

# THE INFLUENCE OF TRAVEL VLOGS ON TOURIST BEHAVIOR: APPLICATION OF THE AIDA PRINCIPLE

**Ying Zhou**

*University of Guelph, Canada*

**WooMi Jo**

*University of Guelph, Canada*

## INTRODUCTION

Travel vlogs have been massively consumed on YouTube and have been gaining increasing attention in recent years. The term “travel vlog” has covered over a half popularity on YouTube since March, 2020 (Google, 2021). Created by individual tourists (mostly younger generations), travel vlogs are regarded as trustworthy and authentic (Wang, Kim & Agrusa, 2018; Mathisen & Prebensen, 2013). In addition to demonstrating destination attributes such as people, culture and natural resources, which is similar to destination promotional videos, travel vlogs creatively integrate personal travel stories. These travel stories may be a key factor that attracts tourists as they contain useful travel information and depict real destination scenes (Kavoura, Kefallonitis & Giovanis, 2019). Since tourists nowadays prefer to seek realistic travel information (Khan, 2017; Lodha & Philip, 2019), travel vlogs have become an adequate travel information source. Travel vlogs, undoubtedly, have penetrated to tourists’ lives and may invisibly affect their travel decisions.

Despite of the popularity of travel vlogs among younger generations such as Generation Y, the mechanism of how travel vlogs exert influence on tourist behaviors is still unknown. This helps to identify the momentous features of travel vlogs and to understand tourist behaviors. Although it has been demonstrated that providing authentic and useful travel information are the attractiveness of travel vlogs (Mathisen & Prebensen, 2013; Kavoura et al., 2019), no empirical evidence has shown whether it is authenticity and informativeness that make travel vlogs influential. It is also undiscovered what affection will be elicited by the two characteristics, which will in turn affect actual

behaviors. Created by tourists, travel vlogs belong to user-generated content (UGC) while DMO promotional videos belong to marketer-generated content (MGC) because they are created by organizations. Recent literature highlights UGC as a potential marketing tool and the differences between UGC and MGC have been extensively investigated (e.g., Yu, Xie & Wen, 2020; Lee, Lee & Hansen, 2017; Hautz, Füller, Hutter & Thürndl, 2014). However, despite of the potential influence of travel vlogs on younger tourists, travel vlogs are still unexplored as a UGC in destination marketing yet by compared with MGC (i.e., DMO promotional videos). This provides insight for DMOs into future marketing strategies regarding the two types of travel videos.

To fill in above research gaps, this research includes two parts, targeting Generation Y. Study 1 is to illustrate travel vlogs’ influence by adopting the Attention-Interest-Desire-Action (AIDA) principle (Strong, 1925). In this study, attention is regarded as a precondition. Authenticity and informativeness are selected as features that stimulate interest. Inspiration is considered as an affective state that elicits desire. Searching additional information and spreading word-of-mouth (WOM) are the proposed two tourist actions. Furthermore, DMO promotional videos are compared with travel vlogs in these constructs and relationships to highlight the importance of travel vlogs in destination marketing. According to AIDA principle, which is originally used to explain consumer behaviors in marketing context, consumers will go through three stages sequentially before purchasing a product: pay attention to it, get interested in it, and desire for it. This principle has been extensively applied to video advertisement contexts (Sharifi, Khazaei Pool, Jalilvand,

Tabaeeian & Ghanbarpour Jooybari, 2019). Despite each component of AIDA can be tested as an individual construct (e.g., Lee, Song, Lee & Petrick, 2018), literature has suggested personalizing each component by other constructs (e.g., Sun, Cardenas & Harrill, 2016). For example, Xu and Schrier (2019) reveals the mechanism underlying website aesthetics and booking intention by adopting AIDA components as theoretical foundation. Based on above, AIDA principle is appropriate to be applied to this study.

Self-report questionnaire is used in study 1 to measure related constructs. However, one significant drawback of self-report measures is potential cognitive bias (Li, Walters, Packer & Scott, 2018). To increase the reliability of study results, study 2 adopts Becker-DeGroot-Marschak (BDM) auction (Becker, DeGroot, Marschak, 1964) to explore how individuals show differences in willingness to pay (WTP) for a destination after watching travel vlogs and DMO promotional videos. As an incentive-compatible method, this auction has been constantly applied to economic experiments (e.g., Eustice, McCole & Ratty, 2019). While DMOs deliberately create a positive destination image in promotional videos for marketing purpose, travel vloggers share positive or negative comments freely depending on their experiences in a destination. Destination attributes such as physical environment, services and tourism resources affect the valence of comments (Hosany & Witham, 2009), which will affect others' attitudes toward the destination (Pahlevan Sharif & Mura, 2019). These destination attributes can be reflected as destination competitiveness (Gómez-Vega & Picazo-Tadeo, 2019). On this basis, destination competitiveness may affect WTP differently between travel vlogs and DMO promotional videos.

In summary, study 1 answers two research questions: 1) What is the mechanism underlying the influence of travel vlogs on tourist behaviors? 2) Does the mechanism apply to travel vlogs and DMO promotional videos differently? Study 2 answers two research questions: 1) Does travel video type (i.e., travel vlog and DMO promotional video) affect WTP? 2) Does destination competitiveness affect WTP for each travel video type? To address above questions, study 1 proposed a measurement model with six aforementioned constructs based on AIDA

principle and compares travel vlogs and DMO promotional videos regarding the measurement model. Study 2 conducted a 2 (video type: travel vlog vs. DMO promotional video) x 2 (destination competitiveness: high vs. low) online experiment on WTP, where BDM auction is adopted.

## METHOD

A total of four destinations were selected for the study including two high and two low competitive destinations, according to the destination travel and tourism competitiveness index in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019 (World Economic Forum, 2019). For each destination, one travel vlog and one DMO promotional video were selected from YouTube based on criteria that characterize the two types of videos. The target sample population was Generation Y (i.e., born between 1981 and 2003) who live in North America, with a sample size of 205. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants, who were from a participant pool of a research laboratory at a major university in Canada.

Data was collected via Zoom and Qualtrics. After joining the Zoom meeting, participants at first gave consent to this experiment via an online survey. A sample video was played and BDM auction was explained. Each participant watched two videos, including one travel vlog and one DMO video. After watching each video, participants filled out a survey related to WTP, manipulation check and AIDA constructs. A total of 27 experiment sessions were conducted from April 3 to April 9, 2021. Each session took between 40 minutes and one hour. The order of video type and the depicted destinations were randomized among different experiment sessions. The two videos in the same session depict different destinations to avoid accumulated effects on study results.

## FINDINGS

The two factors (i.e., video type and destination competitiveness) were both manipulated successfully in this study. However, three competitiveness levels were found across the four selected destinations. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

(CFA) results indicated that the measurement model in study 1 had good model fit for both video types. By conducting Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), a four-step influence of travel vlogs on travel behaviors of Generation Y was found. Travel vlogs initially attract viewers' attention. By providing helpful travel information and showing authentic travel experience, travel vlogs inspire viewers. Finally, viewers will search additional information and spread WOM about the depicted destination. It was also discovered that there were significant group differences between travel vlogs and DMO promotional videos in the relationship between attention and authenticity as well as the relationship between informativeness and inspiration. Both relationships were strengthened by travel vlog group. Additionally, destination competitiveness affects WTP positively when tourists watch travel vlogs. However, no significant differences in WTP between different competitiveness levels were found when tourists watch DMO promotional videos. Moreover, travel video type did not affect WTP for all three competitiveness levels.

## IMPLICATIONS and CONCLUSION

Theoretically, the study enriches the AIDA literature by introducing six constructs to operationalize the four AIDA components in the destination marketing context. Tourist behaviors facilitated by travel vlogs have been better understood with a four-step measurement model. New insight into the differences between UGC and MGC has been provided by comparing travel vlogs and DMO promotional videos. A potential ranking index range for categorizing destinations based on competitiveness has been identified. In addition, BDM auction has been introduced to measure WTP in the tourism destination marketing context.

Practically, by enhancing understanding of both travel vlogs and DMO promotional videos in destination marketing from this study, DMOs may develop future marketing strategies accordingly. To consider travel vlogs as an additional marketing tool, DMOs may collaborate with travel vloggers by sponsorship (Shin, Lee & Perdue, 2018). Marketing strategies can be adjusted based on the current destination competitive position. For

example, high-competitiveness destinations may use travel vlogs as a primary marketing tool while low-competitiveness destinations may consider DMO promotional videos for attracting tourists. Based on the mechanism underlying the influence of travel vlogs on tourist behaviors, it might be a good idea for DMOs to consider each video characteristic that may lead to the influence. For example, to attract tourists' attention, in addition to the attractive design of DMO videos (Guerrero-Rodríguez, Stepchenkova & Kirilenko, 2020), storytelling can be incorporated (Cho, Shen & Wilson, 2014). Voiceover can be included in DMO videos to provide more useful travel information. It might be helpful to select current popular travel vlogs to supplement the DMO media channel to increase the authenticity of the depicted destination. Using "inspiration" as a keyword in DMO video titles or using hashtagging which contains "inspiration" when disseminating DMO videos might be beneficial to arouse inspiration (Colorado, 2016; Travel Wyoming, 2020; Nova Scotia, 2018; Du, Liechty, Santos & Park, 2020). Moreover, an official destination website is necessary for tourists to obtain destination-related information.

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# IMPACTS OF TASTE CUES ON CULINARY TOURISTS' TRAVEL INTENTION —BASED ON THE ONLINE REVIEWS OF CULINARY DESTINATIONS

**Yuan Li**

*The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China.*

**Lisa Wan**

*The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China.*

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, with the prevalence of information technology, visual marketing tools have been widely used in tourism destinations (Buhalis, 2000), such as promo, films, and pictures. However, excessive dependence on a single sensory channel has led to marketing information overload and reduce the marketing effect (Krishna, 2012). Tourists have been falling into visual fatigue, and destinations must develop novel marketing strategies to capture the minds of consumers. Therefore, the other sensory marketing strategies such as taste, touch, and smell are becoming a new frontier research theme in destination marketing (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2014; Agapito, Pinto, & Mendes, 2017).

Food is an important element in the travel experience, playing a significant role in attracting tourists. For example, after the broadcast of a Chinese food documentary called "A Bite of China", tasting regional delicacies has become an important motivation for travel, which set off a culinary tourism boom in China. Food is not only a marketing tool for tourist attraction, but also an important means of cultural spread and local economic development. However, up to now, the existing research of culinary tourism mainly focuses on the motivation and typologies of culinary tourists (Kim & Eves, 2012; Wolff & Larsen, 2019) and the impact of food resource on destinations such as destination image and branding value (Karim Supa, Supsup, & Sup S A, 2010; Tsai & Wang, 2016; Choe & Kim, 2017). The field of culinary tourism consumer behavior has not been deeply explored (Alderighi, Bianchi, & Lorenzini, 2016). How do culinary tourists make their travel decision? What kind of food recommendation

information can stimulate their travel intention? What is the psychological mechanism behind it? These questions are the basic topics of both culinary tourism and taste sensory marketing, which are very essential, but remained unknown.

In the era of Web 2.0, the online reviews of taste experience in destinations play an important role in culinary tourists' travel decision-making process. More and more tourists evaluate the food resources of prospective destinations based on others' travel notes and snapshots containing the taste information (cues). Therefore, online reviews provide a good research scene for exploring the role of taste cues in culinary tourists' travel decision-making and preference.

In order to enrich the related research, this study intends to carry out four studies based on regression analysis and experiment, to explore the impacts of taste information on culinary tourists' online decision-making process. The research questions include: (1) Do the online reviews with taste cues have higher referential utility (usefulness) in culinary tourism decision-making? (2) What kind of taste cues is more attractive and can improve travel intention? (3) What is the psychological mechanism of the impacts on travel intention?

The answer to the above questions is expected to make both theoretical and practical contributions: First, it will enrich the culinary tourism consumer behavior research by identifying the underlying factor of their travel decision-making process. Second, it will demonstrate the causal relationship of taste cues and travel intention; and identify shared similarity between the potential tourist and the customer reviewer will influence the trustworthiness of the review content, so as to advance the study of online sensory marketing in the tourism context.

Third, it will provide innovative suggestions of taste marketing strategy for culinary destinations and companies in the Web 2.0 era.

## THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

### *(1) Construal Level Theory and Psychological Distance*

Construal level theory (CLT) is an account of how psychological distance influences individuals' thoughts and behavior (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). CLT assumes that the closer the psychological distance perceived by individuals, the more they tend to use low-level, detailed, and contextualized information to construe objects. On the contrary, Under the far psychological distance, individuals tend to construe objects abstractly in terms of high-level, abstract, and stable characteristics (Trope, & Liberman, 2010). The relationship between mental construal and psychological distance is bidirectional. The level of construal will also affect one's psychological distance. When information is consistent with individuals' mental construal mode, it has the greatest impact on individual attitude and decision-making process (Trope & Liberman, 2003; Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007; Fujita, Eyal, Chaiken, Trope, & Liberman, 2008).

### *(2) Research Hypotheses*

In the culinary tourism decision context, potential tourists cannot experience the taste of food directly, so they have to refer to others' comments and get the perception of food. Therefore, taste cues in online reviews meet their information needs and have an important reference role for travel decisions. Previous studies have found that the content and valence of information cues will impact customers' purchase intention (Lv. et al., 2020). Similarly, the content and valence of taste cues will also directly affect tourists' evaluation and perception towards the destination food, and then have an impact on their travel intention.

According to the CLT, psychological distances are influenced by level of mental construal, and in turn, affect individuals' prediction, preference, and action. Specifically, low-level construal information presents the detailed content of an object, which helps reduce the psychological

distance between the object and the consumer, and then in turn, guides consumers' evaluation and behavior. (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). In the culinary travel decision context, we suggest that taste cues with detailed descriptions (i.e., low-level construal) can reduce tourists' psychological distance towards the destination food. The closer they feel to the destination food, the higher the attractiveness of the food, and therefore increase their intention to travel to the culinary destination. Thus,

- **H1:** Compared with no taste cues, the online review contains positive (negative) taste cues can improve (decrease) tourists' travel intention to the culinary destination.
- **H2:** The more detailed of the positive taste cues (i.e., the lower the level of construal) in the online review, the higher the tourists' intention to travel to the culinary destination.
- **H3:** The impact of taste cues on tourists' intention to travel is mediated by psychological distance.

Online reviews provide potential tourists with useful information about the destination resources and services based on other customers' experiences. When considering the online opinions from other customers, it is possible that the shared similarity between the potential tourist and the other customer will influence the trustworthiness of the review content. For example, the fellow-townsmen tourists' food comments might also be more trustworthy, due to the similar regional culture, diet culture and eating habits. Previous research has shown that the incidental similarity (e.g. same last name) between the two customers can shorten the psychological distance between them and result in interpersonal trust (Wan & Wyer, 2019). Therefore, we suggest that shared similarity (same native place, same last name) between the potential tourist and the customer who wrote the review will further strengthen the effect of taste cues on tourists' travel intention to culinary destinations.

- **H4:** Shared similarity between the potential tourist and the customer who wrote the review will strengthen the effect of taste cues on tourists' intention to travel to the culinary destination.

### (3) Conceptual framework

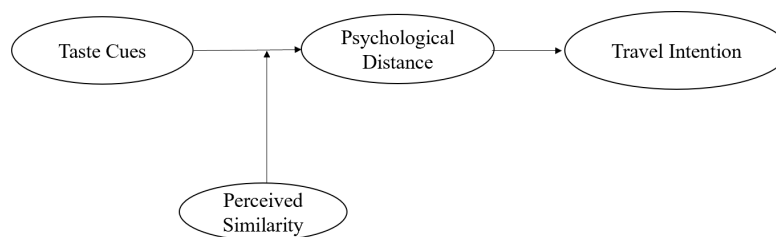


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this paper

## METHOD

Three studies will be conducted to test the hypotheses.

In Study 1, based on the online reviews data of food tourism destinations in Ctrip, this paper will construct a regression model to examine whether the number of taste cues in online destination reviews is helpful during the culinary tourism decision-making process.

In Study 2, we first design an experiment to manipulate verbal taste cues (no vs. positive vs. negative) to examine the effect of taste cues on culinary tourism travel intention.

In Study 3, a 2 (verbal taste cues: with high or low-level construal) X 2 (shared similarity: yes vs no) between-subjects experiment will be designed to test taste cues' information on the culinary tourists' travel intention. The study will only focus on the positive taste cues. More important, we will manipulate shared similarity between the potential tourist and the customer reviewer by using the same native place.

In Study 4, we will replicate study 3 in a different destination context and examine the mediation effect of psychological distance. We will manipulate shared similarity between the potential tourist and the customer reviewer by using the same last name.

## FINDINGS

The expected findings of this research include:

First, taste cues will significantly improve tourists' perceived online reviews usefulness, which is helpful for food tourism decision-making.

Second, (positive) taste cues with low-level

construal will improve travel intention of potential culinary tourists. Psychological distance will play a mediating role in this effect.

Third, the shared similarity between the potential tourist and the customer reviewer will have a significant impact on shortening the psychological distance between them, which will further increase the potential tourist's travel intention.

## IMPLICATIONS

Based on the secondary and experimental data, this study intends to explore the effects of taste cues on culinary tourists' travel intention in the online travel decision-making context. The findings of this study will have positive theoretical and practical implications.

Firstly, it may enrich the research about culinary tourism consumer behavior and psychology, by providing a better understanding of their information preference and decision-making process in the online travel decision context.

Second, it will demonstrate the causal relationship of taste cues and travel intention; and identify shared similarity between the potential tourist and the customer reviewer will influence the trustworthiness of the review content, so as to advance the study of online sensory marketing in the tourism context. Lastly, it will provide a range of innovative suggestions for food tourism marketing for culinary destinations and companies in the Web 2.0 era.

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Any “acknowledgements” and/or “appendices” should appear at the end of the article after the REFERENCES.



# DOMESTIC TOURISM VALUE CHAIN AND LINKAGES AND LEAKGES – A CASE STUDY, COX’S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

**Babul Thomas Gomes**

*Acsenda School of management, Vancouver*

## INTRODUCTION

The development of the tourism sector in many developing countries is prioritized because of its perceived potential for facilitating inter-sectoral linkages (Cai et al. 2006; Meyer 2007; Nyaupane and Poudel 2011; Adiyia et al. 2015), generating employment and capacity to contribute to poverty reduction. The majority of research exploring the impact of tourism on poverty alleviation is predominantly based on the impact of international tourism and does not include domestic tourism (Ghimire 2001; Scheyvens 2007; Njoya and Seetaram 2017). However, there is research (Meyer and Meyer 2015) which argues that domestic tourism has potentially higher levels of linkages with the local economy and more benefits for poor households. This research examines the level of linkages and leakages of tourism in a destination where the vast majority of tourists are domestic. In this respect, this research addresses a gap in the current literature and suggests proposals for to identify and measure the linkages and leakages in the domestic tourism value chain in order to analyse the extent to which the tourism value chain has strongest linkages and weakest leakages in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh.

Research (Llorca–Rodriguez et al. 2018) indicate that while both domestic and international tourism reduced poverty rates domestic tourism demonstrated significantly higher pro-poor economic linkages than international tourism. Domestic tourism has different characteristics from international tourism, and it is proposed that these characteristics may result in different levels of impact on poverty (Jafari 1987; Gladstone, 2005; Winters et al. 2013). Domestic tourists may have greater impact in supporting backward economic linkages and income to poor households as their spending patterns may be closely linked to the local

supply chain of goods and services in the formal and informal economy. These findings are supported by research (Saayman et al 2000) which indicates that multiplier effect of domestic tourism spending exceeds that of inbound tourism and that the expenditure pattern of domestic tourists has significantly higher levels of local linkages.

A review of the literature demonstrates that there are a wide range of definitions of the term ‘leakage’ and differing approaches to its measurement (Lange 2011, Chok et al. 2007, Lejarraga and Walkenhorst 2010). Meyer (2007) sets out a conceptual framework for creating linkages between the tourist accommodation sector and poor households in the local community in developing countries. That framework focuses on four types of linkages, (i) employment (ii) sourcing and procurement (iii) small and medium enterprise (SME) development and outsourcing and (iv) other types of partnership. Linkages may be analysed at the level of an enterprise and its links with the local economy or at an inter-sectoral level between tourism and other sectors of the economy.

## METHOD

The research method is based on quantitative research predicated on tourism value chain mapping in order to identify leakages from and linkages to the local economy. The Cox’s Bazar conurbation was selected as the specific geographic study area because it is the most popular resort for domestic tourism in Bangladesh and has a high level of dependency on employment in the tourism sector by people from economically vulnerable households (Amin 2017) Much of the research in developing economies tends to focus on the linkages and leakages between agriculture and the accommodation sector of the tourism value chain (Pratt et al. 2018). This research provides a wider

lens incorporating a total of twelve actors in the tourism value chain in Cox's Bazar including those in the formal and informal economy. This research was conducted in the three most frequented tourist spots in the resort namely Kolatoli, Suganda and Laboni beaches. The sampling technique used to select research participants in the tourism value chain was convenience sampling including *ad hoc* techniques.

The sample included actors in the formal and informal economy size in the Cox's Bazar tourism value chain incorporating, 71 domestic tourists, 27 suppliers, 22 restaurants, 20 hotels, 25 handicrafts, 15 rickshaw and 20 tuk-tuk drivers. A structured questionnaire was distributed using of convenience and ad hoc techniques and a total of 180 participants participated in this research.

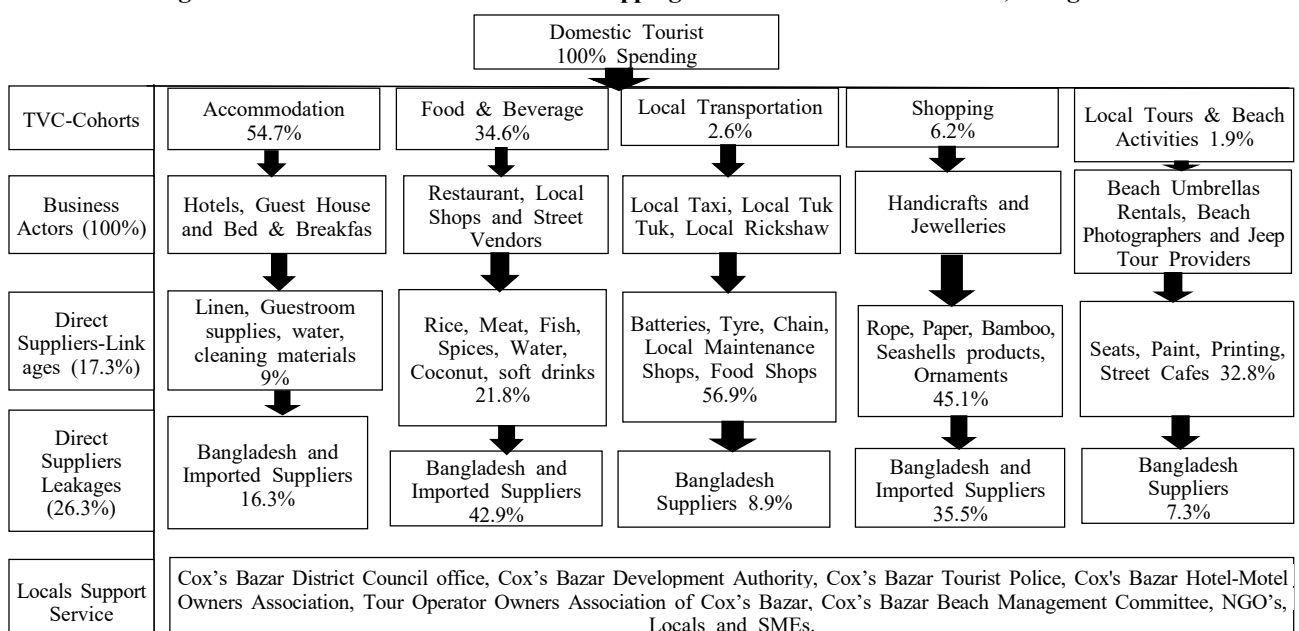
## FINDINGS

The data analysis encompasses calculation of (i) the share of total tourist expenditure allocated to each actor in the domestic tourism value chain, (ii) each actor's linkages and leakages to the local economy in Cox's Bazar,

It can be seen (Figure 1) that accommodation accounts more than half of tourists' expenditure. There is a modest rate of linkages, but the total leakages rate is higher. More than a third of tourists' expenditure is allocated to the food and beverage

sector. Although the rate of linkages is double that of the accommodation sector, it has the second highest level of leakages in the research sample primarily due to sourcing of branded beverages from other parts of Bangladesh. The local transport sector which comprises taxis, tuk tuks and rickshaws attracts the second lowest share of tourists spend. The sector has generally high levels of linkages but there is some variation between the actors in terms of leakages. Rickshaw pullers demonstrate the lowest leakages rate among all actors. The shopping category which has the third largest amount of tourists spend comprises two actors with very different patterns of linkages and leakages. The dried fish retail sector is the most integrated into the local economy and has no imports. The handicrafts sector on the other hand is highly dependent on imports and consequently has the highest level of leakages and the lowest level of linkages. Tours and beach activities, incorporating beach umbrella rentals, beach photographers and jeep tour operators receive the lowest share of tourists spend and have average levels of linkages among the cohort and the third lowest level of leakages. Overall, it can be noted that the three actors (accommodation, food and beverage and shopping) which together attract over 95 per cent of tourists' total expenditure cumulatively have the highest levels of leakages.

**Figure 1: The Tourism Value Chain Mapping Framework in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh**



Source: Author's own work 2019.

## IMPLICATIONS or CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this research relating to that the areas of high expenditure by tourists such as accommodation, food and souvenirs have a low level of linkages but areas of lower tourist expenditure such as street vendors, local transportation and the local excursions sector have a higher level of linkages.

In conclusion, the findings of this research indicate that there is evidence of leakages in the tourism value chain. The literature (Chok et al. 2007; Lange 2011) suggests that the hotel sector is normally associated with high levels of leakages. However, this assertion is not supported by this research as none of the hotels in Cox's Bazar are owned by foreign chains. Overall, the research findings demonstrate that although there are significant leakages (22.3 per cent) from the local economy to other regions of Bangladesh due to supply chain issues, the rate of leakages based on imports is only 4 per cent.

The findings demonstrate that domestic tourists stay in the tourism destination for a longer duration and allocate a greater share of expenditure on locally owned hotels and guest houses rather than luxury hotels. This pattern of expenditure may result in a higher contribution to poor households due to the higher level of linkages of the smaller, locally owned accommodation providers. The results of the research in this paper supports Llorca-Rodriguez et al., (2018) hypothesis that inbound tourism and domestic tourism have characteristics that can differently impact on levels of linkages and leakages with the local economy.

In terms of tourism policy, the key recommendation relates to the absence of any policy specifically focussing on the domestic tourism market Bangladesh is a country undergoing profound economic and social change. Tourism has also followed a growth trajectory from a figure of 300,000 domestic tourists in 2000 to 7 million in 2017 (Economist 2019). The vast majority of tourists are domestic, however as in many developing countries, tourism development strategies are exclusively oriented towards international tourism. The findings of this research indicate that there is a case for developing policies and infrastructure to facilitate more domestic

tourism based on an analysis of this segment's levels of linkages and leakages to the local economy.

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# NEW PERSPECTIVES FROM INTERNATIONAL VISITORS TO THAILAND

**Jerry Agrusa**

*University of Hawaii School of Travel Industry Management Shidler College of Business Hawaii, USA*

**Joseph Lema**

*University of Nevada Las Vegas Harrah College of Hospitality Las Vegas, NV*

**Jihye (Ellie) Min**

*University of North Texas Hospitality and Tourism Management College of Merchandising, Hospitality & Tourism Texas, USA*

**Cathrine Linnes**

*Østfold University College Faculty of Computer Sciences Halden, Norway*

**Sun-Young Park**

*University of San Francisco Department of Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Strategy School of Management San Francisco, CA*

## INTRODUCTION

Competition for tourists and tourist dollars are fierce. Many countries in Asia have been vying for these international tourist dollars. With the increasing integration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), unprecedented opportunities and challenges exist for tourism development and tourists' flows. The tourism industry is vital to the economy of Thailand and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has thrived to position Thailand as a cultural, historical, and natural tourism destination (Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Brown, 2001). In fact, tourism growth had quadrupled from 2001 when Thailand had received 10.13 million visitors to 39.8 million tourists in 2019 (TAT, 2019). Tourism has been promoted in Thailand as a major generator of national income for the country. However, Thailand had suffered from negative effects of uncontrolled tourism, which in part had led the Thailand government to take steps to search for ways to develop a more sustainable tourism product (Worrachaddejchai, 2019). In addition, Thailand as an international tourist destination has had the effects of competing other South East Asian destinations.

In 2020, international travel in Thailand plummeted during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bhaskara & Filimonau, 2021). Tourism is expected to rebound as vaccinations accelerate (Knight, 2021); however, the vulnerability of tourism to external threats such as COVID-19 and their associated impacts may have impact on the image of Thailand as a tourism destination. In tourism, the concept of image is generally explained in two distinct ways. Image can be either an associative image of a product that is developed by the consumer or a mental image of a product created by a marketing department (Kim & Agrusa, 2005; Kim, Holland, & Han, 2013; Tuohino, 2002). Tourism destinations must be cautious in reference to their image so the perception that they have is not different from the way that it is perceived by potential travelers.

According to previous studies in the tourism industry, the perceptions of a tourist destination are critical to its image which has a direct impact on the success as a tourist destination (Kim & Agrusa 2005; Wu, Li, & Li, 2018). The perception that a destination will meet their needs of a visitor, the more attractive that destination becomes, therefore, the greater the probability that it will be selected

as the final destination. A destination's attractiveness has a tremendous influence on determining: a person's destination of choice (Chen & Uysal, 2002; Cong, 2016; Hu & Ritchie, 1993), expectations of satisfaction (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Prideaux, Agrusa, Donlon, & Curran, 2004), intentions to revisit (Crompton, Fakeye, & Lue, 1992), perceptions of benefits and motivations (Kim, Botha, & Crompton, 2000; Prideaux et al., 2004), positive perceptions of opinion leaders (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999), and the amount of money spent along with the duration of stay (Kim, Botha, & Crompton, 2000). A number of studies have determined that destination attributes can also be classified by the characteristics of cognitive resources, such as entertainment, cultural/historical, natural, events, along with sports and recreation (Wu & Li, 2017; Wu, Li, & Li, 2018). In image and competitiveness studies of destinations, the destinations' attributes identified have included climate, atmosphere, comfort, safety and security, sports, recreation, sightseeing, food, beaches, culture, shopping, tourism infrastructure, ease of communication, service quality, friendliness of residents, cost, and entertainment (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Kim & Agrusa, 2005; Kim, Botha, & Crompton, 2000; Sharafuddin, 2015). Therefore, it is important to continue in understanding what international tourist perceptions are of the Thailand tourism product.

In previous research, personal business travel, corporate business travel, visiting relatives and friends, and for pleasure vacations are among reasons to travel (Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2017). This study is geared toward the pleasure vacation segment of the tourism industry and seeks to discover a relationship among the images that international travelers have about Thailand as a tourist destination. Additionally, the study results are compared to the findings from Henkel et al., (2006) to identify changing international tourists' images about Thailand.

## METHOD

This study re-examines whether there has been a change in the perceptions of international visitors on their image of Thailand as a tourist destination after a previous study more than 10 years earlier (Henkel et al., 2006). International visitors were surveyed to determine their perceptions of the image of Thailand and if there have been any changes to the perceptions by international tourists. The population for this study consisted of international travelers. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire through a review of previous literature and previous study such as Henkel et al. (2006). The study analyzed and compared two sets of data collected in 2005 and 2021. T1 in Table 1 represents a sample group of 225 international travelers gathered in 2005, and T2 indicates a sample group of 350 international travelers in summer 2020. T-test was performed to analyze the data.

## FINDINGS

The sample consisted of 52% males and 48% female with an average 35 years of age and with an average household income of 110,000 USD with the T1 sample. T2 consisted of 49% males and 51% female with an average 32 years of age. The majority of the sample 51% reported that they were single in T1 and 47% in T2. The results indicated significant differences between T1 and T2 regarding their cognitive perceptions toward Thailand, such as shopping, nightlife and entertainment, sports activities, budget vacation, historic architecture, erotic tourism, hiking, and health tourism. Related to international tourists' perception considering tourist destinations, significant differences were found between T1 and T2 regarding quality of public services, traffic flow, availability of entertainment, recreation, cultural activities and freedom from terrorism and disease.

**Table 1. Significance Tests on Items Concerning Thailand as a Tourist Destination**

Item	T1		T2		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Importance of cultural sightseeing	4.29	0.90	4.27	0.98	0.27	0.758
Importance of shopping	3.28	1.16	2.96	1.32	3.02	0.000**
Importance of beaches	3.62	1.15	3.89	1.23	-2.74	0.792
Importance of nightlife and entertainment	3.65	1.13	3.11	1.31	5.16	0.000**
Importance of nature, wildlife, and parks	3.68	1.03	3.83	1.09	-1.68	0.896
Importance of friendly people	3.97	1.07	3.77	1.12	2.19	0.057
Importance of sports activities	3.00	1.18	2.46	1.24	5.33	0.003**
Importance of an exotic destination	3.86	1.06	3.87	1.14	-0.14	0.258
Importance of a budget vacation	3.91	1.07	3.38	1.26	5.38	0.000**
Importance of food	4.10	0.96	4.30	0.94	-2.56	0.769
Importance of historic architecture	3.65	1.06	3.68	1.18	-0.33	0.036*
Importance of erotic tourism	2.40	1.38	2.09	1.30	2.76	0.050*
Importance of hiking	2.61	1.08	2.56	1.33	0.45	0.000**
Importance of health tourism	2.76	1.21	2.47	1.32	2.74	0.017*

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

**Table 2. Significance Tests on Perceptions When Considering Tourist Destinations**

Item	T1		T2		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Cleanliness of the community	4.17	0.87	3.92	1.05	3.09	0.160
Quality of public services	4.01	0.93	3.60	1.14	4.59	0.000**
Traffic flow	3.51	0.97	3.09	1.24	4.37	0.000**
Distance traveling to tourist destinations	3.50	1.11	3.28	1.29	2.13	0.000**
Availability of entertainment	3.80	1.00	3.51	1.21	3.04	0.000**
Availability of recreation	3.96	0.88	3.65	1.14	3.50	0.000**
Availability of cultural activities	3.94	0.89	3.92	1.11	0.31	0.010*
Friendliness of residents	4.19	0.85	4.16	0.95	0.30	0.526
Freedom from threats of terrorism	4.26	1.06	3.82	1.26	4.42	0.004**
Freedom from threats of disease	4.44	0.94	3.86	1.16	6.40	0.005**

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

## IMPLICATIONS

The study examines the tourists' changing images toward Thailand as an international travel destination through a longitudinal study. The data analysis showed that there have been significant changes to the destination images and tourists' perceptions when considering tourism destinations. Most importantly, the study revealed a possible negative impact of the current tourism disruption along with COVID-19 on the tourism destination images. By attempting to promote the uniqueness of the Thailand culture and country, the TAT (2019)

has announced the message that Thailand wants to develop sustainable tourism through leveraging the uniqueness of its unique food, culture, and friendly residents. As Thailand is expected to have a rebound in tourism by approving quarantine waiver for those who are vaccinated in Summer 2021 (Thanthong-Knight, 2021), the key to the success of the strategy will be whether or not tourists perceive Thailand to live up to the image that it is intended to be known and advertised. The study provides important implications for destination marketing, tourism policy and planning.

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