

Tourist Attitudes toward Traveling in Thailand after the Political Demonstrations and Protests

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to explore tourists' practices in Thailand during the demonstrations in terms of security, information and tourists' perceptions about the political problems. The study was limited to the Bangkok area, which is surrounded by many important institutions including the main international airport, Suvarnabhumi, which was shut down by the protesters. Using a random sampling process, the respondents were 200 male and female tourists of various nationalities who were present during the demonstrations. Responses were gathered in tourist areas such as Bangkok, Sukhumvit, Kaosan Road, Suwannaphumi Airport, and Silom Road. The findings showed that the demonstrations have short-term negative effects on tourism but no long-term impact; most respondents stated they were willing to come back to Thailand. However, they did suggest Thailand could improve in terms of providing information to people, tourism security and regaining political stability to bring back the image of a peaceful country. Significant relationships were found between the demonstrations and tourists' feelings. Implications and recommendations are provided for tourism businesses in Bangkok as well as for the entire tourism industry in Thailand.

Keywords: Demonstration, Tourist, Travel, Bangkok, Thai protests, and Thailand

1. Introduction

While Thailand is experiencing the downturn of the economy in the same manner as other countries around the world, coupled with severe flooding problems in the latter parts of 2011, surprisingly they have been able to maintain an unemployment rate of less than one percent and now they have elected their first female Prime Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra, member of the Pheu Thai Party. While these are exciting times for Thais as the first female prime minister has been elected, government officials have to work toward a climate of stability and the acquisition or attraction of new visitors to their country while retaining high tourist satisfaction levels in order to have a sustainable economy.

The tourism industry is a major economic factor in Thailand (Sangkaworn and Mujtaba, 2010), but the industry has suffered these past few years due in part to political conflicts and protests that have occurred since 2008 between the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the People's Power Party (PPP), and later on between the Democratic Party government of former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and the National United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) in 2010 (Bangkok Post, 2010).

Thai government data showed that tourism sharply increased in the past few years due to vast improvements in infrastructure and technology, making it easier for people to travel (Office of Tourism Development, 2010). As of 2007, tourist numbers grew to over 14 million international visitors vacationing in Thailand with an average duration stay of 9 days; thus, generating an estimated 547,782 million Thai Bahts (equivalent to about 8 billion

U.S. dollars) and ranking Thailand as the 18th most visited country in the world (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2010). According to Sangkaworn and Mujtaba (2010, p. 166).

In Thailand, travel and tourism as an industry has performed a key role in the economy because of its capacity to generate more revenues for the local municipalities and the country. The tourism industry provides career opportunities for people of every generation, experience and education. Hotels and resorts play an important role in the attainment and acceleration of the social and economic growth of the country. In the province of Chiang Mai the potential growth and development towards industrialization and its programs to promote local and foreign tourism led to the growth of the hotels and resorts that are now serving the province. Aside from being one of the main educational centers in the country, Chiang Mai province is fast becoming a tourist spot because of the beauty of the natural resources and the rich/cultural heritage such as the presence of ancestral buildings.

While many locations around Thailand, such as Chiang Mai and Hat Yai, have benefited from global tourism, some locations have suffered more than others due to the political protests and demonstrations. In mid-2008, the tourism industry was in a difficult position because of the unstable politics in the country (Thailand Travel Mart, 2010). The closure of Suvarnabhumi Airport on November 26, 2008 by the Yellow Shirt protesters and the Red Shirt mob invasion of the East Asia Summit in Pattaya on April 11, 2009 resulted in many travel cancellations to Thailand. The declaration in a state of emergency was enacted with specific warnings for visiting the country, furthering the decline of tourists (United Nations ESCAP, 2010).

For the first time in a decade, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) announced that the gross domestic product (GDP) in Thailand for the fourth quarter of last year contracted (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2008, 2010). Some experts predicted that the country will face a recession in conjunction to the post-global financial crisis with a decrease of output, employment, trade, investment, and household consumption that would continue to deepen the situation (Bangkok Post, 2010).

An understanding of tourists' attitudes toward Thailand after the demonstrations are useful to manage and support tourism businesses (Sangkaworn and Mujtaba, 2010). The information can be considered in marketing plans for future development and planning by government officials and businesses (Mujtaba & Karadayi, 2004).

2. Demonstrations in Thailand and tourism

The demonstrations started when the PPP won the December 2007 general election. Though it gained the most seats in the House, it did not gain an absolute majority. The PPP vowed to amend the 2007 constitution, what they called 'dictatorial constitution', prompting the PAD to reform itself after suspending its movement after the 2006 coup. The PAD began resisting the PPP's constitutional amendment plan. The PAD protested that the amendment was aimed at revoking Thaksin's legal charges and the election fraud charges on PPP high ranking members. The Samak government finally suspended its amendment plan, yet the PAD vowed to continue their protest, calling for Samak Sundaravej's resignation, noting that during his election campaign, he had declared himself a nominee of Thaksin. The tension escalated when the PAD seized the Government House. Samak was finally removed in September after the Constitutional Court found him guilty of being hired and paid for a cooking television program after he became the prime minister. PPP Deputy Leader Somchai Wongsawat, vice president of PPP and brother-in-law of Thaksin, was elected by the members of parliament and became the new prime minister. This change prompted further escalation of PAD protests. The protests led to violent clashes between the police, the PAD, and the anti-PAD protesters on October 7 while the government was aiming to disperse them from blocking the entrances of the House. Some protesters were injured while others were seriously wounded.

To counterattack oppositions of the party, the PAD stepped up their protests by seizing the government's temporary offices at Don Muang Airport, taking over (leading to its closure a few days later) the Suvarnabhumi Airport after the arrest of Chamlong Srimuang, one of its leaders. The sieges ended in December (2006) due to the verdict of the Constitutional Court, which dissolved the PPP party and banned its executive board from political office after finding it guilty of election fraud. Thus, Prime Minister Somchai's position was abruptly ended.

It is alleged by some Thaksin loyalists, despite the controversial sources, that the Thai Army then urged many PPP Members of Parliament (MPs) to defect to the Democrat Party and support Abhisit Vejjajiva as the new Prime Minister. After days of negotiations, Abhisit Vejjajiva, leader of the Democrat Party, was eventually voted in by the majority members of Parliament. PPP members and its supporters, UDD, then rejected the rise of Abhisit and began their huge protest in April 2009 against the Abhisit government. The Government's House

was under siege again and main roads, intersections and entrances to hospitals were blocked in downtown Bangkok.

In early 2010, a series of events occurred in which the situation escalated further. On February 26, assets worth 46 billion Thai baht (about \$1.5 billion US) were seized from former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. On the evening of the 27th of February, M-67 grenades were thrown from motorcycles to three branches of Bangkok Bank. By mid-March, "Red Shirt" protesters, composed mainly of Thaksin supporters, had moved into Bangkok. Although relatively peaceful in nature, human blood donated by some of the protesters was poured outside Parliament. On the 10th of April, the protesters took control of a television broadcasting station causing Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to vow to restore Thailand back to normalcy. Clashes between protesters and the military resulted in 18 fatalities (both civilian and military) and over 800 injured by the 11th of April. On the 22nd of April, a series of explosions in Bangkok killed at least three people and injured 75 more, including four foreigners. At least some of the explosions were caused by grenades, which the government claimed were fired by the Red Shirt protestors. While the natural disasters like the recent floodings in Thailand tend to have physical impacts which can be seen by most individuals, the political protests will also have some type of an impact on the economy of various industries and eventually the productivity of the country.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) (2009) confirmed that tourism did slow in 2007. In total, 14.5 million tourists visited the country in 2007, representing a year-to-year growth of 6.6%. While still representing positive expansion of the sector, this rate of growth is well below recent trends. TAT explained the reasons for this slowdown are mainly due to the demonstrations; ongoing political uncertainty throughout 2007 following a military coup in late-2006 deterred some tourists from visiting Thailand. In addition, the deaths of three people following bomb explosions in Bangkok on New Year's Eve 2006 provided a further disincentive. There have been no further bomb attacks in major tourist centers, although the insurgency in the south of the country continues until this day. The Thai government estimated tourist arrivals of 15.7 million in 2008, representing growth of 8.3. This is in line with their revised target, where they are forecasting arrivals of 16.8 million in 2009.

Thailand's tourism industry makes up about 6.5 percent of the country's GDP (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2010). When seeing the number of tourists and the number of tourist destinations and hotels, one would actually expect it to make up a more substantial portion of GDP (United Nations ESCAP, 2010). But Thailand's tourism industry, while very visible, brings in much less money than other service industries, and certainly less than its manufacturing industry. Nevertheless, international visitors spent more than 547 billion baht (around 16 billion U.S. dollars) in 2008. The average length of stay per tourist in 2007 was 9 days.

The number of domestic tourists dwarfs the number of foreign tourists (Office of Tourism Development, 2010). But domestic tourists (mostly Thais) do spend much less per day and their trips are shorter, on average a little over two days. In 2007, there were reportedly more than 83 million in-country travel trips, creating 380 billion baht (\$12 billion in US) in revenues. Average daily expenditure was around 1,770 baht (\$60) per person in 2007 (as compared to 4,120 baht per person for international tourism). In 2008, about 52.37 % of international tourists were from East Asia, with Malaysia and Japan providing the most visits. Close to two million Malaysians visited Thailand. TAT assumes they take short trips over the Thai-Malaysian border, and they think the number of Malaysian visitors unduly inflates the total number of international visitors. Europeans provided close to 4 million visitors in 2008, about 27.22 % of the total. The number of visitors from the Americas, South Asia and Africa, is much smaller. However, close to 700,000 Australians visited Thailand.

TAT reported that the present downturn was expected by the prime minister (as reported in April 2009) to cost the country around 4 billion U.S. dollars. In a typical short report, lacking exact numbers, Thai Travel Agency's President Surapol Srirakul stated that international tourist arrivals plummeted by more than 50 percent year on year in the first months of 2009. Chinese, Japanese and South Korean tourists represented much of the drop since Asian travelers are much more susceptible to bad news than European travelers.

According to Han, Wild, and Wild, (2009), all companies doing business domestically or internationally confront political risk. Political risk abroad affects different types of companies in different ways. A solid grasp of local values, customs and traditions can help reduce a company's exposure to political risk.

3. Attitudes and perceptions

Attitude makes a huge difference in terms of when and where a person vacations, what he/she eats and drinks (Aimkij and Mujtaba, 2010). Attitudes of current and prospective tourism customers can vary depending on their experiences with a location and country's products, services, prices, and general promotional strategies (Sangkaworn and Mujtaba, 2010). An attitude is an imaginary construct that represents a person's degree of liking or dislike for something or an item (Exforsys Inc, 2010). Attitudes are generally positive or negative views

of a person, place, thing, or event, which is often referred to as the attitude object (Glossary, 2010). People can also be conflicted or somewhat ambivalent toward an object, meaning that they can possess both positive and negative attitudes toward the item in question. The structural model of attitudes has three main components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Exforsys Inc, 2010). The cognitive component concerns one's beliefs; the affective component involves feelings and evaluations; and the behavioral component is the ways of acting toward the attitude object. The cognitive aspects of positive attitude are generally measured by surveys, interview and other reporting methods, while the affective components are more easily assessed by monitoring physiological signs such as heart rate (Gale Group, 2001).

Perception is the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information. The word "perception" comes from the Latin words perceptio, percipio, which means receiving, collecting, and taking possession with the mind or senses. One's perception is a result of the interaction between past experiences, including one's culture and the interpretation of the perceived. If the percept does not have support in any of these perceptual bases, it is unlikely to rise above perceptual threshold. A tourist's perception is important towards a tourist's attitude, having an effect on travel decisions (Tutors2u, 2010; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2010).

Experts in the field of psychology agree that attitude can be changed through persuasion and conscious or strategic effort; of course, communication is an important aspect of changing someone's perception and attitude. Factors such as target characteristics can affect the persuasiveness of a message. These are characteristics that refer to the person who receives and processes a message. One such trait is intelligence. There is a tendency for more intelligent people to be less easily persuaded by one-sided messages. Another variable that has been studied in this category is self-esteem. Although it is sometimes thought of that those higher in self-esteem are less easily persuaded, there is some evidence that the relationship between self-esteem and persuasion is actually curvilinear, with people of moderate self-esteem being more easily persuaded than both those of high and low self-esteem levels.

The medium of persuasion ("the medium is the message") also has an influence towards attitude change (Gale Group, 2001). For example, face-to-face communication is usually more effective than mass communication, although the effectiveness of any one component of communication always involves the interaction of all the variables (i.e. sender, receiver, message, encoding, decoding, and medium). The effects of persuasion may take different forms. Sometimes they are evident immediately; at other times they may be delayed (the so-called "sleeper effect"). In addition, people may often change their attitudes only to revert back to their original opinions, especially if their environment supports the initial opinion. The information-processing model of persuasion, developed by psychologist William McGuire, focused on a chronological sequence of steps that are necessary for successful persuasion to take place (Psychology Glossary, 2010). In order to change listeners' attitudes, one must first capture their attention, comprehend the message, yield to the argument, and retain it until there is an opportunity for action. It has been said that attitude comes from observations of behavior towards something. Sometimes people do not know how to feel until they see how they behave. In this particular case, tourism marketing involves the understanding of customer behavior. Tourists are customers whom we should provide accurate information, build a positive traveling attitude and ensure a satisfying trip to. An understanding of tourists' attitudes and behaviors is useful for marketing plans and public relations in order to have business success. As such, understanding tourists' perceptions become important.

4. Tourism marketing overview

Kotler (1996) mentions that selling products and services to a company is different from selling those to individuals. Others disagree, claiming that the marketing theory is still valid and only involves some adaptation in the marketing tactics. In order for firms to be competitive and remain in business, their products, prices and promotional activities must be satisfactory and offer as good a value as most rivals and industry leaders (Mujtaba and McFarlane, 2007). What is certain though is that to be successful in tourism and its related industries, it is necessary to understand the marketing mix or the 4 P's (people, product, place, and promotion), target audience segmentation, objective and evaluation method (Mujtaba & Karadayi, 2004; The Tourism Network, 2010). Furthermore, the industry must be customer-centric and provide customer intimacy training for all those involved in tourism in order to encourage repeat customers (Mujtaba and Johnson, 2004). As mentioned by marketing and organizational development experts, marketing consists of advertising and selling as well as effective change management practices (Cummings and Worley, 2001). More specifically, marketing includes product or service development, place (location and distribution) determination, promotional strategies, and pricing (Panda Data, 2009). It also requires information about people, especially those interested in what you have to offer (your "market"), such as what they like, where they shop and how much they spend. Its role is to match the right

products or services with the right market or audience (Donnelly, Jr. and Peter, 2006). Mujtaba and Karadayi write that:

Starting and expanding a new business in the tourism industry to consumers requires strategic vision, market research, planning, and effective marketing. Marketing involves analyzing customer needs and securing information needed to produce goods and services in a timely manner. Consumers' buying patterns and behaviors differ among different market segments within a nation or geographical population. Before entering any market, the following questions should be asked: Is there a demand for such a product/service? How competitive is the market for this product/service? How do cultural factors impact a business that is owned by a firm? How is the political situation and advances in technology? (Mujtaba & Karadayi, 2004, pp. 1-2)

Politics is an important consideration in the tourism industry and must be considered when designing an effective marketing strategy. Modern marketing is a way of doing business, heavily based on the "marketing concept" that businesses and organizations should: (1) Design their products/services to meet the customer's wants and needs; (2) Focus on a specific market who will most likely buy the product rather than the entire mass market; and (3) Develop marketing efforts that fit into their overall business objectives (Lern Marketing, 2010).

Recreation or tourism business serves intangible products which makes it more difficult to control the quality and evaluation process. It concerns how people's time and money are spent (Panda data, 2009). Tourism business has many components such as accommodation, food and beverage service. Within the overall business objectives of a marketing plan, specific goals are frequently established relating to things such as increasing the number of tourists, developing or changing their image, facility and activity development, cooperation among tourism related businesses, and/or increasing length of stay and local expenditures. The marketing plan must be able to adapt to economic, social and political changes in the environment. These environmental factors may create marketing opportunities as well as problems as the economy and politics can change at any time (Mujtaba & Karadayi, 2004).

Tourism businesses are also affected by laws and by actions of governmental agencies, so they should continually monitor and evaluate it (Molhotra, 2006). The importance of technology and its developments impact the tourism industry as well. New technology production offers tourism businesses ways to reduce costs and improve the quality of their products/services. For example, the internet and social media websites are excellent avenues for promotion and recruitment of potential clients. Advances in telecommunications continue to create new promotional opportunities. Also, businesses who market themselves as a tourist destination should provide accurate information about their resources, image, and customer satisfaction levels. Overall, the marketing strategy, or mix, should be viewed as a package of offerings designed to attract and serve the customer. The product/service is the recreational/tourism experience with elements including trip planning and anticipation; travel to the site/area; the experience at the site; travel back home; and recollection. Businesses should look for ways to enhance the quality of the overall experience during all phases of the trip.

The 4th "P" of marketing, promotions, provides target audiences with accurate and timely information or special deals to help encourage them in deciding to visit your community or business (Panda Data, 2009). The information should be of great value to the potential or existing visitor. Also, it will be necessary to make decisions regarding target audience, image, objectives, budget, timing, media, and evaluation; furthermore, how to increase the effectiveness of the promotional campaign is also a key factor.

Many well-designed marketing plans fail because they are poorly executed (Pizam and Mansfeld, 2000). Businesses, agencies, and communities can increase the likelihood of successful implementation if they at least assign people or departments specific responsibility for different tasks; and provide employees with timely and relevant coaching, training and information on the communication plan (rationale, objectives, strategies) (Mujtaba, 2008).

Successful marketing requires sufficient funding and personnel time to be made available in order to implement activities aligned with the marketing strategy (Noypayak, 2009). Successful marketing activities will generate additional revenues which can be projected based on the marketing objectives (such as increase off-season stay by 5%). It is important that marketing efforts be continually evaluated. This will improve the effectiveness of marketing strategies by quickly identifying differences between actual results and expected performance and determining likely reasons for the success or failure in meeting the objectives.

Customer satisfaction in tourism is greatly influenced by the way in which the service (hospitality) is delivered and the physical appearance and personality of the business. To do an effective job at marketing, a company

should adopt a strong customer orientation which includes regular research and assessment of their needs, wants and attitudes (Molhotra, 2006).

In order to be successful, the tourism industry must truly understand the meaning of the word "travel." Travel is generally seen as the movement of people between relatively distant geographical locations for any purpose and any duration, with or without any means of transport. As an activity, "travel" covers all the activities performed during a travel (movement). Interconnected with travel is tourism, which is traveling for recreational, leisure or business purposes. The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people who travel and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four hours (Office of Tourism Development, 2010).

Traveling is an adventure, trying to go places that you want to explore as well as seeing and visiting friends and family (Thailand Travel Mart, 2010). It is beneficial to travel, because it builds up our experience about different cultures, foods, traditions, and people groups around the world; it also enhances our idea and self-awareness while giving us the chance to meet and socialize with the other people. Traveling consists of the key player, the tourist, who decides what to do and where to go. Briggs (2001) described that tourism market segments can be identified through numerous methods including demographic variables such as:

- Age - people choose different products according to their age and activities;
- Economic status - for example budget accommodation providers will target people who are traveling on a restricted income;
- Purpose of travel - reason for travel and any special needs. For example, a business traveler will look for efficiency and prompt service whereas a family is more likely to look for fun activities;
- Nationality - as the section about overseas marketing indicates, some nationalities have a greater propensity to travel or indulge in certain activities than others. Once you have chosen specific nationalities or countries to target you will still need to define segments within that group;
- Geographic location/origin - for example, visitor attractions usually find that most visitors come from within one hour's travelling time from the place where they live or are staying;
- Lifestyle, consumer attitudes and behavior - smaller sub-groups according to aspirations, attitudes and general lifestyles.

According to Koth (1987), there are many tools that support tourism marketing process and marketing mix:

- 1). Advertising Marketing- a service, like travel opportunities, is very different from selling a tangible product like a car. Cost per thousand is a useful concept in judging alternative media strategies. Cost per thousand is defined as the cost to deliver one full page black and white ad to 1,000 households.
- 2). Public relations- directing carefully selected messages to key target groups. They can range from ensuring all your staff present a tidy and friendly image to the public, to lobbying Members of Parliament and trying to obtain coverage in the media.
- 3). Personal selling-one of the oldest forms of promotion, which involves the push strategy (encouraging intermediaries to buy the product) or a pull strategy (where the role of the sales force may be limited to supporting retailers and providing after-sales service).
- 4). Sales promotion-depends on the "action", stimulating customers to buy a product. A sales promotion can be directed at the ultimate consumers (a "pull strategy" encouraging purchase) and/or the distribution channel (a "push strategy" encouraging the channels to stock the product).

There are many consumer sales promotional techniques available such as price promotion which is commonly known as 'price discounting'. These techniques offer either a discount to the normal selling price of the product, or more of the product but at the regular price. There are also coupons which come in various forms, such as in coupon books sent out in newspapers allowing customers to redeem the coupon at a retailer.

5. Research methodology

This study aims to explore tourists' attitudes toward Thailand after the Demonstration based on age and gender. The specific hypotheses are as follows:

- There is a statistically significant relationship between traveling to Thailand and the demonstrations.
- Male tourists will feel safe about traveling to Thailand after the demonstrations.
- Female tourists will feel safe about traveling to Thailand after the demonstrations.

- Male and female tourists will have similar ratings for feeling secure toward traveling to Thailand after the demonstrations.
- Tourists who are above thirty-four years of age and those who are thirty-four years of age or younger will have similar ratings for feeling secure toward traveling to Thailand after the demonstrations.

The structure in collecting data for this study was the questionnaire and survey method with random tourists in Bangkok, Thailand. The authors used a purposive sampling method to gather relevant data for the study in Bangkok Province's tourist areas that involved political protests and demonstrations. The statistical analysis included descriptive research such as frequency, percentage, mean, the F-test, and the t-test of the means.

The objective of this applied study was to better understand tourist's attitudes and their feelings toward traveling to Thailand after demonstrations. The surveys were personally handed out to available tourists using a cover letter to explain the purpose of the study and make a request so they would fill it out. Of the 200 questionnaires distributed in Bangkok, all of the respondents filled out the questions. The surveys asked questions regarding gender, age, education, frequency of traveling to Thailand, the main reason for traveling to Thailand, and Tourists' feeling and other factors that impact their decision-making toward coming back to Thailand.

Of all the questionnaires that were distributed, 64.5% were to males and 35.5% were to females. The respondents in the age range of 25-34 years are 40% which represents the mean of the respondents who are working. Most of the respondents (74.5%) are single, 16% are married, 3% are divorced, and the highest rank of education is Bachelor Degree. Furthermore, 21% of respondents are students, 2% are government officers, 35.5% are corporate employees, 12% are business owners, 13% are unemployed, and 16.5% of the sample have other occupations.

6. Analysis and findings

Of the 200 completed and useable responses, 60.5% of the respondents had been to Thailand before and 39.5% of them were in the country for the first time. More specifically, 14% of the sample mentioned that they travel to Thailand more than once a month, 1.7% of them travel to Thailand once a month, 7.4% travel to Thailand once in 3-4 months, 18.2% travel to Thailand twice a year, 22.3% travel to Thailand once a year, and 36.4% travel to Thailand less frequently. It was concluded that 28.5% of the respondents visit North of Thailand during their travels, 49% visit South of Thailand, 15.5% visit East of Thailand, 10% visit North-East of Thailand, and 73% visit Center of Thailand which includes Bangkok.

In this study, 69.5% of the sample mentioned that they are on vacation, 10% are in the country for education purposes, 10.5% are traveling for business purposes, 4% are visiting relatives, and 6% mentioned other purposes for their trip to Thailand. However, they mentioned that 58% are staying less than a month, 21% are staying 1-3 months, 4.5% are staying 3-6 months, 1.5% of the respondents are staying 6-12 months, and 15% are staying more than a year. Accordingly, 44% are staying in various hotels, 20% are staying in resorts, 7% are staying with friends/family members, 34% are staying in Guesthouses, and 13% are staying in other accommodations. Of the respondents, 55% prefer activities on the beach and 11.5% prefer shopping for good bargains.

The political unrest was not new to many of the respondents. As a matter-of-fact, 92.5% of the respondents mentioned that they had heard about the demonstrations in Thailand and still decided to come—perhaps they felt comfortable since they know that Thai people generally support non-violence and are usually very kind to tourists. About 80.5% of the respondents had heard about the demonstrations from television news, 17.5% heard about the demonstration from radio, 50% heard from newspapers, 46.5% heard from internet and websites, and 41% heard from family and friends. Of the total respondents, 61% mentioned that they do not know the overall reasons for the demonstrations.

Table 1 (in the appendix section) shows tourists' feelings comparing by Gender. Male (2.7) feel slightly more secure while traveling in Thailand compared to females (3.3), but both scores fell in neutral rank.

Table 2 shows tourist feelings toward the demonstrations based on age. A good number of these tourists agree that the demonstration problems are directly the government's responsibility; they also believe that the government is too slow to solve these problems and recommend the administration to be more efficient and proactive.

The data also showed that 90% of the males and 90.8% females were feeling secure in traveling to Thailand. Many travelers know that Thais are generally peaceful people and protestors often express their views without violence and destruction. Furthermore, many foreigners may assume that the protests will be short in duration and will end peacefully. As such, the demonstrations have not negatively impacted their decision. However,

76.8% of the males and 82.3% of the female respondents believed that Thai politics appear to be unstable at the moment and, if prolonged for a long time, such perceptions can negatively affect future tourists' feeling in regards to traveling to Thailand. As such, the Thai Government should have a good system to proactively handle the demonstrations which can cause many problems for the country.

The data showed that 66.66% of men are unaffected by the demonstrations and 56% of female's decision making toward traveling to Thailand are unaffected. Assuming that political unrest is short-lived and fairly peaceful, most of the respondents will come back to Thailand again even if they hear of any demonstration: 98.4% of males and 99% of the females will come back to Thailand. As such, marketing professionals should continue to promote their businesses to international tourists as people are willing to return as long as they believe that they will get a good value for their money.

Statistical analysis was used to test the hypotheses at the significance level of 0.05. As demonstrated on Tables 3-4, only some factors show significant impact in regards to traveling to Thailand and the demonstrations. There is a statically significant relationship between traveling to Thailand and the demonstrations: $P = 0.000 < 0.05 \rightarrow$ statistically significant. Male tourists feel safe about traveling to Thailand after the demonstrations: $\mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0.6 > 0 \rightarrow$ Male tourists do not feel afraid to travel to Thailand. Female tourists feel safe about traveling to Thailand after the demonstrations: $\mu_1 - \mu_2 = -0.6 \leq 0 \rightarrow$ Female tourists do not feel afraid to travel to Thailand after the demonstrations.

Male and female tourists have similar ratings for feeling secure toward traveling to Thailand after the demonstrations: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$; $2.7 \neq 3.3 \rightarrow$ Male and Female feeling secure. At 95% confidence level for gender results toward feeling secure; $p = 0.827 > 0.05$ (sig. 2 tailed). $\rightarrow$ The hypothesis regarding gender is not statistically significant. Tourists who are above thirty-four years of age and those who are thirty-four years of ages or younger have similar ratings for feeling secure toward traveling to Thailand after the demonstrations $\mu_1 = \mu_2$; $2.95 \neq 2.87 \rightarrow$ different age groups. At 95% confidence level for Age toward feeling secure; $p = 0.729 > 0.05 \rightarrow$ The hypothesis is not statistically significant.

All tourists, in all age categories, who have traveled to and experienced Thailand feel that it is secure to come to Thailand again even though there have been demonstrations. Tourists that have been to Thailand know more of the Thai traditions and living culture which increases their confidence to be in Thailand. When people see the great hospitality and good value for their time and money in Thailand, they are likely to have a positive impression of the country for future visits. As such, they are more likely to return and recommend the country to other friends and family members.

7. Conclusions

Tourism is very important for the stability of the Thai economy, and political unrest can be a huge concern for the local economy as well as international visitors. Most of the respondents surveyed in this study are males between 25-34 years of age, single, and educated with a bachelor degree. The frequency of visiting Thailand is once a year. They like to visit center of Thailand and south of Thailand. Most tourists had heard of the demonstrations from television and did not want to give a judgment.

Tourists didn't think that the demonstrations were good for the country revolution but they agreed that it had ruined the country's image, the news and international news hurts Thailand's economy, because some people may think it is too risky to invest or visit. Thailand should concentrate on building a good image for the country using various media—such as social media outlets like Facebook which has over 700 million members.

Tourists have agreed on the feeling that Thailand should have efficient administration. They weren't afraid or depressed from what happened in Thailand and want Thailand to solve these problems quickly. Tourists' attitudes and their feelings can change their traveling behaviors and it can affect their decision making to travel in Bangkok. In general, male tourists feel more secure than female tourists to travel in Thailand. However, both feel confident that they would come back to Thailand despite the short-lived demonstrations. Tourists who are thirty-four years of age or younger felt less secure than tourists which are over thirty-four years of age.

We can now see that the demonstrations will not negatively impact tourism businesses in the long run as long as the situation turns back to being safe and peaceful. Almost all of the tourists said that they will come back to Thailand. But we can't deny that the demonstrations had affected tourists' feeling at the time of the demonstrations, some of them had to change their trips and go somewhere else instead. Tourist perceptions have also been impacted by news or misrepresentation of facts through the media.

Officials should make tourists feel safe to travel in Thailand. Leaders should revive the places that had been destroyed as soon as possible: people can feel unsafe and depressed when they see signs of the demonstrations.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) should boost the public relations, provide tourists updated information and country status, create positive feelings by attracting them through a good overall vacation value and nice beaches which are usually safe from demonstrations. Government officials should collaborate with the private sector to offer tourists packages and discounts to raise the number of tourists and motivate them to travel to Thailand. As Noypayak (2009) mentioned, tourist perceptions can be raised by increasing knowledge of consumer values and the relation to other variables, and to be more competitive. Thailand needs to explore and enhance the inherent and distinctive values that maximize tourist's satisfaction.

Overall, this research has provided some literature on tourism to Thailand, the political protests by some supporters of "red shirts" and "yellow shirts", and the general perceptions of tourists during the demonstrations in Bangkok. Educators, managers, government administrators, and tourism professionals can benefit from the findings as they attempt to advance research or their competitive position in the market.

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Table 1. Tourists' feelings by gender

Feeling toward Demonstration	Tourists feelings based on gender		
	Male	Female	Total
Scared	2.7 (Neutral)	3.3 (Neutral)	2.9 (Neutral)
Depressed	2.5 (Neutral)	2.9 (Neutral)	2.6 (Neutral)
Neutral as long as it doesn't impact you	3.1 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)
Good chance of Revolution	2.9 (Neutral)	3.1 (Neutral)	3.0 (Neutral)
Ruined country image	3.4 (Neutral)	3.5 (Agree)	3.4 (Neutral)
Government Responsibility	3.4 (Neutral)	3.7 (Agree)	3.5 (Agree)
Too slow to solve	3.5 (Agree)	3.6 (Agree)	3.5 (Agree)
Misrepresent and slow of news	3.1 (Neutral)	3.3 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)
TAT is a direct responsibility	2.8 (Neutral)	3.3 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)
Thailand should have efficient administration	3.7 (Agree)	3.8 (Agree)	3.8 (Agree)
Total	3.11 (Neutral)	3.37 (Neutral)	3.24 (Neutral)

Table 2. Tourist feeling by age

Feeling toward Demonstration	Tourists feel toward comparing with Age					
	18-25 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-55 years	More than 55 years	Total
Scared	3.1 (Neutral)	2.8 (Neutral)	2.6 (Neutral)	3 (Neutral)	3 (Neutral)	2.9 (Neutral)
Depress	2.7 (Neutral)	2.5 (Neutral)	2.6 (Neutral)	2.5 (Neutral)	2.6 (Neutral)	2.6 (Neutral)
Neutral as long as it doesn't impact me	3.3 (Neutral)	3.1 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)	2.8 (Neutral)	2.4 (Disagree)	3.1 (Neutral)
Good chance of revolution	3 (Neutral)	3.1 (Neutral)	2.9 (Neutral)	2.9 (Neutral)	3 (Neutral)	3 (Neutral)
Ruined country image	3.4 (Neutral)	3.4 (Neutral)	3.6 (Agree)	3.3 (Neutral)	3.3 (Neutral)	3.4 (Neutral)
It is Government responsibility	3.5 (Agree)	3.4 (Neutral)	3.6 (Agree)	3.4 (Neutral)	3.8 (Agree)	3.5 (Agree)
Too slow to solve	3.4 (Neutral)	3.4 (Neutral)	3.8 (Agree)	3.6 (Agree)	4 (Agree)	3.5 (Agree)
Misrepresent and slow of news	3.3 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)	3 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)
TAT is a direct responsibility	2.9 (Neutral)	3 (Neutral)	3 (Neutral)	2.7 (Neutral)	3 (Neutral)	3 (Neutral)
Thailand should have efficient administration	3.9 (Agree)	3.6 (Agree)	3.8 (Agree)	3.9 (Agree)	4.6 (Strongly Agree)	3.8 (Agree)
Total	3.55 (Agree)	3.15 (Neutral)	3.19 (Neutral)	3.13 (Neutral)	3.3 (Neutral)	3.2 (Neutral)

Table 3. One way ANOVA analysis

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Have you ever been to Thailand	Between Groups	1.056	1	1.056	4.475	.036
	Within Groups	46.739	198	.236		
	Total	47.795	199			
Have you ever heard of demonstration	Between Groups	.156	1	.156	2.255	.135
	Within Groups	13.719	198	.069		
	Total	13.875	199			
Scared	Between Groups	14.271	1	14.271	12.738	.000
	Within Groups	213.988	191	1.120		
	Total	228.259	192			
Depressed	Between Groups	4.289	1	4.289	3.731	.055
	Within Groups	219.566	191	1.150		
	Total	223.855	192			
Convenient to travel	Between Groups	.004	1	.004	.047	.829
	Within Groups	16.368	197	.083		
	Total	16.372	198			
Politically unstable	Between Groups	.136	1	.136	.807	.370
	Within Groups	32.154	191	.168		
	Total	32.290	192			
Government Duty	Between Groups	.009	1	.009	.040	.841
	Within Groups	38.814	168	.231		
	Total	38.824	169			

Table 4. Age and gender correlation analysis

4a -

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Gender & Have you ever been to Thailand	200	.149	.036
Pair 2	Gender & Scared	193	.250	.000
Pair 3	Gender & Depressed	193	.138	.055
Pair 4	Age & Have you ever been to Thailand	200	-.109	.124
Pair 5	Age & Scared	193	-.105	.147
Pair 6	Age & Depressed	193	-.061	.403

4b -

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Gender & Convenient to travel	199	-.015	.829
Pair 2	Age & Convenient to travel	199	-.025	.729

4c -

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Convenient	Equal variances assumed	.189	.664	.217	197	.829	.00924	.04265	-.07487	.09336
	Equal variances not assumed			.219	150.080	.827	.00924	.04212	-.07398	.09247