

MARKETING STRATEGY FOR TOURISM INDUSTRIES IN ANDAMAN PROVINCES AFTER COVID-19 EPIDEMIC

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Abstract: The Covid-19 epidemic has significantly and negatively affected way of life extensively. Several businesses have to shut themselves down due to the situation. Inevitably, tourism industries around the world are facing big problems since their potential clients would never want to travel by any chance. This study aims to suggest proper strategies in order to welcome the tourists once a country is reopened. Content analysis is adopted in this study using the review of existing documents. It was found that traditional marketing strategy including product differentiation was dominant. Moreover, in the case of marketing strategy post COVID-19, to ensure health, safety and hygiene is required. Tourism businesses and other service industry may apply the research findings for their preparation.

Keywords: Andaman provinces, Marketing strategy, COVID-19

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 epidemic has significantly and negatively affected the way people were living. It causes millions of deaths globally, and is undeniable that the global economy is completely ruined. Such situation has been going on for years, and it seems that economy sector was the toughest issue to be solved. People around the world had to adapt themselves to this Covid-19 pandemic, but it might not be that simple for many types of business. Many employees are unemployed, and several businesses has to shut themselves down due to the fact that most governments worldwide instructed their people to do the quarantine in order to avoid physical contact.

From all businesses, it could be seen that a tourism sector is the most severely damaged. There are many reasons to be expounded. For instance, airlines, hotels, and travel agencies has suspended their services, which means that neither domestic nor international tourists would be traveling anywhere during this pandemic (Aref 2020). Moreover, people in some countries do not want to go outside their houses because the fear of the disease. Therefore, tourism industries around the world are facing big problems since their potential clients would never want to travel by any chance.

2. Literature Review

Covid-19's impact on traveling sector in Thailand

Thailand, especially for traveling sector, also has also faced hard time in handling the Covid-19 epidemic. A study named "Covid-19 effects on Tourism and Business in Thailand" revealed

that Thailand lost a majority of tourists in 2020 compared to 2019. While there were approximately 39 million tourists in 2019, there were only about 16 million tourists coming to Thailand in 2020, which means that the number of tourists had roughly fallen by 60 percent. The study also suggested that traveling sector in Thailand would not be any better soon until there will be an effective vaccine (or drug) that could prevent the disease and thoroughly build herd community among all Thai citizens (Elango 2020).

Reasons causing the huge loss of Thailand's international tourists during the pandemic

Thailand did not have any problems in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic because the number of its patients was relatively low in the first place. However, in March 2020, the number of patients surprisingly surged due to several social engagement of Thai people. The most notorious case leading to the massive inflation of domestic cases was at a boxing match at the Lumpinee Boxing Stadium, where many both international and domestic tourists had visited (Marome and Shaw 2021). Besides, Thailand was completely unprepared since there was no effective vaccines and drugs, yet there were some foreigners entered Thailand. Some Thai people tended not to be aware of the disease either and still enjoy gathering themselves in any ceremonies or festivals. As a result, the number of new Covid-19 cases in Thailand has rapidly increased in these recent years. According to the Worldometers, the accumulated Covid-19 cases in Thailand, from 2019 until 2022, are 2,397,662, and there are, unfortunately, 22,274 deaths. For these reasons, international tourists might not want to be exposed to the disease, and they would choose to visit other countries that seem to be safer for them. As long as Thai people still ignore such problems, Thailand's reputation would be even more deteriorated.

Expectation on tourism sector of Thailand in 2022

Nevertheless, it was reported by the TAT News (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2021) that the revenue arising from tourism in 2022 is expected to 1.58 trillion Baht. Moreover, the Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C. that the total number of tourists having entered into Thailand since the beginning of January 2022 was 134,459 (1-19 January 2022). Those mentioned tourists who entered Thailand had to comply with some measures related to Covid-19 prevention as being instructed by Thai government, which includes the Test and Go, or Quarantine Exemption Scheme (65,633 tourists), the Sandbox scheme (47,899 tourists), and the quarantine (20,927 tourists).

Sandbox program

In Thailand, the "Sandbox" program was initially executed in Phuket on 1 July 2021. This program allows international tourists to arrive to Thailand without quarantine with a condition that the qualified tourists had to be fully vaccinated and came from low-risk countries, whereby their Certificate of Vaccination, Certificate of Entry, and International Travel Insurance with COVID-19 coverage were to be presented upon their arrivals to Thai authorities (Amatara n.d.).

Tourism in Andaman provinces

The southern part of Thailand seems to be a main tourist attraction of the country. Most international tourists usually go to visit beautiful islands and beaches located on Andaman coast in these provinces: Ranong, Phuket, Phang-Nga, Krabi, and Satun (Chuenpraphanusorn et al. 2018). There are some well-known islands that thousands of international tourists would want to visit, for example, Phuket, Koh Phi Phi, Koh Lanta, or Koh Lipe, and they would spend their vacations there. These islands and beaches used to always be crowded during high seasons before the pandemic. As a result, after the Covid-19 epidemic comes to its end (which should be ended as soon as possible), there is a need for proper strategies in order to welcome the tourists that would arrive to Thailand once the country is reopened.

3. Method

This is a qualitative research and the secondary research design is adopted. Secondary research is a common approach to a systematic investigation in which the researcher depends solely on existing data in the course of the research process. A number of existing literatures including extant research papers and news, published post COVID-19, are collected. Andaman provinces, comprising Ranong, Phuket, Phang-Nga, Krabi, and Satun, are used as a study context. Numerous news, both printed and online version, are used as the data of the current research. Content analysis is then used to conclude the marketing strategy for tourism industries in Andaman provinces after Covid-19 epidemic.

4. Result and Discussion: Marketing strategies for travel industries

Understand the target tourists

It is important for every tourism industry to know what the tourists want to see or receive when they arrive, and it is a paramount issue to understand their traveling behaviors during the Covid-19 pandemic. There are various methods to obtain such information. For example, the easiest and most common method is to do a survey or questionnaire. The results, depending on the questions provided and whom the questionnaires are given, can be compared among all respondents to see if any of their response can be practical and auspicious. In addition, operators of the tourism industries can look for news related to international tourists' behaviors such as their point of view towards traveling during or after the pandemic. Furthermore, the information about tourists' behaviors can be observed through several researches that have been published online, or else, the tourism industries could even conduct research of their own, which would be really beneficial for themselves.

As stated earlier, there were an enormous number of international tourists flowed in Andaman provinces of Thailand every year before the pandemic, and they might be ready to come back again as soon as the country is reopened. Therefore, there should be some questions arise to find out how to respond to their needs. For instance, who are they? What are their spending behaviors? What do they want to experience while they are traveling? Or what are their current perception of Thailand (the Covid-19 management)? After such questions arose, it would be easier for the operators to understand them, and would be able to prepare themselves for a new wave of their potential consumers. On top of that, they should also adopt measures that could help prevent the Covid-19 to make sure that there would not be a spread of the disease in the near future. It is pretty clear that there are risks of being infected by the disease whenever people gather themselves, especially in tourist attractions. They need to see a well-risk-management, which dramatically affects their thoughts in traveling after the pandemic (Rahman et al. 2021).

Offer promotional pricing to tourists as deemed proper

Another way that could attract international tourists' attention is to offer promotional pricing. Even though it means that the tourism industries might lose some of their prospective revenue, it could guarantee their loyal consumers in long term. Offering promotional pricing could be provided though different services. The industries, such as hotel, resorts, or travel agencies, might offer a discount, a voucher, or a membership card. According to Peppoin, the advantages from providing such offers for the industries include 1. It helps raise the sale volume (new consumers) 2. It boosts income (in short term) and 3. It helps maintain their consumers loyalty. In contrary, since the topic says "as deemed proper", it means that the industries should carefully arrange the said offer. According to Profitwell, outstanding risks for the industries from improper arrangement of the promotional pricing are that consumers might not be

willingly pay for full price after a certain period, and they might devalue the services being provided by the industries. It would drastically damage the industries if the offer is advertised too frequently. Therefore, it should be made in place in special occasions, such as in a high season, which is much more reasonable. Moreover, the discount should not be too much since consumers may afterward look for only the discount and would never come back until a certain price is being offered again.

Provide satisfactory travel experiences to tourists

The tourism industries have to realize what consumers need, as well as what they could provide to them in order to maintain their loyalty. After tourists' behaviors are observed, the industries should quickly start planning some traveling programs. A study named "Types of Tourism in Thailand" separated types according to what international tourists could do when they arrive in Thailand, for example, adventure tourism, caving, medical tourism, but common types of tourism in Andaman provinces would be some activities that would be done in the sea or on the beach such as snorkeling, wellness tourism (spa), and sea kayaking (Sharafuddin 2015). Thailand is known of an abundance of natural resources, together with amazing islands and wonderful beaches located in the southern part of Thailand. In addition, both domestic and international tourists used to visit local markets in this area, and these places should be, if feasible, recommended to those tourists via different tools, such as a guidebook, or website. Furthermore, the tourists should be informed of local landmarks where they could actually have an interaction with local people if they want to, which could be referred to "creative tourism". The creative tourism was described as "travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place, and it provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture" (UNESCO 2006). Travel agencies might adapt the concept of creative tourism with their new traveling programs. For example, they might lead their clients to any local areas and invite them to stay there for a night to learn what local people do in daily life, whereby the travel agencies should make sure that they will be able to design their traveling programs properly. They might negotiate with the local people beforehand to avoid any conflicts. Not only the clients (tourists) would be amazed by such experience, but this could also boost income for local people and for the provinces.

Provide safety for tourists or measures to prevent them from the Covid-19

The most vital factor that could preserve the consistency of economic growth after the Covid-19 pandemic is the effectiveness in dealing with the disease. Fortunately, people in many countries are fully vaccinated, yet it does not mean that there would be no need for monitoring on any arriving tourists. Currently, there are some policies set out by Thai government upon international tourists since November 2021, stating that people from low-risk countries (63 countries in total) and are fully vaccinated under the Test and Go program, and people who entered Thailand through the Phuket Sandbox are able to enter the country without quarantine; on the other hand, tourists who neither arrive from low-risk countries nor arriving via the Phuket Sandbox and not being fully vaccinated still have to do a 10-day quarantine (Thai Embassy 2021).

Since the Andaman provinces are destinations of the majority of international tourists after making their arrivals to Thailand, measures being used to prevent the spread of the disease must be firmly strengthened. The tourists might be asked for COVID-19 Certificate of Vaccination. Moreover, they should be notified of news related to Covid-19 situation, such as a number of new cases of Covid-19, or where they could get a free Covid-19 test. In addition, the tourism industries have to be responsible in monitoring on the tourists by informing them to comply with the measures for Covid-19 prevention, for example, to wear a medical mask,

to scan their temperature, or in the event that there are new cases nearby, the tourists shall be isolated at a well-arranged place to avoid any new cases of Covid-19.

Create good public relations

After all travel programs and measures for Covid-19 prevention have been prepared, the tourism industries should start their plan on the advertisement. They can display their advertisement via any platforms as they see fit (online platforms or social medias are highly recommended), for instance, Facebook Page, websites, Instagram, etc. They can carry out every necessary information, and would be even better if some photos with high quality are provided. It could ease the international tourists to decide whether they would be interested in spending their valuable time there or not.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, in 2022, as Thailand is now starting its plan on welcoming a big wave of international tourists after the Covid-19 situation becomes less severe, all tourism industries, especially for those operating in Andaman provinces, should create new market strategies to attract the tourists' interest. However, since the biggest concern of tourists is an infection by the disease, the tourism industries could not focus only on how to make profits from their services, but they also have to prioritize their clients' safety as well. Besides, it could be seen from news that the Covid-19's new cases keep occurring daily, and the reopening might as well be delayed. Therefore, it is better to do the right thing at a right time, which means that the industries would still have some more time to rethink about their marketing strategies before carrying out their advertisement. It is evident that Thailand's traveling sector would take years to recover and retain its glory to be equivalent to what it was before the epidemic. As a result, both Thai government and the tourism industries in Andaman provinces have to try their best to regain trust and confidence from international tourists as soon as possible; eventually, Thailand will once again be crowded with tourists.

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