, and developing tourists' potential (Song et al., 2012; Wang & Xu, 2020).

Tourist Behavior

Tourist behavior refers to tourists' actions in choosing destinations, planning trips, and using tourism-related services (Wongdee, 2019). The Consumer Behavior Model (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021) explains the consumer purchasing decision process, consisting of stimulus, the buyer's black box, and response. Applying this model to Thai tourists' outbound travel behavior helps understand their decision-making process (Wang & Li, 2019).

Marketing and Marketing Mix (7Ps)

Marketing is crucial for businesses to compete, increase sales, and create a good image (Laoumnuay, 2016). The marketing mix (7Ps) is an essential tool for planning marketing strategies, consisting of product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). In the tourism industry, the 7Ps help tour companies offer outstanding value to target customers and create a competitive advantage.

Purchasing Decision Process

The purchase decision is the process consumers use to choose products or services that meet their needs (Tanathon & Wongsuwan, 2012; Wittaya, 2014). The Consumer Decision-making Process (Solomon, 2014; Wen et al., 2021; Han et al., 2020) consists of five main steps: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. Understanding this process helps businesses plan effective marketing strategies.

Related Research

Recent studies highlight the impact of marketing mix factors on tourist decisions. Kotrajaras et al. (2020) found product, price, place, and promotion influence international tourists visiting Thailand. Srimai & Khonkaen (2020) showed all marketing mix factors affect Thai tourists' foreign package purchases, emphasizing product quality and price competitiveness. Tan & Su (2020) identified price, facilities quality/quantity, past experience, and company reputation influence Chinese tourists' Thai package purchases. Rezvani et al. (2021) linked high-quality products/services, appropriate pricing, effective communication/distribution, and personalized marketing to customer satisfaction in Iran's tourism. Vanniarajan & Vijayakumar (2021) associated high-quality service, effective communication, widespread distribution, and personalized marketing with destination image and tourist satisfaction in Tamil Nadu.

Recent literature suggests that price and service quality are the most influential factors in tour package purchase decisions (Wang & Li, 2019). However, there is a gap in understanding the impact of social media on Thai tourists' decision-making processes for international tour packages. This study aims to address this gap, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on digital marketing in tourism. Moreover, Tan & Su (2020) found that company reputation significantly influences Chinese tourists' decisions to purchase Thai tour packages. This study extends this line of inquiry to Thai outbound tourists, examining whether similar patterns exist in their decision-making processes.

Research Hypotheses

- 1) Different travel behaviors of Thai tourists result in different decision-making processes when purchasing international tour packages.
- 2) Different marketing mix factors have varying levels of influence on Thai tourists' decision-making process when purchasing international tour packages.

Research Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in Kotler and Keller's (2016) 7Ps marketing mix theory and Solomon's (2014) consumer behavior model. It aims to examine the relationship between marketing mix factors and Thai tourists' decisions to purchase international tour packages. This framework integrates established marketing theories with current trends in tourism research, providing a solid theoretical foundation for the study as shown in Figure 1.

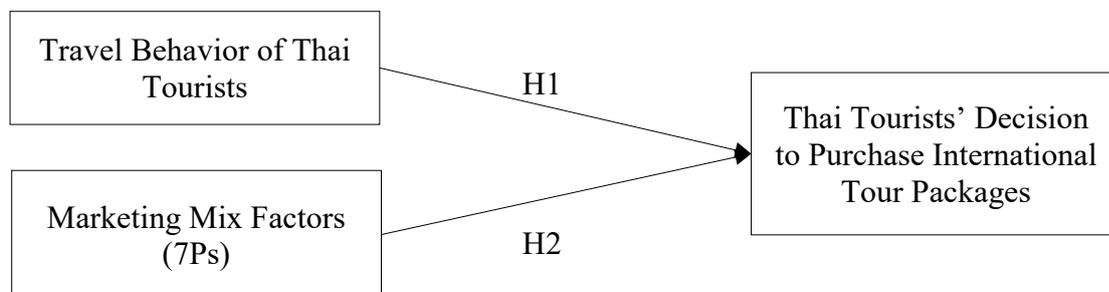


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection to provide comprehensive and in-depth insights. The quantitative research utilizes an online questionnaire distributed to 385 Thai tourists, while the qualitative component involves in-depth interviews with 9 executives from leading tour companies. Data analysis includes descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative data, and content analysis for qualitative data. This methodology aligns with recent tourism research practices (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and allows for a holistic understanding of Thai tourists' decision-making processes.

Quantitative Research

Population and Sample: The population for this research consists of Thai tourists aged 20 years and above who have purchased international tour packages, aligning with the research topic. Since the exact population size is unknown, the sample size is determined using Cochran's formula (1977) at a 95% confidence level and $\pm 5\%$ margin of error, resulting in an appropriate sample size of 385 individuals. Convenience sampling is employed, along with the distribution of an online questionnaire (Etikan et al., 2016). According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2023), approximately 9.8 million Thai tourists traveled abroad in 2022. Therefore, a sample of 385 individuals is considered a good representation of the Thai tourist population traveling internationally.

Research Instrument: The research instrument is a structured questionnaire comprising four sections: personal information (6 items), travel behavior (6 items), marketing mix factors (35 items), and decision-making process (5 items). It employs a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) and was developed through literature review and expert validation (Bolarinwa, 2015), achieving an IOC of 0.97 and a reliability coefficient of 0.945.

Data Collection: Data collection is conducted online using Google Forms to align with the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The questionnaire link is distributed to the target group of Thai tourists aged 20 years and above who have purchased international tour packages through various online channels such as email, social media, and discussion groups. A total of 385 complete responses are collected and checked for completeness before analysis.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data analysis involves both descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, ANOVA, regression analysis, correlation analysis, and factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). These statistical techniques are used to describe the sample characteristics, compare groups, examine relationships between variables, and identify the most influential factors affecting Thai tourists' purchasing decisions.

Qualitative Research

Population and Sample: Purposive sampling is used to select 9 key informants who are executives or owners of leading tour companies in Thailand with at least 5 years of experience in the tourism business and offering international tour packages (Patton, 2015). These informants are considered knowledgeable and experienced in the tourism industry, capable of providing deep insights into the marketing mix factors influencing tourists' purchasing decisions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Instrument: The qualitative research instrument is a semi-structured interview guide with 9 open-ended questions covering the research objectives, including the influence of marketing mix factors (product, price, place, promotion, people, process, physical evidence) on tourists' purchasing decisions and the decision-making process itself (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview guide is developed based on a literature review and expert validation process to ensure content validity and comprehensiveness (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Data Collection: In-depth interviews are conducted face-to-face with the 9 key informants, using the validated semi-structured interview guide. The interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, with the researcher taking detailed notes simultaneously (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). After each interview, the researcher checks the completeness of the data and seeks clarification or additional information from the interviewees if necessary (Yeong et al., 2018). Data Analysis: Qualitative data analysis employs thematic analysis, which involves familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allows the researcher to systematically organize and categorize the large amount of interview data, identifying key themes and patterns relevant to the research objectives (Nowell et al., 2017). The findings are then interpreted and summarized using qualitative analysis principles.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The quantitative and qualitative research results are integrated to obtain more comprehensive and complete findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative results provide statistical data and figures showing tourists' behaviors, attitudes, and importance placed on various factors, while the qualitative results complement these with deep insights and details from the perspective of experienced tour operators. Integrating both sets of findings allows for a holistic understanding of the marketing mix factors influencing Thai tourists' purchasing decisions, considering both the buyer and seller perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

This research adheres to ethical guidelines for human subject research (National Research Council of Thailand, 2019). It involves institutional review board approval, informed consent, participant rights disclosure, confidentiality, respectful treatment, and truthful reporting. These practices protect participants and ensure research credibility.

Research Results

Personal Information of Thai Tourists

Most respondents were female (54.81%), aged 31-40 years (60.26%), had an education level below a bachelor's degree (59.22%), earned a monthly income of 30,001-40,000 THB (34.80%), worked as government or state enterprise employees (36.88%), and were married (39.74%).

Travel Behavior of Thai Tourists Who Purchased International Tour Packages

Most respondents had purchased international tour packages 5-6 times (30.39%), traveled for an average of 3-5 days per trip (18.96%), preferred traveling during public holidays (36.62%), spent an average of 30,001-50,000 THB per trip (13.52%), traveled for leisure (80.26%), and were influenced by family or relatives in their purchase decision (61.04%).

Marketing Mix Factors Affecting Thai Tourists' Decision to Purchase International Tour Packages

Overall, the marketing mix factors had a high level of influence on Thai tourists' decision to purchase international tour packages (Mean = 3.97). Product had the highest influence (mean = 4.12), followed by promotion (mean = 4.10), people (mean = 4.05), place (mean = 3.98), process (mean = 3.92), physical evidence (mean = 3.87), and price (mean = 3.85).

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Marketing Mix Factors (Overall)

Marketing Mix Factors	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank
Product	4.12	0.68	High	1
Price	3.85	0.76	High	7
Place	3.98	0.71	High	4
Promotion	4.10	0.65	High	2
People	4.05	0.69	High	3
Process	3.92	0.72	High	5
Physical Evidence	3.87	0.70	High	6
Total	3.97	0.70	High	

The decision-making process of Thai tourists when purchasing international tour packages was at a high level (Mean = 3.87). The decision to purchase due to package suitability had the highest importance (Mean = 4.08), followed by information search and comparison of prices, services, and promotions (Mean = 3.90 each), recommendation to others if satisfied (Mean = 3.85), and awareness of tour packages from advertisements (Mean = 3.72).

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Decision-Making Process

Decision-Making Process	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank
Awareness of tour packages from advertisements	3.72	0.76	High	5
Information search from various sources	3.90	0.72	High	2
Comparison of prices, services, and promotions	3.90	0.75	High	2
Decision to purchase due to package suitability	4.08	0.73	High	1
Recommendation to others if satisfied	3.85	0.74	High	4
Total	3.87	0.74	High	

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Different travel behaviors of Thai tourists result in different decision-making processes when purchasing international tour packages. Purchase frequency and travel period significantly affected Thai tourists' decision-making process when purchasing international tour packages, while travel duration, expenses, purpose of travel, and influential person did not have a significant effect.

Table 3 Differences in Travel Behavior on Decision-Making Process

Variable	Statistics	p-value	Interpretation	Details
Purchase Frequency	F = 5.002.	.002*	Significantly Different	Past purchase experience affects decision
Travel Duration	F = 1.854	.137	Not Significantly Different	Travel duration does not significantly affect decision
Travel Period	F = 3.003	.030*	Significantly Different	Chosen travel period affects decision
Expenses	F = 1.133	.335	Not Significantly Different	Budget does not significantly affect decision
Purpose of Travel	F = 1.568	.182	Not Significantly Different	Travel purpose does not significantly affect decision
Influential Person	F = 1.101	.334	Not Significantly Different	Influential person does not significantly affect decision

*Significant at the 0.05 level

Hypothesis 2: Different marketing mix factors have varying levels of influence on Thai tourists' decision-making process when purchasing international tour packages. Price, place, people, and physical evidence significantly influenced Thai tourists' decision-making process when purchasing international tour packages, while product, promotion, and process did not have a significant influence.

Table 4 Influence of Marketing Mix Factors on Decision-Making Process

Factor	Statistic	p-value	Interpretation	Coefficient (B)	Details
Product	t = -.889	.375	No Influence	-.066	Package details do not significantly affect decision
Price	t = 2.148	.032*	Influence	.123	Price has a positive effect on decision
Place	t = 2.438	.015*	Influence	.209	Distribution channels have a positive effect
Promotion	t = -1.427	.154	No Influence	-.109	Promotions do not significantly affect decision
People	t = -2.240	.026*	Influence	-.122	Personnel have a negative effect on decision
Process	t = -2.240	.061	No Influence	-.108	Service process does not significantly affect decision
Physical Evidence	t = 14.982	.000*	Influence	.769	Physical environment has a strong positive effect

*Significant at the 0.05 level

The qualitative findings provided in-depth insights into the factors influencing Thai tourists' decision to purchase international tour packages, complementing the quantitative results.

Table 5 Summary of Qualitative Findings from In-Depth Interviews (n = 9)

Interview Questions	Summary of Responses
1) Product Factors	- Greatly affects purchase decision; Variety and attractiveness of destinations are most important; Quality of accommodation and special activities increase appeal
2) Price Factors	- Has the greatest effect on purchase decision; Value for money is more important than low price; Promotions and discounts greatly influence decision
3) Place Factors	- Has a moderate effect, but convenience is important; Online channels are increasingly popular; Physical stores help build trust
4) Promotion Factors	- Greatly influences purchasing motivation; Discounts and giveaways are effective; Social media marketing is highly efficient
5) People, Process, Physical Evidence	- People: Expertise of guides is very important - Process: Speed and problem-solving affect satisfaction - Physical Evidence: Cleanliness and safety of destinations are crucial
6) Decision-Making Process	- Recognize need, search for information, compare options, decide to purchase, post-purchase evaluation

7) Factors Stimulating Demand	- Advertisements and reviews on social media - Desire to relax and seek new experiences- Promotions and special prices
8) Information Sources	- Social media (rank 1); Travel company websites; Recommendations from friends and family
9) Most Influential Factors	- Price and value for money; Attractiveness of the package; Reputation of the company; Reviews and recommendations from others

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Quantitative and qualitative results consistently highlight product quality, pricing, distribution, promotions, and physical environment as key factors influencing Thai tourists' package purchases. Qualitative insights add emphasis on tour guide expertise, service efficiency, and destination safety. This integration provides a comprehensive view of decision-making processes, demand drivers, and information sources in the Thai international tourism market.

Suggestions for Tour Operators

Tour operators should focus on developing high-quality, diverse packages offering value for money, while implementing flexible pricing strategies with appealing promotions. Utilizing a mix of convenient online and offline distribution channels is crucial, as is investing in digital marketing, especially on social media. Operators must ensure expert personnel, particularly tour guides, and streamline service processes for efficiency. Prioritizing cleanliness, safety, and overall environmental appeal is essential. Additionally, monitoring and managing online reviews is vital, as they significantly influence potential customers. By understanding and addressing Thai tourists' preferences and decision-making processes, operators can enhance their marketing strategies and services, ultimately boosting customer satisfaction and loyalty in the competitive international tourism market.

Conclusion and Discussion

Our findings indicate that product quality and price are the most influential factors in Thai tourists' decisions to purchase international tour packages, aligning with Kim et al.'s (2020) research on travel option choice. However, this study reveals a more significant role of social media in Thai tourists' purchase decisions than previously documented, possibly reflecting the rapidly evolving digital consumer behavior in Thailand.

The study's mixed-methods approach provides a nuanced understanding of the decision-making process. While quantitative data highlight the importance of tangible factors like price and product features, qualitative insights reveal the growing influence of peer recommendations and online reviews, consistent with findings on digital tourist behavior.

These results have important implications for tour operators and marketers. They suggest a need for a balanced approach that emphasizes product quality and competitive pricing while also leveraging digital platforms for marketing and customer engagement. Future research could explore the long-term impact of digital marketing strategies on customer loyalty in the tour package industry."

These revisions aim to address the comments by strengthening the conceptual basis, clarifying the methodology, enhancing the literature review with recent sources, and providing a more in-depth discussion of the results in relation to current research.

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Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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