A STUDY OF THE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND

DECISION-MAKING FACTORS THAT MOST INFLUENCE FOREIGNERS

TO TRAVEL TO THAILAND

A MASTER'S PROJECT

BY

LADAWAN LIMPRASERT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree

in Business English for International Communication

at Srinakharinwirot University

August 2006

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AN ABSTRACT

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This study was undertaken to identify the communication channels and decision-making factors that most influenced foreigners to travel to Thailand.

Data in the research was obtained from questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to 100 foreign tourists in Bangkok and Chonburi provinces in December 2005. The respondents were nationals of East Asia, Europe, the Americas, and South Asia.

The findings showed that the most influential communication channel was the Internet and the most influential decision-making factor was word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family.

การศึกษาช่องทางการสื่อสารและปัจจัยในการตัดสินใจที่ชักจูงให้นักท่องเที่ยว

ชาวต่างชาติมาเที่ยวเมืองไทยมากที่สุด

บทคัดย่อ

ของ

ลดาวัลย์ ลิ้มประเสริฐ

ลดาวัลย์ ลิ้มประเสริฐ. (2549). *การศึกษาช่องทางการสื่อสารและปัจจัยในการตัดสินใจที่ชักจูงให้*
นักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติมาเที่ยวเมืองไทยมากที่สุด. สารนิพนธ์ ศศ.ม. (ภาษาอังกฤษ
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รวิโรฒ. อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาสารนิพนธ์: อาจารย์ลีรอย เอ ควิก

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้ เป็นการศึกษาช่องทางการสื่อสารและปัจจัยในการตัดสินใจที่ชักจูงให้
นักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติมาเที่ยวเมืองไทยมากที่สุด

ข้อมูลของงานวิจัยนี้ได้มาจากแบบสอบถาม โดยสอบถามนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติ
100 คน ในพื้นที่กรุงเทพมหานครและจังหวัดชลบุรีในเดือนธันวาคม พ.ศ. 2548 โดยนักท่องเที่ยว
เหล่านี้เป็นชนชาวเอเชียตะวันออก ยุโรป อเมริกา และเอเชียใต้

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ช่องทางการสื่อสารที่ชักจูงให้ชาวต่างชาติเดินทางมาท่องเที่ยว
เมืองไทยมากที่สุดคืออินเตอร์เน็ต และปัจจัยในการตัดสินใจที่ชักจูงให้ชาวต่างชาติเดินทางมา
ท่องเที่ยวเมืองไทยมากที่สุดคือการเล่าขานสู่กันหรือคำแนะนำจากกลุ่มเพื่อนและสมาชิกใน
ครอบครัว

The Master's Project Advisor, Chair of the Business English for International Communication Program and the Oral Defense Committee have approved this Master's Project as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication of Srinakarinwirot University.

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August …….2006

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The tourism industry is the second largest source of foreign exchange earnings for Thailand. In the report, A Study for the National Action Plan for the Tourism Industry: The Ninth Five-Year (2000-2006) National Economic and Social Development Plan, it was reported that Thailand is one of the leaders among developing Asian countries in international tourism business, second only to China (Thailand Development Research Institution. 2001: 1).

Foreign exchange income from the Thai tourism industry continuously increased during the period of 1995-2002 as shown in TABLE 1 (TAT. 2005). Only in 2003 did Thailand experience negative growth due to concerns over terrorism and SARS.

TABLE 1 AMOUNT OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS GROWTH FROM FOREIGN TOURISTS TRAVELING IN THAILAND FROM 1995 TO 2003

Year:	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Amount (Million Baht):	190,765.2	219,364.0	220,754.5	242,177.3	253,018.3	285,272.2	299,047.0	323,484.0	309,269.0

TABLE 2 shows the details of the actual numbers of foreign tourist arrivals in Thailand in 2000-2003 (TAT. 2005).

TABLE 2 FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVALS STATISTIC OF YEAR 2000 TO 2003

Region	Year 2000 Arrivals (persons)	Year 2001 Arrivals (persons)	Year 2002 Arrivals (persons)	Year 2003 Arrivals (persons)	Share %
East Asia	5,782,323	6,095,979	6,564,664	6,199,719	61.49
Brunei	13,479	14,402	14,181	17,694	
Cambodia	43,389	54,756	79,549	74,194	
Indonesia	145,375	153,734	165,295	167,726	
Laos	74,940	86,439	94,147	104,576	
Malaysia	1,055,933	1,161,490	1,297,619	1,340,193	
Myanmar	47,392	43,115	42,448	37,359	
Philippines	107,123	130,179	143,354	143,412	
Singapore	659,539	669,166	687,982	633,805	
Vietnam	57,255	80,431	98,456	135,543	
China	704,463	695,372	763,708	624,923	
Hong Kong	495,153	531,300	533,798	657,458	
Japan	1,206,549	1,179,202	1,233,239	1,026,287	
Korea	448,207	553,441	717,361	695,034	
Taiwan	711,702	728,953	678,511	525,916	
Others	11,824	13,999	15,016	15,599	
Europe	2,191,433	2,327,680	2,475,319	2,283,913	22.65
Austria	45,254	46,980	48,768	47,602	
Belgium	50,719	54,551	56,383	50,978	
Denmark	81,037	80,050	86,131	80,184	
Finland	55,431	58,937	64,566	63,060	
France	240,568	238,550	254,610	22,659	
Germany	387,904	407,353	412,968	389,293	
Italy	120,159	120,368	126,648	93,079	
Netherlands	120,553	138,355	142,528	130,867	
Norway	65,208	73,282	75,520	71,376	
Russia	49,631	58,998	69,020	90,722	
Spain	34,003	38,863	48,550	31,927	
Sweden	210,504	224,268	222,154	210,882	
Switzerland	114,030	122,701	128,529	116,327	
UK	480,303	522,117	574,007	550,087	
East Europe	55,384	58,823	65,392	58,020	
Others	80,745	83,484	99,545	78,850	

TABLE 2 (continued)

Region	Year 2000	Year 2001	Year 2002	Year 2003	Share
	Arrivals	Arrivals	Arrivals	Arrivals	%
	(persons)	(persons)	(persons)	(persons)	
The Americas	597,716	613,897	650,195	586,147	5.81
Argentina	5,257	5,674	2,380	1,585	
Brazil	3,992	4,258	5,535	4,660	
Canada	86,585	93,006	101,588	97,861	
U.S.A.	485,701	494,920	519,668	469,165	
Others	16,181	16,039	21,024	12,876	
South Asia	340,036	333,936	391,371	391,064	3.88
Bangladesh	29,784	33,035	41,263	57,788	
India	203,221	206,451	253,475	230,790	
Nepal	19,662	19,061	23,021	22,424	
Pakistan	49,183	35,785	29,930	30,928	
Sri Lanka	29,637	29,187	32,499	38,354	
Others	8,549	10,327	11,183	10,780	
Oceania	384,648	430,806	427,014	347,849	3.45
Australia	326,003	366,468	358,616	284,749	
New Zealand	56,205	61,545	65,189	60,545	
Others	2,440	2,793	3,209	2,555	
Middle East	202,169	239,200	274,878	206,234	2.05
Egypt	3,669	6,092	7,505	5,237	
Israel	73,565	91,253	98,694	64,714	
Kuwait	19,847	22,305	28,576	21,411	
Saudi Arabia	14,193	14,083	14,600	10,085	
U.A.E.	34,670	37,391	44,521	40,541	
Others	53,555	68,076	80,982	64,246	
Africa	80,501	91,011	89,535	67,183	0.67
South Africa	37,577	42,062	37,772	34,571	
Others	42,924	48,949	51,763	32,612	
Total	9,578,826	10,132,509	10,872,976	10,082,109	100.00
% Change	+10.80	+5.78	+7.33	-7.27	

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand, Tourism Statistics (TAT. 2005)

In the years from 2000 to 2003, East Asian tourists, such as Japanese, Malaysians, and Singaporeans, became the prime source of Thai tourism earnings.

European tourists were the second and American tourists were the third largest contributors to Thai tourism earnings (TAT. 2005).

At the end of the Ninth Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plan, i.e. at the end of the year 2006, foreign tourist arrivals are expected to reach 14 million. The World Tourism Organization has estimated the average annual growth rate for world tourism from 2000 to 2010 at 4.2 percent. For the Asia-Pacific region and Thailand, the estimates are 7.7 percent and 7.8 percent, respectively (TDRI. 2001: 64).

However, the Thai tourism industry presently is in a difficult period due to the tsunami disaster in the south of Thailand on 26 December 2004. The tsunami caused the biggest losses to the main tourism markets of Phuket, Krabi, Phang-Nga, Trang, Satun, and Ranong all on the Andaman Coast. In the years between 1996 and 2003, the annual tourism income from the Andaman markets was over 70,000 million Baht or approximately 1,750 million US Dollars. The tsunami destroyed almost everything (Matichon. 2005). The Tourism Authorization of Thailand (TAT. 2005) reported that approximately 90 percent of all accommodation was left vacant: 26,762 rooms in 472 hotels available in Phuket, 9,042 rooms in 292 hotels in Krabi, and 1,098 rooms in 46 hotels in Phang Nga.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT. 2005) immediately developed a recovery plan called "Andaman Tourism Recovery Plan 2005: the Focus of Public Relations Efforts". The plan was divided into three key phases: phase I was the Critical Phase from December 26, 2004 to January 15, 2005, phase II was the Short Term Phase from January 15 to March

2005, and phase III was the Mid and Long Term Phase from March 2005 onwards. In Phase I, following surveys of the affected areas, responsible agencies and TAT embarked on plans to restore the confidence of domestic and international travelers. This was achieved through the launch of a pro-active and sustained advertising and public relations campaign designed to inspire the confidence of domestic as well as international travelers.

Phase II had two key themes: the "Save the Andaman" theme for the domestic Public Relations campaign, and the "Andaman Smile" theme for the international campaign. Both campaigns used communication channels such as video documentaries, tourist information kits, and websites for accommodation, attractions and useful information.

Phase III launched the "Happiness on Earth" tourism promotion campaign for both domestic and international tourism through all possible communication channels to project a new image of the Andaman coast that still retained its natural magnificence.

To redress the post tsunami tourism situation, it is necessary to have effective communication channels and to know the decision-making factors that most influence foreign tourists to travel to Thailand. The sales promotion expert, Saree Wongmontha (1998: 25), said that in the information society, businesses must focus on consumer behavior and carefully transmit information through the various kinds of the communication channels such as television, radio, the Internet, and every other channel. Focusing on the tourism industry specifically, Eric Laws (2001: 63) argued that the sources of tourist information include advertising through all kinds of communication channels that create and enhance the

awareness of travel destinations. Christian Neilson (2001: 111) added that knowing which

medium is the most effective in reaching the customers is paramount for tourism providers.

Neilson (2001:24) also defined the meaning of communication channel as the

means of information exchange between parties, or media of communication transporting a

message from sender to receiver. A communication channel can refer to any media such

as newspapers, magazines, brochures, radio, television, the Internet, word-of-mouth, or

recommendations of reference groups including friends and family, and travel agencies.

With regard to the tourism industry, Neilson (2001: 131) pointed out that the

communication channels could connect tourism information and tourist decisions. He also

argued (2001: 51) that tourism decisions might be based not so much upon the information

that is aimed at potential tourists, but on how this information is perceived and assimilated

into pre-existing belief structures. While Dimitrios Buhalis and Eric Laws (2001: 61) stated

that it is important to understand the ways in which consumers make their choices. It is to

understand the tourist's decision criteria and the influential factors.

Therefore, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the Association of Thai Travel

Agents (ATTA), the Thai Hotel Association: (THA), travel agencies, and people or

companies working in the tourism industry need to pay attention to selecting the right

communication channels and the influential factors of tourists' decision-making for their

promotions, advertisements, or communications to their customers in order to help the Thai

tourism industry recover after the tsunami disaster and to continue to develop the Thai

tourism industry as a leading sector of national foreign exchange income. If the communication channels and the decision-making factors that most influence foreigners to travel to Thailand are found, the right communication channels and the right factors can be developed in order to be effective in communicating and influencing foreign tourists to travel to Thailand.

Research Questions

This research seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Which communication channels most influence foreigners to travel to Thailand?

2. Which decision-making factors most influence foreigners to travel to Thailand?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be beneficial for tourism organizations, travel agencies, and people or companies working in the tourism industry. The findings will help them to identify communication channels and focus on the decision-making factors that most effectively influence foreign tourists to travel to Thailand.

Scope of the Study

The study was limited to 100 randomly selected foreign tourists who made decisions to travel to Thailand with the main propose of tourism. The respondents were foreign tourists who decided to visit Thailand for the first time.

Definitions of Terms

Buying decision-making process	The process of decision making in selecting the travel destinations with the main propose of tourism.
Communication channels	Means of communicating tourist information to potential visitors such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, television, radio, the Internet, word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family, and travel agencies.
Decision-making factors	Factors that cause potential tourists to decide on tourism products. These are classified into two groups: internal and external factors. The internal factors are the personal motivators, personalities, disposable income, health, past experiences, hobbies and interests, existing knowledge of potential holidays, life styles, and attitudes, opinions, and perceptions. The external factors are the availability of suitable products, advice of travel agents, information obtained from tourism organizations and travel media, and word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family,

special promotions from tourism organizations and

the climate or destination of the region.

Foreign tourists   Tourists from other countries who are

traveling to Thailand for the first time with the sole

purpose of tourism.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter explores the importance of the tourism industry in Thailand, communication channels in the tourism industry, decision-making factors, and finally, research related to the tourism industry, communication channels and decision-making factors.

Tourism Industry in Thailand

In their work, "Tourism and Economic Development in Asia and Australasia" Frank Go and Carson Jenkins (1996: 287) trace the development of Tourism in Thailand. They noted that the foundation for international tourism in Thailand was laid starting in the 1850s when the Thai kings, Rama IV followed by Rama V encouraged international trading in Thailand. Foreign trade brought to Thailand not only flows of capital, but also a flow of investors, traders and occasional tourists. Guesthouses and hotels appeared in Thailand during the nineteenth century in response to the demand for lodging. The Thai tourism industry increased during the Vietnam War years, 1962 to 1975. The presence of US forces inspired the development of an extensive entertainment industry in Thailand which included restaurants, bars, massage parlors, night clubs and brothels. The Thai tourism industry

became of important economic value to the nation in the year 1982, when tourism revenue

became, for the first time, the largest foreign exchange earner for the

According to a study by the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI.

2001: 64), foreign tourist arrivals in Thailand have continuously increased. In 1987, a

special program, "Travel To Thailand", was organized by the government to raise foreign

tourists' intentions to travel to Thailand. This program caused an increase in the volume of

foreign tourists traveling to Thailand even though many unexpected events occurred such

as the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and the economic crisis in 1997. The Thailand tourism

industry continued in the growth trend from 1995 until 2005 aided by the "Amazing

Thailand" promotional program (see Appendix A, page 82) in the years from 1998 to 2000

and the devaluation of the Thai currency. Between 1990 and 1998, Thailand was

recognized as the twenty-first largest tourist destination in the world based on tourist

arrivals.

The Year-End 2002 Economic Review of the Bangkokpost Newspaper

(Bangkokpost, 2005) reported that the year 2002 ended with visitor arrivals of 10.79 million,

up 7.3 percent over 2001. Thailand's tourism industry rode out the post-September 11 crisis

better than many of its Asia-Pacific counterparts, but the lingering possibility of a US-Iraq

war led to a slowdown in the global tourism market as people grew more reluctant to travel.

In 2003, Thailand's tourism industry dealt with the impact of an outbreak of the

disease; SARS, and the threat of terrorism. Visitor arrivals ended at 10.08 million, down 7.36

percent over 2002. The number of visitors from Europe fell and US arrivals suffered a significant drop due to concerns over terrorism and SARS. At the same time, the number of Chinese, Hong Kong and Singaporean visitors dropped sharply due to travel restrictions placed on them by their governments, while Japanese and tourists from other countries were scared away by reports of increasing SARS infection levels in Southeast Asia. Even the government tried to rescue the industry as it was one of the country's largest foreign-exchange earners by marketing and assuring visitors that Thailand was a SARS-free country (Bangkokpost. 2005).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) reported the tourism situation in 2004 with international tourist arrivals during the first ten months at Don Muang International Airport at 6.59 million, up 22 percent from the same period the previous year. From November 1 to November 20, 2004, the number of international tourists at the airport was up 16% year-on-year to 540,000 (TAT. 2005). Unfortunately, at the end of 2004, the tsunami disaster happened in the Andaman Sea region of Thailand. This crisis caused a difficult situation for the tourism industry of Thailand. In February 2005, TAT governor, Mrs. Juthamas Siriwan, reported that approximately 90 percent of all accommodation in the Andaman Sea area was vacant: 26,762 rooms in 472 hotels available in Phuket, 9,042 rooms in 292 hotels in Krabi, and 1,098 rooms in 46 hotels in Phang Nga (TAT. 2005). The Thailand Tourism Council president Wichi Na Ranong noted that prior to the tsunami, Phuket, Krabi and Phang Nga attracted more than four million tourists a year and generated

combined revenue of 120 billion Baht. The Phuket International Airport recorded 159,423

tourist arrivals between January and May 2005, compared to 487,419 arrivals during the

same period in 2004, a drop of 67 per cent, while Don Muang International Airport received

3,184,496 visitors between January and May 2005, compared to 3,182,481 in 2004, an

increased of just 0.06 per cent (Thaiwebsites. 2005). People in the Andaman Sea area, who

previously earned their income from tourism, were affected. The Final Report of the Action

Plan for Tourism Development in Krabi, Trang, Satun, and Pattalung Provinces Study

Program, done in the year 2002 (Thailand Science and Technology Research Institute.

2002: 2-51), reported that the incomes of the people in these four provinces were mainly

related to tourism as shown in TABLE 3.

TABLE 3 THE OCCUPATIONS OF THE PEOPLE IN KRABI, TRANG, SATUN, AND
PATTALUNG PROVINCES THAT ARE RELATED TO TOURISM

Description	Percentage
Income related to tourism:	
- No	26.1
- Yes	73.9
Total	100.0
Occupations related to Tourism:	
- Souvenir selling	13.4
- Tour guides	12.1
- Goods, food selling	46.3
- Handicrafts	6.0
- Culture and traditional shows	0.7
- Boat rental	6.7
- Accommodation or room rental	6.1
- Car rentals	7.4
- Other	1.3
Total	100.0

In brief, the tourism industry of Thailand, which started in the 1850s, has developed into a major source of foreign exchange income. Along with its development, the tourism industry created occupations for Thai people and increased their income. Many unexpected events have caused declines in the industry over time. However, the people, companies, and organizations in the Thailand tourism field have time and again responded and developed the industry. The December 2004 the tsunami disaster created new challenges for the industry: to maintain jobs, the reputation of Thailand as a desirable tourist destination, and the income of the nation.

Communication Channels in the Tourism Industry

Communication is considered a process because it is an active and changing event or set of behaviors. It is an activity in which people participate (William Seiler. 1992: 11).

According to Emmert and Donaghy, the structural elements of the communication process are sender, message, channel, receiver, gatekeeper, and opinion leader (1984: 346), each element of the communication process is important for successful communication to occur. The sender is a person or group of people who wish to communicate a message. The sender element must be divided into two parts: a single source or a group source that needs to communicate to an audience, and an encoder or an expert in transmitting the desired message. The message is the information which the

sender desires to communicate. The communication channel is the means by which the message is transmitted. When a message is intended for a large number of diverse people, a channel of mass communication must be selected. Emmert and Donaghy (1984: 348) cited the mass communication theorist, Marshall McLuhan, who said that the medium was the message. By this statement McLuhan meant that the channel used to transmit a message had a profound influence on how the message was perceived by the message receiver. Receivers actually perceive messages differently when transmitted by radio, television, newspapers, or by other communication channels. The next element in the communication process is the receiver, or audience, who has the power to filter and select what he or she wishes to hear or see. A unique element in the mass communication process is the gatekeeper who is any person or group having the power to filter or distort a message before it finally reaches the intended receiver, for example, editors, proofreaders, television or radio station owners, magazine distributors, government agencies, and newscasters. The last element is the opinion leader or the person who has the ability to influence what the receiver believes relative to what he or she receives through communication. The opinion leader is similar to high-status persons in small groups or organizations with whom others check before they make a decision or take an action.

Communication channels in the tourism industry are important elements in the communication process. The channel selected to transmit a message has a profound influence on how the message is perceived by the message receiver. A communication

channel can refer to any media such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, radio, television, the Internet, word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family, and travel agencies.

Christian Neilson (2001: 11) citing Laws (1991) said that the earliest recorded instance of mass tourism occurred in 1841 when Thomas Cook organized a train journey from Leicester to Loughborough. The tour was a success. Cook later ran a weekend trip from Leicester to Liverpool, this time printing a brochure for the event in his own print shop. With great foresight, Cook recognized the importance of the connection between the medium of communication, in this case the printed brochure, and the information it conveyed. It is one of the earliest examples of the relationship between tourism and the media.

Associate Professor Chalongsri Pimolsompong (2003: 117) mentioned that the most important factors that contributes to successful tourism marketing is sales aid production which includes booklets, brochures, posters, postcards, tourist magazines, press kits, travel kits, guidebooks, display materials, billboards, and mailings.

Neilson (2001: 111) argued that to be successful, the communication channels must be able to sell to the public the information that is offered. Success means staying in business.

Neilson (2001: 128) also cited the research of the US Travel and Tourism Administration (USTTA) that conducted research in its most important markets to know more

about the sources used by potential tourists in planning trips to the USA. The USTTA found

that Japanese tourists most used brochures, but British, German, and French tourists most

used travel agencies as their communication channels for planning trips to the USA. The

results showed that tourists from the different countries did trip planning by seeking tourism

information from different information sources or communication channels. Sales volumes of

tourism products can be increased through the use of different channels of information if the

communication channels are selected for the right tourist groups.

Awareness of travel destinations is created and enhanced by travel reporting in

the media, guidebooks and other documentaries such as nature films (Buhalis and Laws.

2001: 63; citing Laws. 1995). Electronic online systems are regarded as increasingly

important information sources (and booking avenues) for the future. The following is the

order of importance of the major communication channels in the year 2005 as predicted by

Muller, cited by Buhalis and Laws in 2001 (2001: 63):

1. Online information via the Internet, telnets, etc.

2. Radio, TV features, videos

3. Recommendations of acquaintances and family

4. Other books, magazines

5. Travel guides

6. Travel agency advice

7. Travel destination decisions reached without using these information sources

8. Travel operators' catalogues, brochures

Middleton (1994: 191) defined the print media as a part of marketing communication. Marketing communication can be any form of printed material paid for out of marketing budgets, designed to create awareness among existing and prospective customers and stimulate demand for specific products, or facilitate their purchase, use and enjoyment. The types of printed material used in marketing travel and tourism products are brochures, leaflets, posters, direct mail letters, magazines, directories, and timetables. The purpose of printed materials in travel and tourism are creating awareness, sending promotional messages, offering promotional specials, playing product substitute roles, making reassurance, facilitating product use and information, and providing education.

This study will focus on newspapers, magazines, brochures, television, radio, the Internet, word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family, and travel agencies as these eight communication channels represent a grouping of the "channels" listed by Muller and Middleton.

A. Newspapers

Newspapers, today, primarily serve economic and educational functions with persuasion, entertainment, and socialization as secondary functions (Emmert and Donaghy. 1984: 368).

In the travel industry, virtually every tourism organization uses newspapers (Neilson. 2001: 30; citing Reilly. 1990). They represent the dominant medium for travel

principals—particularly for advertising. Potential travelers have an understanding of this close relationship, and are conditioned to look to newspapers for travel information. (See Appendix A, page 83.)

B. Magazines

Neilson (2001: 31) argued that magazines overcome some of the weaknesses in newspapers. The color is clearer and more attractive in a magazine's glossy form. Magazines are more audience-specific, and generally have a longer shelf life. Readers of magazines are usually more affluent, which offers many opportunities for advertising. However, magazines also encounter certain problems as a communication channel. They are more costly to produce, and this makes placement costs higher. (See Appendix A, page 84.)

C. Brochures

In theory, the role of brochures is much replaced by the current technology, including radio cassettes, video, films, computerized images, video-text, and on-line communications between a principal's stock of products and a consumer's home TV set. But the physical value of attractively produced print, and its ability to inspire images and dreams, appears to be critical in travel and tourism (Middleton. 1994: 198).

D. Television

Television has generally been held to be the most effective advertising medium— entering more houses and thus gaining access to greater audiences. Chalongsri Pimolsompong (2003: 108) mentions that the most used communication channel in the

tourism industry is television. Television is the most effective means while it also has the weakness of its high cost.

E. Radio

Radio has been described as an intimate and selective medium. Other advantages are that it is flexible, transmission can be altered on very short notice and it is inexpensive to produce (Neilson. 2001: 31). Radio remains an important marketing communication channel.

F. The Internet

Wahab and Cooper (2001: 87) noted that the Internet and technology in general would facilitate one-to-one marketing, as specialized products could be distributed directly to the right market segments. Offering specialized products on-line would not only improve the specialization of the industry, but it would also enable the reduction in the number of brochures used for the promotion of tourism products, reducing both the printing costs as well as the environmental damage caused by their production and distribution.

Buhalis (Neilson. 2001: 131; citing Buhalis. 1996) said that Information Technology (IT) plays an increasingly important role in tourism marketing, distribution, promotion, and coordination. The phenomenal growth and the impact of the Internet cannot be ignored by media practitioners as it is becoming the way forward in communication in general, and tourism communications in particular (Neilson. 2001: 39). Neilson also cited Sheldon (1994) who stated that the tourism and travel industry is considered to be one of

the largest users of IT. IT is becoming a vital link in the dissemination of information, and in

the process of tourists searching for information upon which to base decision-making. (See

Appendix A, page 85.)

G. Word-of-mouth or Recommendations of Reference Groups Including Friends and Family

Murray (Buhalis and Low. 2001; citing Raitz and Dakhil. 1989; Murray. 1991;

Sheldon. 1993; Fodness and Murray. 1997) believed that many researchers agree that

personal sources of information, including previous experience and word-of-mouth

recommendations from friends and acquaintances is the most important factor in risk

reduction strategies when planning a trip.

The Final Report of Action Plan for Tourism Development in Krabi, Trang, Satun,

and Pattalung Study Programs (2002: 5-43) showed that the Thai tourists knew these

tourism places firstly from personal recommendations, or word-of-mouth, secondly, by

reading books and magazines, and lastly by information from travel agencies. The foreign

tourists knew the places from the Internet, word-of-mouth, books and magazines, and travel

agencies respectively (TABLE 4).

TABLE 4 THE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS ACCESSED BY TOURISTS TO FIND

INFORMATION ON TRAVELING TO PLACES IN KRABI, TRANG, SATUN, AND

PATTALUNG PROVINCES

Communication Channel	Thai tourists	Foreign tourists
The Internet	12.26	34.80
Travel agencies	18.97	14.19
Tourism organizations	8.62	8.95
Books and magazines	27.97	19.43
Personal recommendations/word-of-mouth	30.07	21.7
Television	2.11	0.84
Total	100	100

H. Travel Agencies

Luiz Moutinho (1995: 161) stated that travel agencies have much influence in the

travel decision process and hence have become more important, both to the traveler and

the destination area, the greater the distance from the point of the visitor to the destination.

They are often the first and most influential link in the tourist flow chain. Travel agencies are

also gatekeepers of information.   They provide information about destinations even if

travelers do not choose to use their services. This source of information can be considered

as an induced image formation agent critical to perceptions travelers hold about different

destination areas. The role of travel agencies is to provide and distribute information and

organize the information search process for the potential traveler.   External sources of

information are minimized for the individual if they choose to use the services of a travel

agency.

Decision-making Factors in the Tourism Industry

Buhalis and Laws (2001: 61) cited Gee and Fayos-Sola (1997) whose survey

showed that one of the key roles for travel agencies was that of advising customers about

the suitability and quality of various travel products. It is important to understand the ways

in which consumers make their choices. A key function of tourism is to provide consumers

with information and to influence their choice of holiday products. In most decisions, the

information-gathering stage will be purposive, i.e. to establish a 'go or not go' criteria. It is

important to understand the factors that influence tourist's decision making.

FIGURE 1 shows the decision-making factors that influence tourists to decide to

travel to any particular place. Horner and Swarbrooke (1999: 74) classified tourism

decision-making factors into two groups: internal factors and external factors. The internal

factors that influence tourist decision-making are their own personal characteristics such as:

the personal motivators, personalities, disposable incomes, health, past experiences,

hobbies and interests, existing knowledge of potential holidays, life styles, and attitudes,

opinions, and perceptions. The external factors are the availability of suitable products,

advice of travel agents, information obtained from tourism organizations and travel media,

and word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family,

special promotions from tourism organizations and the climate or destination in the region.

Internal to the tourist | External to the tourist

Personal motivators

Personality

Availability of suitable products

Advice of travel agents

Disposable income

Information obtained from destinations, tourism organizations and travel media

Health

Decision

Word-of-mouth recommendations of friends and family

Past experiences

Special promotions from tourism organizations

Hobbies and interests

Existing knowledge of potential holidays

The climate/destination of region

Lifestyles

Attitudes, opinions and perceptions

Figure 1 Factors influencing tourist decision-making
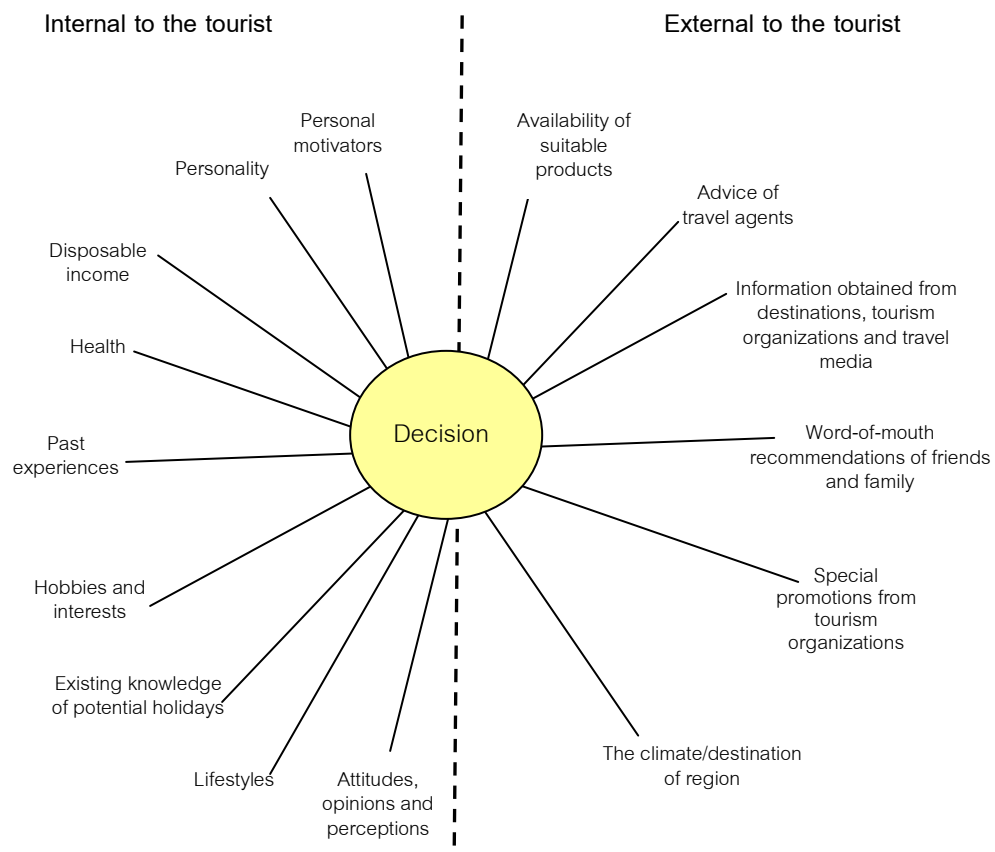
Each of these factors is discussed below.

Internal Factors Influencing Tourist Decision-Making

Personal motivators are a dynamic process in buyer behavior, bridging the gap

between the felt need and the decision to act or purchase. A powerful personal motivator is

one that triggers action. It is in this sense that products can be designed, marketed, and

presented to prospective purchasers as solutions to customers' needs (Middleton. 1994: 56).

Personality is the type of person the buyer is. Personality strongly influences the types of products that are bought, and determines the sort of advertising and other communication messages that are targeted at different personalities (Buhalis and Laws. 2001: 317).

Disposable income is the factor that determines which tourist groups will consume more or less leisure services and spend more or less money while they demand better tourism services (Buhalis and Laws. 2001: 319).

Health was firstly about exploiting natural phenomena, such as mineral springs and sea water for medicinal benefits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This factor gradually grew into spa resorts, thalassotherapy, fitness centers and medical treatment to improve tourists' physical and mental health (Swarbrooke and Horner. 1999: 33). Today, healthcare is a reason to decide to travel to a tourist destination.

Past experiences are the collection of tourists' satisfactions with tourism products. It is possible for any of the many companies providing services and products during the journey, or while in the destination, to affect customer satisfaction, either by pleasing them or by not meeting their expectations (Buhalis and Laws. 2001: 65).

Hobbies and interests are special interests and activity holidays that attract larger numbers of holidaymakers who take the opportunity for personal development and

exploration to learn about other cultures, history and customs (Weiler and Hall. 1992; Ryan 1997 cited by Wahab and Cooper). People may use the time to practise a favorite sport, such as skiing, tennis, etc.; explore an area for a specific interest, e.g. archaeology, architecture; learn a new skill, such as cooking, painting; or simply interact with local people to meet, understand and appreciate the local culture (Wahab and Cooper. 2001: 76).

Existing knowledge of potential holidays includes tourism or destination information selected and remembered by travelers from various channels. Existing knowledge of potential holidays motivates travelers to decide to participate in different activities such as sports, health, resting, relaxing, cultural education, etc. (Middleton. 1994: 52).

Lifestyles are the ways of living, characterized by the manner in which people spend their time (activities), what things they consider important (interests) and how they feel about themselves and the world around them (opinions) Morrison (Wahab and Cooper. 2001; citing Morrison. 1989). Lifestyles are difficult and subjective factors (Wahab and Cooper. 2001: 89) but one's lifestyle has an impact on the decision to travel to one destination on another.

Attitudes, opinions and perceptions extend to beliefs and knowledge of products as well as to people and events. They change over time through a constant learning process influenced by experience, advertising and hearsay (Middleton. 1994: 55).

External Factors Influencing Tourist Decision-Making

Availability of suitable products includes suitable cost, availability in a particular

market, and various psychological benefits such as the exclusivity of a particular type of

holiday component such as hotels, modes of transport or available activities (Buhalis and

Laws. 2001: 64). The availability of suitable products is important and essential to create a

profit for the tourism industry, it includes the right product, right place, right time, right price

and right quantity (Charumanee Nikom. 1993: 206).

Advice of travel agents is an important source of information for a large

proportion of holiday purchasers. Buhalis and Laws cited Woodside and Ronkainen (1980)

saying that the longer the distance is to be traveled, the more reliance there is on travel

agents, especially when traveling to foreign countries (Buhalis and Laws. 2001: 61).

Information obtained from destinations, tourism organizations and travel media is

the information about destinations provided to travelers. These sources of information can

be considered as induced image formation agents critical to the perceptions travelers hold

about different destination areas.   They have great power to influence and direct consumer

demand when compared with their counterparts in other industries. They also create the

link between the producers of tourism services and their customers (Moutinho. 1995: 161).

Word-of-mouth or recommendations of friends and family is an important factor in

risk reduction strategies when holidaymakers do trip planning (Buhalis and Laws. 2001: 64).

Travelers feel more secure about travel decisions when they have advice from trusted

individuals. Middleton (1994: 54) stated that word-of-mouth is information accessed by individuals through their family, friends, and the groups of people with whom they interact at work and socially. Word-of-mouth is influential on purchase decisions.

Special promotions from tourism organizations are discount fares, package tours, VAT refunds to tourists, hotel privilege cards, or free air tickets (Pimolsompong. 2003: 119). Promotions also influence travel decisions.

The climate/destination of the region can be a factor for holidaymakers from northern or cold regions who traditionally 'escape' for a certain period of time to southern and warmer destinations, or to destinations to enjoy the sea, landscapes, or mountains in order to relax, 'recharge their batteries', restore their physical and mental strength for hard work at home (Wahab and Cooper. 2001: 77; citing Krippendorf. 1987).

Swarbrooke and Horner (1999: 45) cited Kotler and Armstrong who defined a service as any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product. The intangible nature of the service offered has a considerable effect on the consumer during the decision-making process. This means that tourism involves the consumer in a high risk decision-making process. This also means that the consumer is highly interested and involved in the decision-making process, since there is a considerable amount of risk associated with the purchase decision.

Pimolsompong (2003: 33) argued that tourists are consumers whose needs of products and services are different from other types of consumers. Tourists are involved in committing large sums of money to something which cannot be seen or evaluated before purchase. The cost of a failed holiday is irreversible. If a holiday goes wrong that is it for another year. Most people do not have the additional vacation time or money to make good the holiday that went wrong.

In order to meet the needs of this kind of consumer, tourism organizations and people working in the tourism industry need to study and analyze tourist decision-making factors.

Middleton (1994: 50) presented a stimulus-response model of tourist buyer behavior. The model is shown in FIGURE 2. The model has four interactive components: stimulus input, communication channels, buyer characteristics and decision process, and purchase outputs. The first two components are inputs, most of which can be manipulated by marketing managers, the third component is the central process while the final component represents the purchase output.

Stimulus Input	Communication Channels	Buyer Characteristics and decision process	Purchase outputs (response)

Communication filters   Motivation

| Range of competitive products produced and marketed by the tourist industry | Advertising Sales promotion Brochures Personal selling PR -------------------- Friends Family Reference groups | Learning   Perceptions   Experience | Demographics economic and social positions Psychographics characteristics Needs Wants Goals Attitudes | Product Brand Price Outlet |

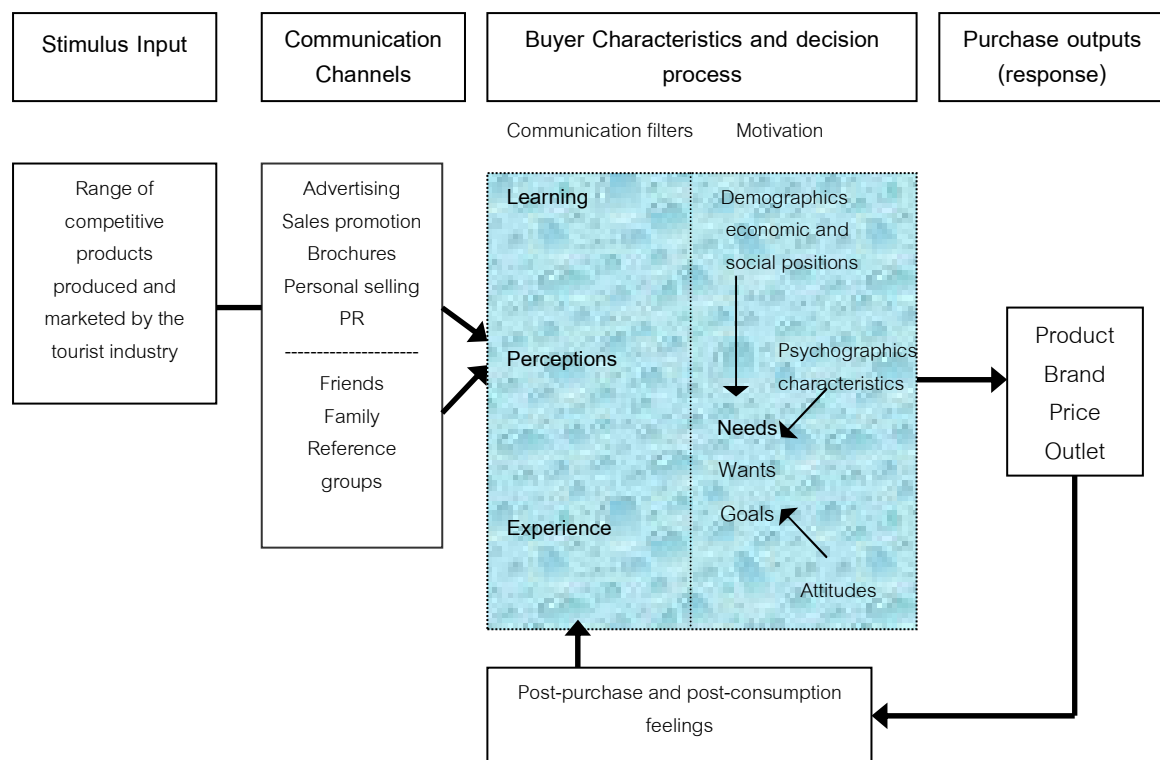Post-purchase and post-consumption feelings

FIGURE 2 A STIMULUS-RESPONSE MODEL OF TOURIST BUYER BEHAVIOR

The first component is the stimulus input or product input. This is the whole range of competitive products and product mixes that are made available to the prospective customer.

The second component is the communication channels which have two parts: formal communication channels or media, aimed at persuading prospective buyers through advertising, brochures, sales promotions and public relations (PR) activities; and informal communication channels or information accessible to individuals through their family and friends and the groups of people with whom they interact at work and socially. This is sometimes referred to as 'word of mouth' communication.

The third component includes buyer characteristics and the decision-making process with the central focus of needs, wants and goals. There are three main interacting elements, which determine an individual buyer's disposition to act in certain ways. The three elements act sometimes as constraints on purchase decisions and sometimes provide or reinforce motivation.   The three elements are discussed below:

1. Demographic, economic and social positions are easily quantifiable characteristics such as age, sex, occupation, region of residence, household size and social class.

2. Psychographic attributes indicate the type of person the buyer is and strongly influence the types of products that are bought. These attributes also determine the sort of advertising and other communication messages to which the buyer responds.

3. Attitude is a mental state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a direct influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which the attitude is related (Middleton. 1994:55). Attitudes extend to beliefs and knowledge of products as well as to people and events. Attitudes cover feelings, such as likes and dislikes aroused, and a disposition to act or not act because of such beliefs and feelings.

These three elements interact and influence an individual's needs, wants and goals. Individuals have a range of needs and aspirations according to the well-known hierarchy established by Maslow in 1943. These extend from immediate basic physical needs for food, warmth, shelter and sleep, through safety and social needs for affection and

love, to self-esteem and status needs, to the most sophisticated level of self-development

needs or self-actualization in Maslow's terms. These are represented in FIGURE 2 by the

terms "Needs, Wants, goals". Self-development needs relate to people's striving for

personal fulfillment of their potential as individuals. Self-development needs are unlikely to

become very important until most, if not all, the lower order needs are satisfied on a

reasonably regular basis. Individuals with a high propensity to participate in travel and

tourism are most likely to be in a position to focus on their own self-development. Travel and

tourism has been associated with a broadening of awareness and self-recognition through

added knowledge and exposure to other cultures and human circumstances. Also, the

personal goals influencing behavior patterns include the respect of friends, the influencing

of peer groups, the achievement of a happy domestic life, or achievement and status in

employment or voluntary work. Travel and tourism can be used as a means of achieving

personal goals. Psychological theory holds that needs, wants and goals generate

uncomfortable states of tension within individuals' minds and bodies, tension that cannot be

released until the needs are satisfied. States of tension, including hunger, fatigue, and

loneliness, as well as the drive for self-development, are the motivators that produce actions

to release tension states. Motivations therefore are the dynamic process in buyer behavior,

bridging the gap between the felt need and the decision to act or purchase.

The communication filters presented in FIGURE 2 are the final element in the

buyer decision process: experience, learning, and perceptions that are influenced strongly

by attitudes. Perception is the term used to cover the way individuals select and organize the mass of information they are exposed to, and perception is a function of attitude. Perception is influenced by personal attitudes, by motivations, knowledge and interesting products; it may also be influenced by experience, advertising and hearsay. It changes over time through a constant learning process. If the perceived positive aspects of product design and promotion can be enhanced, and the perceived negative aspects can be reduced through consumer research that throws light on perception processes, more cost effective marketing expenditure should result.

The fourth and final component of FIGURE 2 is the purchase outputs and the post-purchase and post-consumption feelings. The list of the outputs of the decision process includes the product, brand, price, and distribution outlet. These decisions are related to the individuals' personal circumstances and linked to the buyers' characteristics. The experience of consumption will affect all future attitudes. Post-purchase feelings considered satisfactory will lead to repeat purchases and the likelihood of good 'word of mouth'. If the tourist experience was unsatisfactory, the opposite will occur, the consumer may never buy that product again.

Based on the above cited theories and the research on communication channels and tourist purchasing decision-making factors, it is possible to determine the most influential and effective communication channels and decision-making factors that influence foreigners to travel to Thailand. To identify the channels and factors that are the most

influential, and to use this information effectively may be one of the keys to sustaining and/or developing the Thai tourism industry. This may also contribute to the goal set by the Thai government of creating a reputation for Thailand as a "World Class Destination with Thai Identity by the Year 2012" (TDRI. 2001:5).

Previous Research

A collection of studies related to communication channels and decision-making factors in the tourism industry from various sources are presented below.

Siriluk Ariyapunyothai studied the "Effectiveness of Public Relations Media in The Amazing Thailand Project Under the Tourism Authority of Thailand" (1997) by using questionnaires to survey 449 respondents. It was found that the communication channels: TAT officers, television, magazines, a CD ROM, and the Internet; had a high correlation to Thai tourist's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior towards the Amazing Thailand Project.

In a study on "The Communication of National Identity Portrayed in Tourism Authority of Thailand's TV Commercials" Sirima Yuwiangchai (1998) interviewed TAT advertising officers, and advertising agencies on TAT strategies towards advertising campaigns and the contents of 21 TV commercials. Yuwiangchai found that the TV commercials created awareness of Thai tourism in foreign audiences and also influenced the audiences to travel to Thailand.

Sittichai Nuansate made "A Study of Association between Attitude towards Tourism and Media Exposure and Seaside Touring Behavior of Thai Tourists in Phuket" (2003) by using a questionnaire as a tool to survey 500 Thai tourist respondents. He found that the attitude of Thai tourists overall was associated with media exposure with a statistical significance at the 0.05 level. The communication channels that Thai tourists used to search for tourism information were television at 57.2%, word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family at 14.8%, the Internet at 8.6%, magazines at 6.0%, travel guide books at 5.2%, newspapers at 4.0%, radio at 2.4%, and brochures at 1.6%. However, the study found that the communication channels were used primarily to provide the information and education about Thai tourism rather than influence the tourists to decide to purchase tourism products. The study found that the communication channels used did not motivate buying behavior of the Thai tourists. The tourists' decision-making factors to take trips to Phuket were, in order of importance: personal motivation, stress release, low cost compared to out-bound trips, and influential Public Relations actions informing tourists of the benefits of travel in general.

"The Factors of Attitude and Buying Behavior towards the Thai Handicraft Products of the Foreign Tourist in Jatujak Market" was studied by Messaya Sodsee (2003) by using questionnaires for a survey of 400 respondents. It was found that foreign tourists received information about Jatujak market mostly from word-of-mouth or recommendations

of reference groups including friends and family, and secondarily from newspapers/magazines/tourism journals, and the Internet.

Rattana Choomcom (2003) studied "The Factor of Thai Internet User Behavior towards the Website for Inbound Tourism: a case study of www.sabuy.com" by using questionnaires to survey 385 respondents. It was found that 67.72% of the respondents gained benefits by searching the site for tourism information to make decisions. The effective communication channels for making decisions were the Internet, word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family, television, radio, and magazines in that order.

"The Factors of Integrated Marketing Communication that are Associated with Buying Behavior of Outbound Tour Services from Travel Agencies of Thai Tourists in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area" was studied by Narumol Julnongyai (2004) by using questionnaires for the survey of 385 respondents. It was found that television, magazines, and newspapers were influential communication channels for Thai tourists' deciding to travel overseas. The main decision-making factors for the Thai tourists to decide to travel abroad were the climate/destination of the region, and safety in transportation.

These studies demonstrate some similarities and differences in the influence of various communication channels on tourist decision-making factors. It is hoped that this study will add significantly to the growing body of knowledge about communication

channels and decision-making factors in the tourism industry, and in particular with regard

to foreign tourists' decisions to travel to Thailand.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the subjects, or respondents in the study, as well as the procedures to collect and analyze the data are described.

Subjects of the Study

One hundred foreign tourists participated in this study. They were randomly chosen based on the following four criteria: (1) they were tourists who were traveling to Thailand for the purpose of tourism only, (2) this was their first trip to Thailand, (3) they were nationals of East Asia, Europe, the Americas, or South Asia, and (4) the respondents were the individuals who made the decisions to make the trip to Thailand.

Procedures of the Study

Survey Research

The survey included one hundred respondents and was conducted using a questionnaire. Data collected was reviewed and analyzed quantitatively to define the communication channels and decision-making factors that most influenced foreign tourists to travel to Thailand.

Research Tool

The questionnaire was divided into three parts:

1. Personal information

2. Communication channels

3. Decision-making factors

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to establish the basic personal information on the respondents: gender and age. This was used as background information only. The second part was designed to determine the communication channels and the decision-making factors that most influenced the respondents to travel to Thailand.

As East Asian respondents rarely use English, the questionnaire was prepared in three languages: English, Japanese, and Chinese. The purpose of having three languages was to facilitate the responses of the respondents from different countries. (See Appendix B, pages 86-92.)

Data Collection

The survey was conducted in December 2005 during weekends and on public holidays. The survey was conducted in Bangkok and Chonburi provinces at popular tourist sites. The questionnaires were distributed and collected by the researcher and three English, Japanese and Chinese speaking assistants. The questionnaires were explained in detail to the randomly selected respondents and their questions were answered. The sample group of this study was divided into 4 sub-groups, each roughly proportional to the

foreign arrival share of tourists to Thailand based on Tourism Authority of Thailand statistics on tourist arrivals in Thailand for the year 2003, as shown in TABLE 2. Therefore, the sizes of the sub-groups were 60 respondents from East Asia, 25 respondents from Europe, 10 respondents from The Americas, and 5 respondents from South Asia, for a total of 100 respondents.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires were analyzed to determine which communication channels and which decision-making factors most influenced the foreign tourists to decide to travel to Thailand. The findings of the data analysis led to conclusions, discussion and recommendations for further study included in Chapters 4 and 5.

Basic statistical principles were applied to this study, i.e. means, percentages and ratios.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. Details of the data obtained from the completed questionnaires are divided into the three parts of the questionnaire:

PART I: PERSONAL INFORMATION

PART II: COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

PART III: DECISION-MAKING FACTORS

Summaries and interpretations of the data gathered are presented and discussed in the order of the questions in the questionnaire. Tables are drawn to display the findings in averages, percentages and a brief discussion is presented below each table.

One hundred tourists were randomly selected in Bangkok: Grand Palace, Wat Pho Temple, Wat Tri-Mitr Temple; and Chonburi Provinces: Pattaya and Bang Saen Beaches. The sample group was interviewed by the use of questionnaires. All respondents were screened to ensure conformity with the four selection criteria: 1) they were all tourists who were traveling to Thailand for the purpose of tourism, 2) this was their first trip to Thailand, 3) they were nationals of East Asia, Europe, the Americas, or South Asia in proportion to the 2003 arrival statistics of the TAT, and 4) the respondents were the individuals who made the decisions to make the trip to Thailand.

I. PERSONAL INFORMATION

The personal information provided by the respondents reflects the trip decider's profile. The demographic information on the one hundred respondents is recapped below in terms of nationality, gender, and age.

TABLE 5 NATIONALITY OF THE RESPONDENTS

Region	Nationality		Number of Tourists	Percentage
East Asia :	Japanese	= 27	60	60
	Chinese	= 13		
	Korean	= 9		
	Malaysian	= 3		
	Singaporean	= 3		
	Hong Kongian	= 2		
	Brunei	= 1		
	Cambodian	= 1		
	Indonesian	= 1		
Europe :	British	= 8	25	25
	Swedish	= 5		
	German	= 4		
	French	= 3		
	Austrian	= 2		
	Danish	= 1		
	Norwegian	= 1		
	Swiss	= 1		
The Americas :	American	= 6	10	10
	Canadian	= 4		
South Asia :	Indian	= 4	5	5
	Srilankan	= 1		
Total			100	100

TABLE 5 shows that 60% of the respondents were from the East Asia, 25% were European, 10% were from the Americas. The remaining 5% were South Asian. This distribution corresponds to the ratio of tourist arrivals provided by TAT in 2003 (TAT. 2005).

TABLE 6 GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS

Gender	Number of Tourists	Percentages
Male	62	62
Female	38	38
Total	100	100

TABLE 6 demonstrates that 62% of the respondents were male and 38% were female.

For more detail on the respondents' gender, TABLE 7 provides the male: female ratio of the deciders by region and national market. The randomly selected respondents were often part of a couple or group. In this case, the question was asked, "Who decided to make this trip to Thailand?" the "decider" was thereby identified.

TABLE 7 GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS BY REGION AND NATIONALITY

Region	Nationality	Male Deciders (%)	Female Deciders (%)	Total
East Asia :	Japanese	16	11	27
	Chinese	7	6	13
	Korean	8	1	9
	Malaysian	1	2	3
	Singaporean	2	1	3
	Hong Kongian	1	1	2
	Brunei	0	1	1
	Cambodian	1	0	1
	Indonesian	1	0	1
Europe :	British	4	4	8
	Swedish	4	1	5
	German	3	1	4
	French	2	1	3
	Austrian	1	1	2
	Danish	1	0	1
	Norwegian	1	0	1
	Swiss	1	0	1
The Americas :	American	3	3	6
	Canadian	2	2	4
South Asia :	Indian	3	1	4
	Srilankan	0	1	1
Total		62	38	100

It is interesting to note that the Korean market was the most dominated by male deciders (88.8%).

TABLE 8 AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Age	Number of Tourists	Percentages
15 - 25	40	40
26 - 35	33	33
36 - 45	14	14
46 - 55	5	5
56 - 65	6	6
Over 65	2	2
Total	100	100

The respondents between the ages of 15-25 were the largest group, at 40% of the total respondents. The respondents between the ages of 26-35 represented 33% of all respondents, between 36 and 45 represented 14%, between 56 and 65 represented 6%, and between 46 and 55 represented 5%. Respondents over 60 years of age represented only 2% of all respondents.

In summary, having an age/gender profile of trip deciders in each national market will be useful for choosing communication channels and designing message contents.

II COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The one hundred respondents were asked to answer three answers about the communication channels that most influenced them to travel to Thailand; therefore, 300 replies concerning communication channels were made by the 100 respondents. The findings below present the sample group's choices among the eight communication channels that most influenced them to travel to Thailand. The replies regarding the levels of influence of the communication channels were made in three levels: "Most Influence", "Medium Influence" and "Least Influence". "Least Influence" means the least influential of the three communication channels that most influenced the respondents. The results of this part of the questionnaire are presented in TABLE 9.

TABLE 9 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Communication Channels	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Newspapers	4	2	11	17	5.67
Magazines	7	15	18	40	13.33
Brochures	8	8	18	34	11.33
Television	25	25	7	57	19.00
Radio	0	0	1	1	0.33
The Internet	19	30	14	63	21.00
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	30	15	13	58	19.33
Travel agencies	7	5	18	30	10.00
Others	0	0	0	0	0.00
Total	100	100	100	300	100.00

TABLE 9 demonstrates that of the respondent choices for the "Most" influential communication channel, 30% ranked "Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family" most influential, 25% ranked "Television" most influential, and 19% ranked "The Internet" as the most influential. At the second, or "Medium" level of influence, 30% of the respondent replies ranked the "Internet" first, 25% ranked "Television" first and 15% ranked both "Magazines" and "Word-of-mouth…" first. At the third level, or "Least" level of communication channel influence on travel decision making, "Magazines", "Brochures" and "Travel agencies" were ranked first by the respondents with 18% of the respondent choices each. These were followed by "The Internet" with 14% and "Word-of-mouth…" with 13% of respondent choices.

Grouping all respondent replies, TABLE 9 illustrates that 63 (21.00%) of the respondent replies ranked "The Internet" as the most influential communication channel followed by "Word of mouth…" 58 (19.33%) of all respondent replies and "Television" with 57 (19.00%) of all respondent replies. "Magazines", "Brochures", and "Travel agencies" were of secondary influence.

To analyze the data by categorizing the respondents into the four regions identified in this study, TABLEs 10–13 present the respondents' choices of the communication channels that most influenced East Asian, European, American, and South Asian tourists to travel to Thailand.

TABLE 10 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: EAST ASIAN REGION

Communication Channels	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Newspapers	3	1	5	9	5.00
Magazines	7	10	10	27	15.00
Brochures	8	7	9	24	13.00
Television	19	11	7	37	20.56
Radio	0	0	1	1	0.50
The Internet	7	20	9	36	20.00
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	12	9	8	29	16.11
Travel agencies	4	2	11	17	9.83
Others	0	0	0	0	0.00
Total	60	60	60	180	100.00

TABLE 10 presents the most influential communication channels as identified by the 60 East Asian respondents. At the "Most" level of influence, 19 (31.67%) of all replies were for "Television", and 12 (20%) were for "Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family" as the most influential. At the "Medium" level of influence, 20 (33.33%) choices identified "The Internet", 11 (18.33%) identified "Television", and 10 (16.67%) identified "Magazines". At the "Least" level of communication channel influence on travel decision making, 11 (18.33%) selections were for "Travel agencies", and 10 (16.67%) for "Magazines".

Overall, 37 (20.56%) of all respondent replies ranked "Television" as the most

influential communication channel followed by "The Internet" with 36 (20.00%) and "Word-of-

mouth…" with 29 (16.11%) of all replies. "Magazines" and "Brochures" were of secondary

influence.

TABLE 11 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: EUROPEAN REGION

Communication Channels	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Newspapers	0	1	3	4	5.33
Magazines	0	5	6	11	14.67
Brochures	0	0	8	8	10.67
Television	3	11	0	14	18.67
Radio	0	0	0	0	0.00
The Internet	7	2	2	11	14.67
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	14	3	3	20	26.67
Travel agencies	1	3	3	7	9.33
Others	0	0	0	0	0.00
Total	25	25	25	75	100.00

TABLE 11 shows the respondent choices for the most influential communication

channels as identified by the 25 European respondents. Fourteen replies (56%) were for

"Word-of-mouth…", and 7 (28%) identified "The Internet" as the most influential. At the

"Medium" level of influential communication channels, 11 (44%) selections were for

"Television" and 5 (20%) for "Magazines". At the "Least" level of communication channel influence on travel decision making, "Brochures" were identified first by respondents with 8 choices (32%) and "Magazines" were identified first with 6 (24%) of respondent choices.

Overall, 20 (26.67%) of all European respondent choices ranked "Word-of-mouth…" as the most influential communication channel followed by "Television" with 14 (18.67%) of all replies.

TABLE 12 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: THE AMERICAN REGION

Communication Channels	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Newspapers	0	0	3	3	10.00
Magazines	0	0	1	1	3.34
Brochures	0	2	1	3	10.00
Television	2	1	0	3	10.00
Radio	0	0	0	0	0.00
The Internet	2	4	1	7	23.33
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	4	3	1	8	26.67
Travel agencies	2	0	3	5	16.67
Others	0	0	0	0	0.00
Total	10	10	10	30	100.00

TABLE 12 reveals the most influential communication channels as identified by the 10 American respondents. Four replies (40%) were for "Word-of-mouth..." as the most

influential. At the "Medium" level of influential communication channel, 4 (40%) replies were

for "The Internet". At the "Least influential" level, "Travel agencies" and "Newspapers" were

both identified by 3 respondent choices (30% each).

Overall, 8 (26.67%) of all American replies ranked "Word-of-mouth..." as the most

influential communication channel followed by "The Internet" with 7 (23.33%) of all replies.

TABLE 13 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: SOUTH ASIAN REGION

Communication Channels	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Newspapers	0	0	0	0	0.00
Magazines	0	1	1	2	13.33
Brochures	0	0	0	0	0.00
Television	2	3	0	5	33.33
Radio	0	0	0	0	0.00
The Internet	2	1	2	5	33.33
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	1	0	1	2	13.33
Travel agencies	0	0	1	1	6.67
Others	0	0	0	0	0.00
Total	5	5	5	15	100.00

TABLE 13 presents the most influential communication channels as identified by

the 5 South Asian respondents. At the "Most" level of influential communication channels,

"Television" and "The Internet" were both identified by 2 respondent replies (40% each) as most influential. At the "Medium" level of influential communication channels, 3 selections (60%) identified "Television". At the "Least", or the third level of communication channel influence on travel decision making, 2 (40%) replies were for "The Internet".

"Television" and "The Internet" were both ranked highest with 5 (33.33%) of all respondent replies as the most influential communication channels.

In summary, the most influential communication channels selected by the respondents from each region were different. East Asians ranked the most influential communication channels as 1) Television, 2) The Internet, and 3) Word-of-mouth…. The most influential communication channels ranked by the European respondents were: 1) Word-of-mouth..., 2) Television, and 3) Magazines and The Internet. The American respondents ranked the communication channels: 1) Newspapers and Word-of-mouth..., and 2) Magazines and The Internet. South Asian respondent replies were: 1) Television and The Internet, and 2) Magazines and Word-of-mouth.... This reflects the fact that different regions are influenced to different degrees by different communication channels. This must be taken into consideration by tourism organizations and tourism advertisers when designing tourism advertisements and messages.

III DECISION-MAKING FACTORS

Question number 5 in the questionnaire asked the 100 respondents to chose the

three most important decision-making factors from a list of fifteen factors: Availability of Suitable Products; Advice of Travel Agents; Information Obtained from Destinations; Tourism Organizations and Travel Media; Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family; Special promotions from tourism organizations; The climate/destination region; Attitudes, opinions and perceptions; Lifestyle; Existing Knowledge of Potential Holidays; Existing knowledge of potential holidays; Hobbies and interests; Past Experience; Health; Disposable Income; Personality; Personal Motivators; and Others. Again, 300 choices were collected from the 100 respondents. The findings, presented below in TABLE 14, report the sample group's choices of decision-making factors expressed in three levels of influence: "Most Influence", "Medium Influence", and "Least Influence".

TABLE 14 DECISION-MAKING FACTORS

Decision-Making Factors	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Availability of suitable products	5	5	2	12	4.00
Advice of travel agents	8	0	5	13	4.33
Information obtained from destinations, tourism organizations and travel media	9	7	2	18	6.00
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	23	10	16	49	16.33
Special promotions from tourism organizations	3	4	6	13	4.33
The climate/destination in region	9	19	9	37	12.33
Attitudes, opinions and perceptions	2	8	5	15	5.00
Lifestyle	7	5	10	22	7.33
Existing knowledge of potential holidays	4	10	8	22	7.33
Hobbies and interests	12	15	15	42	14.00
Past experience	4	6	4	14	4.67
Health	0	1	2	3	1.00
Disposable income	2	3	8	13	4.33
Personality	2	2	4	8	2.67
Personal motivators	7	3	4	14	4.67
Others	3	2	0	5	1.67
Total	100	100	100	300	100.00

TABLE 14 reveals that of the respondent choices for the "Most" influential decision-making factors, 23% ranked "Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family" most influential, 12% ranked "Hobbies and interests" most influential. At the "Medium", or the second level of influence, 19% ranked "The climate/destination in region" first, 15% ranked "Hobbies and interests" first, and 10% ranked "Word-of-mouth…" and "Existing knowledge of potential holidays" first. At the "Least", or the third level of decision-making factor influence, 16% ranked "Word-of-mouth…" first, 15% ranked "Hobbies and interests" first, and 10% ranked "Lifestyle" first.

In the "Total Respondent Replies" column, TABLE 14 demonstrates that overall 49 (16.33%) of all respondent replies ranked "Word-of-mouth…" as the most influential decision-making factor followed by "Hobbies and interests" with 42 (14.00%) of all respondent choices and "The climate/destination in region" with 37 (12.33%) of all selections.

To analyze the data by categorizing the respondents into the four regions of this study, TABLEs 15–18 present the respondents' replies on the decision-making factors that most influence East Asian, European, American, and South Asian tourists to travel to Thailand.

TABLE 15 DECISION-MAKING FACTORS: EAST ASIAN REGION

Decision-Making Factors	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Availability of suitable products	5	2	2	9	5.00
Advice of travel agents	3	0	5	8	4.45
Information obtained from destinations, tourism organizations and travel media	7	5	2	14	7.78
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	9	7	8	24	13.33
Special promotions from tourism organizations	1	2	3	6	3.33
The climate/destination in region	1	7	5	13	7.22
Attitudes, opinions and perceptions	2	5	3	10	5.56
Lifestyle	6	4	7	17	9.44
Existing knowledge of potential holidays	3	5	3	11	6.11
Hobbies and interests	10	11	9	30	16.67
Past experience	1	5	2	8	4.44
Health	0	1	0	1	0.56
Disposable income	2	3	5	10	5.56
Personality	1	2	3	6	3.33
Personal motivators	7	1	3	11	6.11
Others	2	0	0	2	1.11
Total	60	60	60	180	100.00

TABLE 15 illustrates that of the East Asian respondent choices for the "Most" influential decision-making factors, 10 (16.67%) ranked "Hobbies and interests" as the most influential, and 9 (15.00%) ranked "Word-of-mouth…" most influential. At the "Medium", or second level of decision-making factor influence on travel selection, 11 replies (18.33%) ranked "Hobbies and interests" first, and 7 (11.67%) ranked "Word-of-mouth…", and "The climate/destination in region" first. At the "Least", or third level of decision-making factor influence, 9 choices (15.00%) ranked "Hobbies and interests" first, 8 (13.33%) ranked "Word-of-mouth…" first, and 7 (11.67%) ranked "Lifestyle" first.

Grouping all respondent replies, TABLE 15 reveals that 30 (16.67%) of all respondent replies ranked "Hobbies and interests" as the most influential decision-making factor followed by "Word-of-mouth…" with 24 (13.33%) of all respondent selections, and "Lifestyle" with 17 (9.44%).

TABLE 16 DECISION-MAKING FACTORS: EUROPEAN REGION

Decision-Making Factors	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Availability of suitable products	0	0	0	0	0.00
Advice of travel agents	3	0	0	3	4.00
Information obtained from destinations, tourism organizations and travel media	0	2	0	2	2.67
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	10	2	3	15	20.00
Special promotions from tourism organizations	1	1	0	2	2.67
The climate/destination in region	7	9	3	19	25.33
Attitudes, opinions and perceptions	0	0	2	2	2.67
Lifestyle	1	1	3	5	6.67
Existing knowledge of potential holidays	1	4	4	9	12.00
Hobbies and interests	0	4	5	9	12.00
Past experience	0	1	1	2	2.67
Health	0	0	2	2	2.67
Disposable income	0	0	1	1	1.33
Personality	1	0	1	2	2.67
Personal motivators	0	0	0	0	0.00
Others: Culture	1	1	0	2	2.67
Total	25	25	25	75	100.00

TABLE 16 shows that of the European respondent choices for the "Most" influential decision-making factor, 10 (40%) ranked "Word-of-mouth…" most influential, and 7 (28.00%) ranked "The climate/destination in region" most influential. At the "Medium", or second level of influence, 9 replies (36.00%) ranked "The climate/destination in region" first, and 4 (16.00%) ranked "Existing knowledge of potential holidays", and "Hobbies and interests" first. At the "Least", or third level of influence, 5 replies (20.00%) ranked "Hobbies and interests" first, and 4 (16.00%) ranked "Existing knowledge of potential holidays" first.

TABLE 16 shows that 19 (25.33%) of all respondent replies ranked "The climate/destination in region" as the most influential decision-making factor, 15 (20.00%) of all respondent choices ranked "Word-of-mouth…" most influential, and "Existing knowledge of potential holidays", and "Hobbies and interests" were each ranked most influential with 9 (12.00%) of all respondent selections.

TABLE 17 DECISION-MAKING FACTORS: THE AMERICAN REGION

Decision-Making Factors	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Availability of suitable products	0	2	0	2	6.67
Advice of travel agents	2	0	0	2	6.67
Information obtained from destinations, tourism organizations and travel media	0	0	0	0	0.00
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	3	1	4	8	26.67
Special promotions from tourism organizations	0	1	1	2	6.67
The climate/destination in region	1	3	1	5	16.67
Attitudes, opinions and perceptions	0	2	0	2	6.67
Lifestyle	0	0	0	0	0.00
Existing knowledge of potential holidays	0	0	1	1	3.30
Hobbies and interests	1	0	1	2	6.67
Past experience	3	0	1	4	13.33
Health	0	0	0	0	0.00
Disposable income	0	0	1	1	3.33
Personality	0	0	0	0	0.00
Personal motivators	0	1	0	1	3.33
Others	0	0	0	0	0.00
Total	10	10	10	30	100.00

TABLE 17 demonstrates that of the American respondent choices for the "Most" influential decision-making factor, "Word-of-mouth…", and "Past experience" were ranked first by the respondents with 30% of the respondent choices each, and 20% ranked "Advice of travel agents" first. At the "Medium" influential level, 30% of all replies ranked "The climate/destination in region" first, and "Availability of suitable products", and "Attitudes, opinions and perceptions" were each ranked first by 20% of the respondent replies. At the "Least" influential level, 40% of choices ranked "Word-of-mouth…" first.

Gathering all respondent replies together, TABLE 17 illustrates that 8 (26.67%) ranked "Word-of-mouth…" as the most influential decision-making factor followed by "The climate/destination in region" by 5 (16.67%) and "Past experience" by 4 (13.33%) of all replies.

TABLE 18 DECISION-MAKING FACTORS: SOUTH ASIAN REGION

Decision-Making Factors	Levels of Influence			Total Respondent Replies	Percentage of Total Scores
	Most	Medium	Least		
Availability of suitable products	0	1	0	1	6.67
Advice of travel agents	0	0	0	0	0.00
Information obtained from destinations, tourism organizations and travel media	2	0	0	2	13.33
Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family	1	0	1	2	13.33
Special promotions from tourism organizations	1	0	2	3	20.00
The climate/destination in region	0	0	0	0	0.00
Attitudes, opinions and perceptions	0	1	0	1	6.67
Lifestyle	0	0	0	0	0.00
Existing knowledge of potential holidays	0	1	0	1	6.67
Hobbies and interests	1	0	0	1	6.67
Past experience	0	0	0	0	0.00
Health	0	0	0	0	0.00
Disposable income	0	0	1	1	6.67
Personality	0	0	0	0	0.00
Personal motivators	0	1	1	2	13.33
Others: Culture	0	1	0	1	6.67
Total	5	5	5	15	100.00

TABLE 18 demonstrates that of the South Asian respondent choices for the "Most" influential decision-making factor, 2 (40%) ranked "Information obtained from destinations…" first. At the "Medium" level of influence, no significant decision-making factor was identified by the respondents. At the "Least" influential level, 2 (40%) ranked "Special promotions from tourism organizations" first.

TABLE 18 illustrates that, overall, 3 (20%) of all respondent replies ranked "Special promotions…" as the most influential decision-making factor followed by "Information obtained from destinations…", "Word-of-mouth…", and "Personal motivators" by 2 (13.33%) of all replies each.

In summary, the most influential decision-making factors selected by the respondents from each region were different. Grouping all respondent replies from all regions, East Asian replies for the most influential decision-making factors were 1) Hobbies and interests, 2) Word-of-mouth…, and 3) Lifestyle. The most influential decision-making factors for European respondents were 1) The climate/destination in region, and 2) Word-of-mouth…. The American respondents' replies on the most influential decision-making factors were 1) Word-of-mouth…, and 2) The climate/destination in region. South Asian respondent replies were 1) Special promotions from tourism organizations.

The findings are analyzed and discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, conclusions are drawn from the summary of results and analysis presented in Chapter 4. The data are interpreted to answer the research questions and a discussion of limitations and obstacles encountered in this study, as well as, recommendations for future research are presented.

Conclusion

The important results of this study are the answers to the two Research Questions:

1. Which communication channels most influence foreigners to travel to Thailand?

And

2. Which decision-making factors most influence foreigners to travel to Thailand?

The study found that the communication channel most influencing foreigners to travel to Thailand was the Internet. Overall, the total result from the four regions (East Asia, Europe, the Americas, and South Asia) was that 21.00% of foreign tourist replies to the questionnaire identified the Internet as the most influential communication channel. (See TABLE 9.) However, this was closely followed by "Word-of-mouth…" and "Television" as influential communication channels; 19.33% of foreign tourist replies identified "Word-of-

mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family" as the most influential communication channel; and 19.00% of foreign tourist responses identified "Television" as the most influential communication channel.

The answer to research question number 1 is that the Internet was the communication channel that most influenced foreign tourists to travel to Thailand. Overall, the Internet has become the most influential communication channel for the Thai tourism industry. The Internet supplies tourists with immediate and constant tourism information anywhere at anytime. It provides accommodation reservations, ticket bookings and traveling package purchases on-line. It is an easy to use and low cost channel.

The second most influential communication channel was "word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family". This reveals that tourists also rely on information obtained from their friends and family members for trip planning. The third most influential communication channel was television. Television remains an influential communication channel for tourism messages.

This study not only reveals the most influential communication channels but also the least influential channels. Tourism organizations and other tourism businesses should divert their attention from radio and newspapers as influential tourism communication channels. Only one reply out of 300 (00.33%) identified radio as an influential channel and only 17 of 300 replies (05.67%) identified newspapers as influential.

The answer to research question number 2 is "word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family" as the most influential decision-making factor for foreign tourists. (See TABLE 14.) Of all respondents, 16.33% of all responses to the questionnaire identified word-of-mouth… as the most influential decision-making factor. Overall, word-of-mouth has become the most influential decision-making factor for the Thai tourism industry. Information provided by reliable and trusted persons, like friends or family members, who may have traveled to, or have knowledge about, any particular travel destination influenced deciders of travel itineraries the most. Word-of-mouth…, as an influential decision-making factor, motivates deciders to respond with a purchase output, i.e. purchase a travel product to Thailand. (See FIGURE 2.)

The second most influential decision-making factor was hobbies and interests with 14.00% of all respondent replies. The replies came mostly from East Asian tourists with 30 of the 42 replies (71.423). (See TABLE 15.) This suggests that East Asian tourists most enjoy their hobbies and interests during their overseas trips. The third most influential decision-making factor was the climate/destination in the region with 37 replies, or 12.33% of all respondent replies. The 37 replies were provided primarily by European tourists with 19 of the 37 replies (51.35%). (See TABLE 16.) This means that many of the European tourists made their trips to Thailand during the cold season.

The least influential decision-making factor found in this study was health. Only 1%, or 3 of 300 replies, identified health as an influential decision-making factor.

The findings of this study on the most influential communication channels and decision-making factors should be beneficial for tourism organizations, travel agencies, and people or companies working in the tourism industry. The findings can help them choose the right communication channels and focus their messages on the decision-making factors that most effectively influence foreign tourists to travel to Thailand.

Discussion

Overall, the research found that the most influential communication channel selected by all respondents was "The Internet". The second most influential communication channel was "Word-of-mouth…", and the third most influential communication channel was "Television".

However, the most influential communication channels in each region were different: East Asian tourists selected "Television" as the most influential, followed by "The Internet" the second, and "Word-of-mouth" as the third most influential communication channel. This suggests that television was the most influential communication channel for tourism messages and advertisements to the East Asian tourists.

European tourists selected "Word-of-mouth…" first, "Television" second, and "The Internet" and "Magazines" as the third most influential communication channels. "Word-of-mouth" was the most influential communication channel for European tourists and

was the most reliable information source, therefore, testimonials of famous European people would be helpful in advertising or tourism messages for this market.

American tourists also selected "Word-of-mouth…" as the most influential communication channel, "The Internet" second, and "Travel agencies" third.

South Asian tourists selected "Television" and "The Internet" as the most influential communication channels.

This demonstrates that tourists in different regions perceive different communication channels differently. Therefore, tourism organizations, travel agencies, and people or companies working in the tourism industry should choose the communication channels that are most influential in each region or market.

The research found that, overall, the most influential decision-making factor for foreign tourists was "Word-of-mouth…". The second most influential factor was "Hobbies and interests". The third most influential decision-making factor was "Climate/destination in the region". Based on these findings, tourism organizations, travel agencies, and people or companies working in the tourism industry should consider testimonials in tourism advertisements and messages as these strongly influence foreign tourists in the decision-making stage. The second most influential decision-making factor was "Hobbies and interests". Consequently, commercial messages should focus on Thailand's fertile supply of sport facilities: trekking, mountaineering, fishing, scuba diving; cultural activities including art, music, dance, history; cooking; gardening and agriculture; and other interesting hobbies

and interests. The third most influential decision-making factor was "Climate/destination in the region". Thailand's warm and tropical climate should be used to influence foreign tourists especially during winter months in countries with cold climates. Thailand should organize special activities, promotions, and/or tour packages during this season especially to beach and sea areas.

The study also found that the least influential decision-making factor was "Health". Thailand tourism organizations should focus more on health services and promote these to increase tourist awareness of health services available in Thailand. In the early 21st century, Thailand has developed many healthcare businesses including massage, aromatherapy, beauty and herbal treatments, and spas (Thailand Travel e-zine: 2006). Thailand has also expanded medical services provided to tourists such as cosmetic surgery, eye surgery, dental care, and other procedures (TAT: 2006). Creating tourist awareness of health care services will help to achieve Thailand's tourism targets and increase revenues.

As with the influence of communication channels, the influence of decision-making factors is different in different regions and markets. East Asian tourists selected "Hobbies and interests" as the most influential decision-making factor, followed by "Word-of-mouth…" second, and "Lifestyle" as the third most influential decision-making factor. Thailand should provide various attractive activities in many places around the country for tourists to enjoy throughout the year.

European tourists selected "The climate/destination in region" first, "Word-of-mouth…" second, and "Existing knowledge of potential holidays" and "Hobbies and interests" as the third most influential decision-making factor. Thailand should be promoted as the most suitable destination to serve the European market's need for a warm climate to enjoy.

American tourists selected "Word-of-mouth…" as the most influential decision-making factor, "The climate/destination in region" second, and "Past experiences" third.

South Asian tourists selected "Special promotions from tourism organizations" as the most influential decision-making factor. Special persuasive messages need to be crafted specifically for each market and delivered via the most effective channel. This suggests that the special promotions, or tour packages with the special prices, shall be offered to the South Asian market to convince tourists to decide to travel to Thailand.

The research also reviewed the profile of tourists' gender and found that the tourists who made the decisions to come to Thailand were mostly men (62%). In the Korean market, there were 8 male respondents and only 1 female respondent. The largest group of tourist was between 15 and 25 years old (24 male respondents and 16 female respondents, 40% of all respondents). Only 2% of tourists found in this research were over 65 years of age: 1 East Asian man and 1 American man. This confirms that the tourist target for Thailand is primarily young people. This may be because of the positioning of Thailand

tourism products and advertisement plans that are more influential to younger tourists than older tourists.

Overall, the tourist profile for Thailand found in this study was young and male. The East Asian market was 61.67% male and 51.67% between15 and 25 years of age. The European market was 68.00% male and 32.00% between 26 and 35 years of age. The American market was 50.00% male and 30.00% between the ages of 15 and 25. The South Asian market was 60.00% male and 80.00% between 26 and 35 years old.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the tourism industry offers unique products and services which require high decision-making involvement and risk reduction, especially when choosing, often costly, annual vacations. Communication channels deliver useful information to tourists to reduce the risks of not being satisfied with a selected destination, traveling time spent, cost issues, health concerns, and security. As the tourism industry is the number one source of foreign exchange income for Thailand, the decision-making factors act importantly to create the "needs, wants, goals" for the foreign tourists to select Thailand as the destination for their trips (Middleton: 1994).

Limitations of the Study

The study had the following limitations:

1. The sample group of this study was limited to only 100 foreigners who came to Thailand for the first time as tourists.

2. The sample group in this study was limited only to the tourists who made the decisions to travel to Thailand.

3. The sample area in this study was limited to only Bangkok and Chonburi provinces.

Because of these limitations, the findings should be considered as tentative, and future studies should include a wider sample group, more focused on each target market and demographic factor.

Suggestions for Further Studies

As a follow up to the present study, and taking into consideration the above remarks, the following studies are recommended:

1. A study on the most influential communication channels and decision-making factors used by foreign tourists traveling in other areas of Thailand.

2. A deeper study on the most influential communication channels and decision-making factors in each market: East Asia, Europe, the Americas, and South Asia.

3. A study on the relationship between tourists' profiles, communication channels used and decision-making factors should be conducted in order to better target different demographic groups.

4. Studies on the most influential communication channels and decision-making factors should be made periodically in order to regularly up-date knowledge of changing travel behaviors.

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Appendix A

Examples of Tourism Communication Channels

Example 1

Source: Wongmontha, Seree. (1998: 41)

Example 2

Example 3

Source: Honeymoon+Travel. (Online) Available: http://www.hm-travel.com/.

Retrieved January 16, 2006.
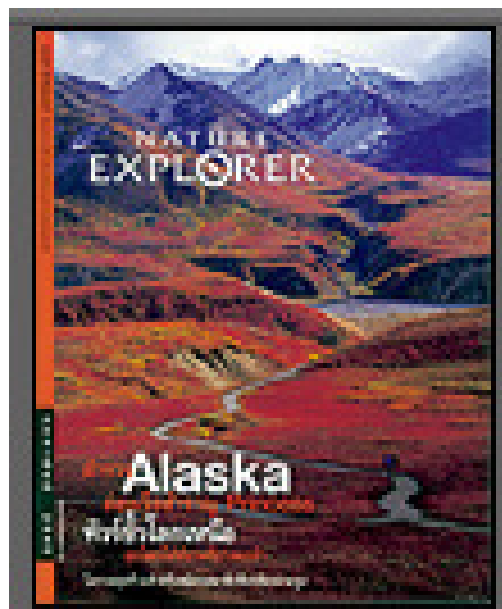
Source: Nature Explorer. (Online) Available: http://www.natureexplorer.net/passissue.html.

Retrieved December 12, 2005.

Example 4

Source: Thai Airways. Retrieved October 10, 2005, from URL: http:///www.thaiair.com/

Source: Yahoo Geocities. Retrieved October 10, 2005, from URL: http://www.geocities.com/jenavavi/hotel.html

Appendix B

Questionnaires

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is part of a Master's Degree Research Project at Srinakharinwirot University. Your kind cooperation in answering the following questions will be highly appreciated.

1. **Personal Information:**

    Nationality _____

    Gender

        ☐ Male

        ☐ Female

    Age

        ☐ 15-25 years old

        ☐ 26-35 years old

        ☐ 36-45 years old

        ☐ 46-55 years old

        ☐ 56-65 years old

        ☐ Over 65 years old

2. **Communication Channels:**

    Which are the 3 media or communication channels that most influenced you to travel to Thailand? (1 = Most influenced me, 2 = Had medium influence on me, 3 = Least influenced me)

        _____ Newspapers

        _____ Magazines

        _____ Brochures

        _____ Television

        _____ Radio

        _____ The Internet

        _____ Word-of-mouth or recommendations of reference groups including friends and family

        _____ Travel agencies

        _____ Other, please specify: _____

3. Decision-Making Factors:

Which are the 3 factors that most influenced you to decide to travel to Thailand? (1 = Most influenced me, 2 = Had medium influence on me, 3 = Least influenced me)

_____ Availability of suitable products

_____ Advice of travel agents

_____ Information obtained from destinations, tourism organizations and travel media

_____ Word-of-mouth recommendations of friends and family

_____ Special promotions from tourism organizations

_____ The climate/destination region

_____ Attitudes, opinions and perceptions

_____ Lifestyle

_____ Existing knowledge of potential holidays

_____ Hobbies and interests

_____ Past experience

_____ Health/Medical treatment

_____ Disposable income

_____ Personality

_____ Personal motivators

_____ Other, please specify: _____

Thank you very much for your cooperation in completing this questionnaire.

QUESTIONNAIRE

此問卷調查是我在 Srinakharinwirot 大學碩士論文的一部分,感謝您撥冗回答以下問題

1. 你的國籍 (請註明): _____

    你的性別?
    - ☐ 男
    - ☐ 女

    你的年齡?
    - ☐ 15-25 years old
    - ☐ 26-35 years old
    - ☐ 36-45 years old
    - ☐ 46-55 years old
    - ☐ 56-65 years old
    - ☐ Over 65 years old

2. 以下請你選出你認為最重要的三項旅遊資訊來源幫你決定到泰國玩 (請以1.2.3排列重要性)

    - _____ 報紙
    - _____ 雜誌
    - _____ 渡假指南
    - _____ 電視
    - _____ 廣播
    - _____ 網路
    - _____ 口耳相傳推薦(包括朋友家人)
    - _____ 旅行社
    - _____ 其他(請註明) : _____

3. 以下何種因素影響你決定來泰國旅遊 (請以 1.2.3 排列重要性)

　　　　　　　　　適合的產品
　　　　　　　　　旅行社的建議
　　　　　　　　　泰國觀光局(相關旅客單位)提供相關資訊
　　　　　　　　　親友的口耳相傳推薦
　　　　　　　　　觀光局(或相關單位)的促銷
　　　　　　　　　目的地天氣狀況
　　　　　　　　　自己的態度和看法
　　　　　　　　　生活方式
　　　　　　　　　潛在假日的既有認知
　　　　　　　　　習慣和興趣
　　　　　　　　　已往的經驗
　　　　　　　　　健康
　　　　　　　　　自己的可隨意運用的收入
　　　　　　　　　個性
　　　　　　　　　個人的動機
　　　　　　　　　其他(請說明)：_____

非常感謝你的合作完成此一問卷

アンケート

このアンケートは、シーナカリンウィロート大学の修士論文を作成するものの一部です。アンケートへのご協力をいただき、心から感謝いたします。

1. 個人情報:

国籍　　　_____

性別
- ☐　男性
- ☐　女性

年齢
- ☐　15-25 歳
- ☐　26-35歳
- ☐　36-45歳
- ☐　46-55歳
- ☐　56-65歳
- ☐　65歳以上

2. コミュニケーション　チャネル

タイへの旅行に当たって、どの情報源であなた方の心を誘い込んでいるのか？３つを選んでください。（1 = 大，2 = 中，3 =小.）

- _____　新聞
- _____　雑誌
- _____　パンプレット、ビラ
- _____　テレビ
- _____　ラジオ
- _____　インターネット
- _____　人の話から聞く、友達及び家族の人からのアドバイス
- _____　旅行代理店
- _____　その他、記入をお願いいたします。

3. 決心要素

どの要素であなたがタイへの旅行 に決心しましたか？３つを選んでください。（1 ＝ 大，2 ＝ 中，3 ＝小.）

_____ 適切なサービス、製品
_____ 代理店会社からのアドバイス
_____ 観光地、観光機関、観光メディアによる情報
_____ 人の話から聞く、友達及び家族の人からのアドバイス
_____ 観光機関による特別プロモーション
_____ 観光地の地理、気候
_____ 見解、意見、身方
_____ 生活スタイル
_____ 観光地に関する知識
_____ 趣味及び興味
_____ 過去の経験
_____ 健康
_____ が多いが、旅行費が安い。
_____ 個人性格
_____ 個人動機
_____ その他、記入をお願いいたします。

このアンケートのご協力を頂き、

誠にありがとうございます。

VITAE

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