

Tourist Tragic News:

A Case of Its Effects on Tourism in Thailand

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Abstract—The purposes of this research were to measure and compare the effects of tourist tragic news on audiences' attitudes toward tourism in Thailand. Sixty three foreign students were selected to determine whether their attitudes were changed after viewing the news. Statistical instruments such as mean, standard deviation, and t-test with the significant level at 0.05 were selected to complete the process of data analysis of pretest and posttest. The results found that after viewing the news, the level of audiences' attitudes toward tourism in Thailand significantly decreased to be less positive levels. However, gender was not a significant factor. Both male and female were equally influenced by similar effects of tourist tragic news.

Keywords—Country Image, Country of Destination, Gender Difference, Thailand, Tourist Tragic News.

I. Introduction

According to MasterCard Global Destination Cities Index of 2015, Bangkok was the first in Asia and the second in the world that tourists chose to visit as the destination city [1]. Tourism is an important source of income for many countries, especially for Thailand. In 2014, it was estimated that tourism in Thailand directly generated 350 billion USD to the country which was accounted for 16 percent of country's GDP. Moreover, the indirect effects of tourism might be accounted for 700 billion USD or 32 percent of Thailand's GDP [2]. In addition, tourism not only introduces the country image to the world, but also creates jobs and distributes income to provinces. For these reasons, tourism becomes one of the most vital industries for Thailand.

To maintain the important source of incomes, Thailand not only has to promote its tourism, but also prevent the negative image of the country. However, the tragic news occurred to the tourists in Thailand severely hurt Thailand's country image. According to table 1, the numbers of tourist deaths in Thailand in the past 3 years have been increasing from 24 cases to 83 cases [3][4][5].

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Although the tourist deaths reported are relatively small compared with the numbers of tourist arrivals, this statistics had already alarmed Thai government to take seriously actions since the tourism in the essential source of income for Thailand [2].

TABLE I
NUMBERS OF TOURIST ARRIVALS AND TOURIST DEATHS IN THAILAND

Year	Tourist Arrivals	Tourist Deaths	% Change
2013	27 millions	24*	-
2014	25 millions	54	+78%
2015	30 millions	83	+54%

* Estimated number.

According to previous studies, media news, especially a video format, had significant impacts on audience's decision to select country of destination for travelling [6]. Moreover, Jeffers (1997) found that the audiences were able to determine whether they would like to visit the country shown in the media from a single view only [7].

In 2014, the case of two young British backpack tourists were killed at Koh Tao, one of the most popular tourist islands in Thailand, was spread all around the world especially in western mainstream media [8] [9]. In 2015, the bomb at tourist famous shrine in central district of Bangkok that instantly killed over 20 people also shocked tourists [10]. These were the examples that how the tragic tourist news could affect tourism in Thailand. In this study, it would test how much the tragic tourist news could affect foreigner's perception about country image of Thailand, and consequently change the tourists' decision the choose Thailand as the country of destination.

II. Literature Review

A. Country Image

Gunn (1997) found that a country image was a representation of totality of what a person already knew or perceived about that country from different sources of information such as news, documentary, drama, and other entertainments [11]. Therefore, country image is a perception

of individual's experience. In the past, only a few studies of country image of Thailand were conducted and most were positive image. For example, Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) found a positive image of Thailand as a rich cultural, natural, and historical country [12]. Tapachai and Waryszak also found the positive image of Thailand such as friendliness of Thai people, Thai food, historical sites, natural scenery, exotic culture, and competitive cost of travelling [13].

However, the recent incidents related to tourists in Thailand had significant impacts on country image. In 2012, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) conducted a survey on country image of Thailand found that safety was the primary concern for foreign tourists visiting Thailand. Also some tourists had the least confidence in visiting Thailand because of previous bad experiences with fraud and service misunderstandings [14].

A country image not always come from individual's direct experience, but can also be conveyed via a media news viewing. Since mass media was considered to be a consumer product, consuming media news could also convey a country image similarly to consuming a product. Thus, it seemed to be reasonable enough to assume that audience could perceive a country image by their own experience of consuming the media news according to the concept of country image by Nagashima (1970) [15].

B. Social Representation Theory and Cultivation Theory

Serge Moscovici was considered to be the first researcher who used the term social representation to psychological research field [16], and then Pearce applied the social representation theory to tourism research in 1996 [17]. Representation refers to the construction of reality such as country, places, people, events, culture, and other abstract concepts, from media which may or may not be exactly the same things in real world. It means that media produces only one version of reality. Therefore, the social representation theory is the study of one particular person, people, groups, or country that being represented to audiences in the media. When social presentation theory is applied in media, especially mass media, it creates a visual representation caused by media. It provides representations that lead to social understanding. On the other hand, the media producers can manipulate how the visual representations will be shown to audiences.

In general, one piece of news may contain an icon of the country image. The icon is a symbolic meaning or theme, featured event, place, people, historical or cultural traits viewed in that media. By this function, when the audiences views a piece of news about a country, they may perceived

one icon such as place, people, the way of life, technology, or safety of a community, of the country.

In addition, Cultivation theory which studied the long-term effects of consuming media news stated that the more time audiences spend living in the media world, the more likely they are to believe social reality portrayed on media is the real [18]. Therefore, when audiences consume bad news of the country, they may presume a bad icon of the country such as unsafe place, unfriendly people, unsecure of life are really the whole reality of the country. This effect may totally lead to misunderstanding of country image perception.

C. The Effects of Media to Tourism

Jeffers (1997) found that during the process of decision-making about country of destination, media had a great influence [7]. Kim and Richardson (2002) found that media could generate both positive country image and negative country image [19]. Even the recent news about Brexit which United Kingdom had to leave European Union has been expected to affect tourism all over Europe leading to higher cost of travelling or even more disintegration of the European Union [20]. In Thailand, the news about the military coup in 2014 hurt tourism in Thailand by 6 percent drop in the months after the coup [21].

However, the effects of media on tourism may vary by personal factor such as gender. Some found significant differences between male and female in perceptions from media effects while the others found only little difference in the level of the effect between two different genders [22] [23].

III. Research Purposes and Hypotheses

This study assumed that the negative country image of Thailand from the tourist tragic news video that foreign audiences viewed could discourage them to visit Thailand and eventually lead them not to choose Thailand as a country of destination for travelling. Therefore, the purposes of this research were the followings;

1. To measure and compare the attitudes toward country image and travelling intention before and after viewing the tourist tragic news video.
2. To measure and compare the attitudes toward country image and travelling intention between male and female before and after viewing the tourist tragic news video.

Based on the literature review, the hypotheses of this study were the followings;

H₁: The attitudes toward country image and travelling intention before and after viewing the tourist tragic news video were different.

H₂: The attitudes toward country image and travelling intention from viewing the tourist tragic news video of male and female were different.

4) Thailand speedboat tragedy on May 26, 2016. The video duration was 1:05 minutes. The source was The Telegraph [25].

The questionnaire consisted of 2 major parts; icons and effects. The questionnaire was tested for its reliability and had 0.846 and 0.878 reliability of Cronbach’s alpha for pretest and posttest. Also, the questionnaire was approved by experts in the related field for its validity. All rated questions were measured on a five-point scale by given 1 as the most disagreement and 5 as the most agreement.

IV. Methodology

A. Research Design

The target group of this study was the foreign students in international college. The data collection process was divided into two phases; in-depth interview and experimental study. In the first phase, five foreign students from International College, Bangkok University, were selected by purposive sampling. The data collected from in-depth interview then were used to construct the questionnaire on experimental study in the second phase.

In experimental study, the data were collected by purposive sampling as well. The 104 questionnaires were distributed to foreign students in a classroom of International College, Bangkok University. Only 63 questionnaires were used due to the selection process. The study needed only foreign students who had little knowledge about the news before. The respondents were asked to fill-in the questionnaires first before viewing the video. Right after viewing the video, the respondents were asked to fill-in the questionnaires again.

B. Survey Instrument

Four series of tourist tragic news and questionnaires were used as tools for study. The four series of videos presented Thailand icons; places, security, people, and facility. The four series of tourist tragic news used in this study were the followings;

- 1) The murder of two young British at Koh Tao Island, Thailand on September 15, 2014. The video duration was 56 seconds. The source was BBC News [9].
- 2) The Shrine Bomb in Central District Bangkok, Thailand on August 17, 2015. The video duration was 2:28 minutes. The source was CNN News [10].
- 3) British family beaten unconscious during Songkran festival in Thailand on April 13, 2016. The video duration was 25 seconds. The source was The Guardian [24].

C. Data Analysis

The level of attitude toward country image (icons) and travelling intention (effects) was explained in mean and standard deviation. Then, the data of pretest and posttest were analyzed to compare the differences in attitude and intention using t-test with the significance level at 0.05. In addition, the attitude and intention levels of both male and female in pretest and posttest were also compared using t-test with the significant level at 0.05.

V. Results

From the total of 63 foreign students as audiences, the attitude differences toward country image and travelling intention of pretest and posttest was shown in table 2.

TABLE II
PRETEST AND POSTTEST OF ATTITUDE AND INTENTION DIFFERENCES

Questions of icons and effects		Pretest		Posttest		Sig.
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Icons	Q1: Thailand is the country of many safe places to visit.	3.43	0.797	2.35	0.919	0.000*
	Q2: Thailand is the country of having high security measure for tourists.	3.00	0.842	2.25	0.879	0.000*
	Q3: Thailand is the country of nice people to know.	3.94	0.878	3.22	1.039	0.000*
	Q4: Thailand is the country of safety transportation and facility.	3.29	0.958	2.63	0.955	0.000*
Effects	Q5: I like Thailand.	4.35	0.864	3.63	1.021	0.000*
	Q6: I decided to travel to Thailand if possible.	4.19	0.877	3.40	1.056	0.000*

* Significant at 0.05 level

From table 2, the significant difference was found in every question. It meant that the tourist tragic news did change the attitude toward country image from positive image to less positive image or even negative image. The tourist tragic news also significantly discouraged audiences to choose the country

as visiting destination. When data were divided by gender, the pretest attitudes of 28 male and 35 female audiences were analyzed and shown in table 3.

TABLE III
PRETEST OF ATTITUDE AND INTENTION IN DIFFERENT GENDERS

Questions of icons and effects	Pretest				
	Male		Female		Gender Diff.
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Sig
Q1: Thailand is the country of many safe places to visit.	3.50	0.839	3.37	0.770	0.529
Q2: Thailand is the country of having high security measure for tourists.	3.11	0.916	2.91	0.781	0.371
Q3: Thailand is the country of nice people to know.	3.79	0.787	4.06	0.938	0.225
Q4: Thailand is the country of safety transportation and facility.	3.14	1.044	3.40	0.881	0.293
Q5: I like Thailand.	4.39	0.916	4.31	0.832	0.723
Q6: I decided to travel to Thailand if possible.	4.14	1.008	4.23	0.770	0.703

* Significant at 0.05 level

According to table 3, the attitudes toward country image and travelling intensions between male and female in pretest were not significantly different at all. It meant that the tourist tragic news produced the relatively equivalent effects to both genders. The posttest attitudes of both male and female audiences were analyzed and shown in table 4.

TABLE IV
POSTTEST OF ATTITUDE AND INTENTION IN DIFFERENT GENDERS

Questions of icons and effects	Posttest				
	Male		Female		Gender Diff.
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Sig
Q1: Thailand is the country of many safe places to visit.	2.36	0.989	2.34	0.873	0.952
Q2: Thailand is the country of having high security measure for tourists.	2.18	0.945	2.31	0.832	0.547
Q3: Thailand is the country of nice people to know.	3.25	1.005	3.20	1.079	0.851
Q4: Thailand is the country of safety transportation and facility.	2.50	1.000	2.74	0.919	0.320
Q5: I like Thailand.	3.82	1.020	3.49	1.011	0.197
Q6: I decided to travel to Thailand if possible.	3.54	1.201	3.29	0.926	0.354

* Significant at 0.05 level

From table 4, after viewing the tourist tragic news video in posttest, the attitudes toward country image and travelling intensions between male and female found no significant difference. Although video viewing did reduce the positive attitudes toward country image and travelling intensions of the audiences, both genders seemed to have relatively equivalent effects. Therefore, gender was not a factor of the media news effects in this case.

VI. Conclusion

This study found that the tourist tragic news video certainly reduced the positive attitudes toward country image and travelling intensions as the previously assumed on this study. The video viewing of tourist tragic news could change the positive attitudes to even negative attitudes of country image. Consequently, it transformed those attitudes into negative actions. Hence, it was likely to discourage more audiences not to travel to that country. Again, it confirmed that media news; especially tragic news in this case, had a great impact on country image, country of destination, audiences' decision, and finally tourism industry.

The study found that gender was not a significant factor. The tourist tragic news contributed relatively similar great impacts on both male and female. Both genders were equivalently influenced and their attitudes and intension were both reduced with no significant difference.

In conclusion, the tourist tragic news could significantly reduce positive audiences' attitudes toward country image and their intention to choose country of destination. However, the tourist tragic news is only one fraction of the whole reality. To prevent the negative country image, several sectors of the country must help improve such tourist tragedy not to happen in all possible ways since its effects severely hurt tourism industry. Therefore, understanding the effects of tourist tragic news could turn to be great benefits if the country seriously takes more security measures to increase tourists' safety and that should be the long-term solution for the countries that rely on tourism industry.

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