

Tourism Destination Image Evaluation by Photo Elicitation:

A Case Study of a Crude Oil Leakage Crisis on Samed Island, Rayong, Thailand

การประเมินภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยวโดยใช้ภาพถ่าย กรณีศึกษา :

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Abstract

Tourism is an essential industry that makes the economic growth in society however this industry is also sensitive to disaster and crises. This study aimed to assess the attraction of Samed Island for tourists before and after a leakage of crude oil and to understand the changing image of the island. The study involved 120 Thai and foreign tourists and data were collected by in-depth interviews and responses to a collection of photographs of the island. Results showed that among the component of tourist destination image; attractions, atmosphere and activities are the initial concern before traveling to the destination while local people, transportation, accommodation and food are less important respectively. After the oil leakage, tourists have mix of feelings especially feelings of grief and depression as well as concern about animal, environment and pollution. Despite the oil crude having negative effects, this only lasted for a limited time, and most tourists still found the island attractive as a destination. Strategies were also proposed to restore a positive image.

Keyword: Destination Image, Tourism Crisis, Samed Island, Crude Oil Leak Disaster, Photo Elicitation

บทคัดย่อ

การท่องเที่ยวเป็นอุตสาหกรรมที่สำคัญต่อการเติบโตของเศรษฐกิจและมีความอ่อนไหวต่อภัยพิบัติและวิกฤตการณ์ การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อประเมินภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยวบนเกาะเสม็ด ก่อนและหลังเกิดเหตุการณ์การรั่วไหลของน้ำมันดิบ และเพื่อทำความเข้าใจกับภาพลักษณ์ที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไปของเกาะ จาก การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกในกลุ่มนักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยและชาวต่างชาติ จำนวน 120 คน โดยใช้รูปถ่ายเป็นเครื่องมือ ประเมินการรับรู้ภาพลักษณ์ ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ในส่วนของภาพลักษณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยว สถานที่ท่องเที่ยว บรรยากาศ และกิจกรรม เป็นความกังวลเบื้องต้น ก่อนที่จะเดินทางไปยังปลายทาง ในขณะที่คนในท้องถิ่นเห็นว่าการขนส่งที่พักและอาหาร มีความสำคัญน้อยกว่าตามลำดับ หลังจากการรั่วไหลของน้ำมัน นักท่องเที่ยวรู้สึกถึงความรู้สึกเศร้าและความหดหู่ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่ง ความกังวลเกี่ยวกับสัตว์ สิ่งแวดล้อมและมลพิษ แม้จะ วิกฤติน้ำมันดิบรั่ว มีผลกระทบเพียงระยะเวลาจำกัด แต่นักท่องเที่ยวส่วนใหญ่เห็นว่า เกาะเสม็ดยังคงเป็น สถานที่ที่น่าสนใจทางการท่องเที่ยว อย่างไรก็ตาม เมื่อเกิดวิกฤติใด ๆ ขึ้น หน่วยงานที่เกี่ยวข้องควรมีการ กำหนดกลยุทธ์ทางการจัดการเพื่อสร้างภาพลักษณ์ที่ดีให้กลับคืนมา

คำสำคัญ : ภาพลักษณ์แหล่งท่องเที่ยว วิกฤตทางการท่องเที่ยว เกาะเสม็ด วิกฤตการณ์ท่อน้ำมันดิบรั่ว
การประเมินโดยใช้ภาพถ่าย

Introduction

Tourism is a vulnerable industry that is subject to the effects of external factors, such as political crises, natural disasters, epidemics, terrorism, and protests, all which can impact on travel (Beirman, 2003; Rittichainuwat, 2013; Speakman & Sharpley, 2012). Study about these effects helps the industry understand tourists' needs and assist in the management of tourist destinations after such events. However, research in tourism and tourism image has been mainly of an empirical nature and has lacked innovation and variety, mostly using quantitative methodology (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Franklin & Crang, 2001; Pike, 2011; Untong & Kaosa-ard, 2010). Attempts have been made to introduce more creative qualitative approaches in the latter time (Consulting, 2012; Pernecky, 2007; Pike, 2011; Ryan & Cave, 2005).

Samed Island is a famous tourist destination known for its natural beauty, white beaches, extensive recreational facilities, and more than 90 accommodation places of various types and standards. It is popular with Thai and foreign tourists who visit to relax and enjoy the water activities, including scenic boat rides, diving, jet skis, para-sailing, banana boats, and windsurfing. Ao Phrao is a major tourist center providing an excellent viewpoint to watch the sun setting.

There are three hotels at Ao Phrao, Le Vimarn Cottages and Spa, Lima Coco Resort, and Ao Prao Resort (TAT, n.d.).

Date back to Saturday, 27 July 2013, there was a serious crude oil leakage from PTT Global Chemical Public Company Limited in the Gulf of Thailand at Maptaphut port, Rayong province. The oil spread extensively, reaching Ao Prao, an important tourist destination on Samed Island. It seriously damaged the environment and economy by impacting on the marine ecosystem, coastline, inshore fisheries, and tourism industry. The oil slick was eventually brought under control but there were significant short-term and long-term impacts on tourists' confidence and the tourism image of Samed Island. In August 2013, after the leakage, there was a hotel occupancy rate of twenty percent compared to a normal average occupancy rate of 63% (DOT, 2013). The number of tourists decreased to less than 10,000 people per day. Records showed that income from tourism in 2013 was about \$0.6 million and the number of tourists was 360,727. Of these, 76 percent were Thai tourists and 23 percent were foreigners (DNP, 2013). It was believed that tourists lost confidence in the destination and food, and cancelled check-ins and room bookings for a lengthy period of time both in and outside Ao Prao. The crisis affected the destination image of Samed Island, an area that depends on tourism. Restoration of the destination image after the crisis required immediate attention.

Despite the fact that this crisis passed for four years, some questions are remain to answer 1) How do tourists feel about tourism destination image before Samed oil spill incident? 2) How do tourists feel about Samed Island image after oil crude crisis? and 3) How is the image of Samed Island changed?. To answer these questions, researchers used qualitative approach with tourist's in-depth interview and utilized photographs as a tool in the assessment of the island's destination image before and after the crisis. It was anticipated that the results may form strategies for the development of image restoration in tourism crisis management.

Objectives

1. To assess the attraction of Samed Island for tourists before and after a leakage of crude oil.
2. To understand the changing image of the island by using photo elicitation approach.

Literature Review

Destination Image

Destination image is one of the most study topic in tourism context due to its influence to raise certain images into tourists' mind. There are various definitions of destination image especially in term of tourism. Destination image is defined as individual psychological expressions of knowledge, feelings and perceptions of a particular attraction (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) including impression, prejudice and emotion of a person or group of people toward a specific object or place (Alcañiz, García, & Blas, 2009; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). However, the term basically refers to the sum of knowledge, beliefs, feelings, impressions, and overall perceptions of tourists for each destination (Haywantee, Dogan, & Robin, 2009; Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011).

Considering to destination image components, Beerli & Martin (2004) pointed out that destination image is a picture in mind that emerged from a set of component to describe a destination for instance natural resources, infrastructure, tourist leisure and recreation, culture, history and art, and political and economic factor

Destination Image Formation

Before making decisions about traveling to destinations, it is beneficial to tourists to be able to find out relevant information about the appropriateness of the destinations to their needs. This information may be communicated by effective media (Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011), such as photographs in magazines, journals, newspapers, brochures, and tourism companies (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gunn, 1988). These photographs are able to create an image of the destinations for potential tourists (Little, 1994; Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011).

Tourist destinations with recognizable images have more chance of being chosen. Tourists make their choices of where to travel based on the destination images being portrayed by the media but also based on their own images of a destination that come from many different sources, including background and past experiences with a destination. When planning a journey to a destination, tourists usually go through a seven-step process (Gunn, 1988). These steps consist of: 1) Accumulation of mental images about vacation experiences; 2) Modification of these images with additional information; 3) Making of a decision to take a vacation trip; 4) Travel to chosen destination; 5) Immersion in the destination and participation in activities; 6) Return home; 7) Modification of images after the experiences.

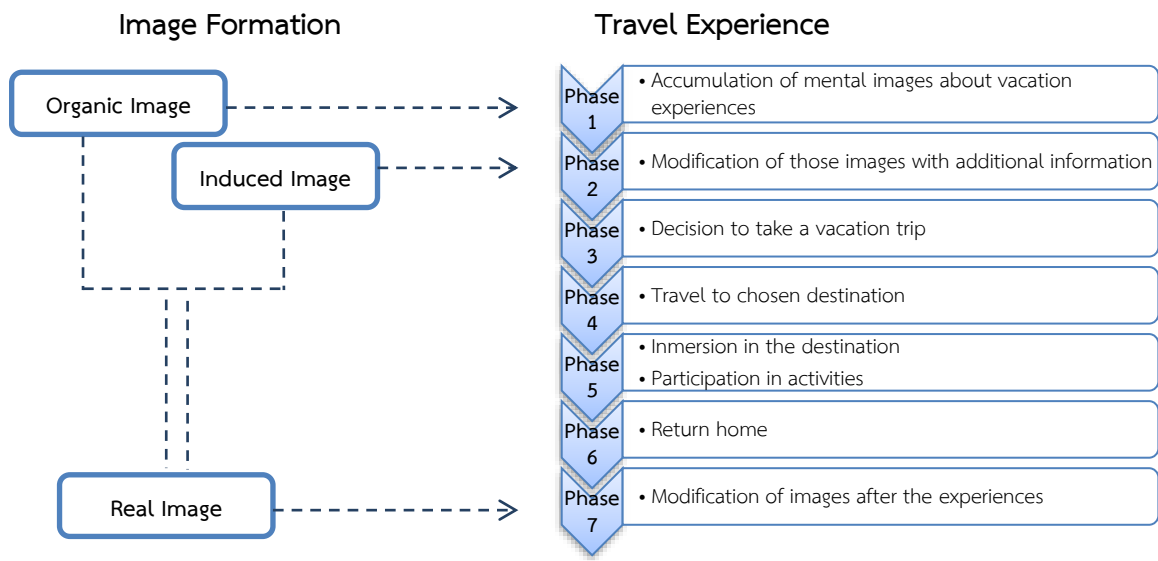


Figure 1 Process of destination image formation

Source: Adapted from tourism experience model of Gunn (1988)

Figure 1, Tourists may make assessments of the destination image from data sources drawn from phases 1, 2, and 7. The destination image from phase 1 is called organic image, an image from data sources which are irrelevant to tourism. These data sources are non-commercial, such as general media (newspapers, journals, and movies) as well as ideas from friends and/or family. Image formation in phase 2 is called induced image and is derived from commercial data sources, such as tourism brochures, tourism companies, guide books, radio, and television. Tourists should use data from phases 1 and 2 for decision-making before going to the destination. Phase 7 presents real image, tourist experiences obtained from the destination and from traveling. This real image is used for destination image improvement as it is the tourists' image based on their experiences, and is more realistic, complicated, and different from the image before visiting the destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gunn, 1988).

These phases show that tourists may have destination images even though they have not been to the destination or never seen tourism media. Tourists' images may change before and/or after going to a destination due to their experiences. As a result, studies of destination image may involve people who have not been to a destination and also experienced tourists.

Tourism Crisis Situation

Tourism crises may occur due to natural disasters, epidemics, wars, terrorism, and/or political riots, and often impact on tourists' confidence (Beirman, 2003; Rittichainuwat, 2013; Speakman & Sharpley, 2012; Tse, 2006), and, in turn, cause problems for hotels, restaurants, transport services, and general employment (Franklin & Crang, 2001; Gertner & Kotler, 2004). Natural disasters, such as tsunamis and earthquakes, may directly damage destinations and their resources, while non-natural disasters, such as terrorism and political problems, may affect tourists' confidence and/or safety awareness, a major factor in decision-making (Beirman, 2003). Such tourism crises have negative effects in the decrease in tourist numbers and loss of image. The impacts may vary, depending on the situations, information, and tourists' experiences (Avraham & Ketter, 2013; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). In cases of tourism crises, there is a need for urgent action for destinations in terms of strategic image restoration and/or marketing image restoration (Avraham & Ketter, 2013; Gertner & Kotler, 2004).

Previous research looked at the relationship of destination image and other elements but not many. Pennington-Gray, London, Cahyanto, & Klages (2011) studied about tourism crisis management planning after a crude oil leakage crisis in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. This research found that a small number of tourists cancelled their trips to Florida when they heard about the crude oil leakage. Most tourists with experiences of traveling to Florida received reliable data from Visit Florida media and continued with their plans as they knew that the situation in Florida was safe. The research found this outcome to be a result of a positive destination image.

Another survey of the impact of a crude oil leakage on destinations was conducted in the Gulf of Mexico (Branstrator, 2012). The survey considered the Gulf of Mexico as a tourism attraction, changes about destination image after the crude oil leakage crisis, and differences between specific destinations in the Gulf of Mexico. The research found that tourism image was restored explicitly after one year which no impact to tourism around the Gulf area. Most tourists have seen The Gulf of Mexico remained attractive as a tourism destination since it was recovered very quickly. Also, there were no differences around Gulf of Mexico because it mostly was communicated about Florida beach.

From the literature review, assessing a destination image typically depends on tourist's background toward tourism destination which includes knowledge, believe, impression and perception. The destination image can also be developed by the perception of organic and

induced image before experiencing a certain tourist destination. The conceptual framework (Figure 2) was proposed to reflect the research questions regarding the evaluation of destination image before and after the crisis.

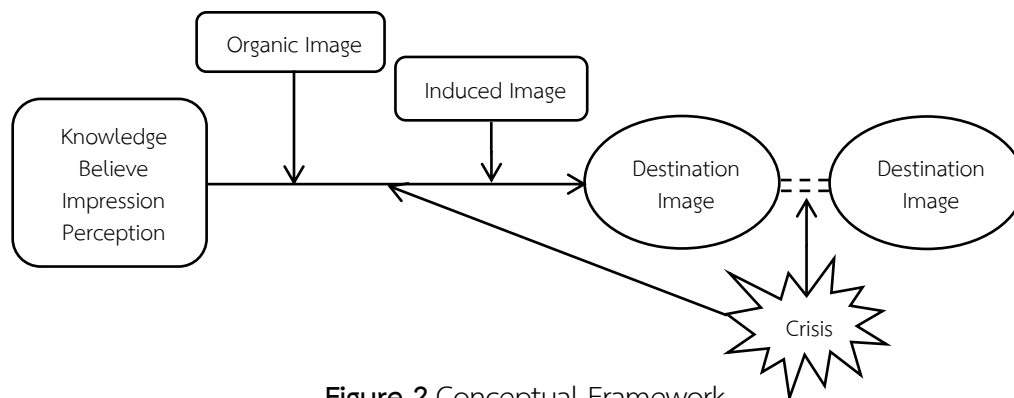


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

This qualitative research used purposive sampling in the selection of 120 Thai and foreign tourists for interviews during November 2015 to January 2016. These tourists were organized in two groups, one regarded as ‘experienced’ in that the tourists had spent a minimum of one night on the island and were able to comment on their impressions of the destination, and a group of ‘inexperienced’ tourists who were on a one-day visit. Members of the former group were interviewed while they were relaxing, eating at restaurants, or involved in activities on the beach.

Data were collected by employing photo elicitation in-depth interview and laddering technique which monitored tourists’ opinions by the use of sets of photographs. The photographs used in the data collection interviews were organized in two sets. The first set showed tourism aspects of Samed Island obtained from the Tourism Authority of Thailand and tourism companies. The second set consisted of photographs of the effects of the crude oil leakage from PTTGC Greenpeace and National Geographic. Content analysis were used and facilitated by Nvivo.

Data Collection Techniques

Previous research used the laddering technique to identify elements of tourism experiences (Haywantee et al., 2009; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2009; Willson & McIntosh, 2010). This technique is used in marketing research and is based on means-end theory which focuses on the relevance between product image affecting consumers (means) and personal values (end)

(Gengler & Reynolds, 1995). It is designed to push up people stepping down from the first step of ladder which is intangible (mean) to the last step which is intangible (end). The technique poses repeated questions to encourage respondents to provide answers that reveal their feelings and beliefs.

Between 1973 and 2007, there were more than 262 research articles about destination image published (Pike, 2011). Despite this increasing interest in destination image, the analysis revealed a continued lack of qualitative methodology, lack of an explicit travel circumstance, and the risk of uninformed responses. Qualitative research which studied destination image used the free elicitation technique through which tourists were able to express their thoughts and feelings about destinations freely in the assessment of destination image (Jenkins, 1999). This technique involved interactive interviews, focus groups, and photo elicitation to separate and identify the elements of destination image (Jenkins, 1999; Willson & McIntosh, 2010). Besides the free elicitation technique, the laddering technique was used in this study to allow tourists to express tangible and intangible feelings through the use of questions which enabled this expression (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2009; Willson & McIntosh, 2010). This paper attempt to close the gap by using qualitative research method and photo elicitation to assess tourist destination image.

Photo-based research tool comprised of Set 1: Samed Island Image (24 photos) and Set 2: Crude Oil Leak Crisis (16 photos). The examples of photos are shown in Figures 3 and 4.



Figure 3 Photo-based Research Tool Set 1: Samed Island Image



Figure 4 Photo-based Research Tool Set 2: Crude Oil Leak Crisis

Findings

The collected data were analyzed by the qualitative research software NVivo Plus version 11. The results were:

1. In relation to Samed Island as a tourist attraction (set 1), the four most popular tourist choices were: C-giant statue (12.7%), H-calm beach and sea (11%), D-sun-bathing on the beach (7.6%), and J-waves and sea (7.6%). The tourist images fell into three categories, attractions, atmosphere, and activities.

2. Tourists' images of a destination are important. Other factors of significance are people in the community, transport, and accommodation. The words that were mentioned most frequently were 'clear water,' 'beautiful beach,' and 'natural' as in word cloud shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Samed Island Image Word Cloud

3. After the crude oil leak crisis, tourists expressed a wide variety of feelings and concerns. These were categorized into seven sensory groups: feelings of grief and depression; concern about animals, environment and pollution; dirty; uninspired; panic; tragedy; and personal feelings. For the tourists, the crude oil crisis impacted directly and indirectly on tourism. It clearly affected the environment, the economy, and society. The words that were mentioned most frequently were 'sad,' 'dirty,' and 'tragedy' as in word cloud shown in Figure 6.

4. Most tourists stated that Samed Island was still a tourist attraction, and even though the tourism image would suffer negatively, it was considered to be a crisis for only a limited period of time. Also, the crisis was confined to Ao Phrao, and would not affect tourists' images of other tourist attractions, especially if they were developed, improved, revitalized, and/or cleaned

up. Tourists who had a negative image stated that they did not want to take any risks in traveling to the island. Some tourists felt nervous and anxious and were prepared to find new tourist attractions to replace Samed Island as their destination or make Samed Island a choice of lower priority.

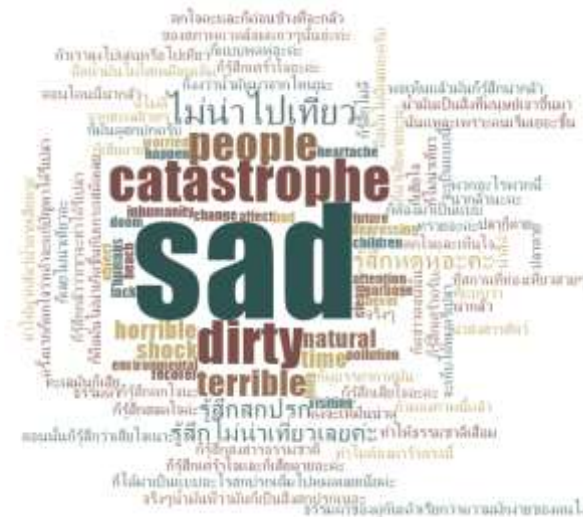


Figure 6 Samed Island Image after Crisis Word Cloud

Discussion

Although there was the crisis of crude oil leakage, most tourists found that Samed Island still remained attractive as a destination since the crisis occurred in a certain area and a limited of time. The results was consistent with the findings of Branstrator (2012) which revealed that the destination image of Mexico after the accidental oil spill at the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 was clearly restored after one year and still a tourist attraction. This was similar to the study on tourism crisis management in the Gulf of Mexico by Pennington-Gray et al. (2011) which reported that a prompt announcement through media and website was important and could assist in recovering a positive destination image of Florida and Mexico. Consequently communication in a positive manner and publishing positive pictures are needed during and after the crisis to strengthen the destination image.

This research is an example of crisis management that involves many related agencies that need to introduce and implement policies to deal with critical incidents. There is a clear requirement for management guidelines to determine concrete measures or penalties for those whose irresponsible actions destroy the environment. There also needs to be a development of

the awareness of people at government, business, and local levels regarding the environment. The issue of transporting oil by ship, especially close to land, requires examination, and the development of alternative and renewable energy sources should be pursued.

The crude oil leak crisis had direct and indirect effects on Samed Island that require the attention of a number of organizations. Travel agencies should organize activities to attract tourists back to the island to restore its tourism image and to display its tourist attractions in a clean and safe environment. Educational institutions have a role to play in the development of the awareness of students about environmental responsibility, and there needs to be community involvement, concern, and action at local and global levels to manage and overcome crises, such as the crude oil leak experienced by Samed Island.

Recommendation

1. The current destination image is the essential tool in planning to strategic marketing and management especially to develop and promote the destination according to the right targeted-tourists segment.
2. The quantitative research in tourist behavior either international or domestic tourists' survey should be conducted in further research to confirm the Samed Island destination image comparing to this study.

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