

MARKETING MIX PRACTICE IN FOREIGN TOURISTS' SERVING IMPROVEMENT (THE CASE OF COOKING AND MASSAGE SCHOOLS IN THAILAND)

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This research aimed to study marketing mix of Thai cooking and Thai massage teaching service for foreign tourists. The data were compiled by examining related documents, websites, and interview of the administrators of the service for teaching Thai cooking and Thai massage in Bangkok metropolitan and Chaingmai and Phuket. The research considers an implementation of 8 P's of marketing mix in realization of short and long-term classes for foreign tourists visiting Thailand. Some conclusions on effective marketing strategies formation and realizing in Thai tourism market were suggested.

Keywords: marketing mix, Thai cooking, Thai massage, cultural tourism, teaching service

Introduction

Generally, significant part of the country revenue comes from the service sector especially inbound tourism. This kind of income drives Thailand to create jobs in manufacturing and other economic sectors, and increases gross domestic product (GDP). Tourism revenue not only helps to develop the country's economy but also to improve local population living standards. It also promotes cultural exchanges with people visiting Thailand, creates good relationship between people, languages and religions. (Chutchakul, 2007, 59; Daengroj, 2001, 31)

Due to the tourism service's importance affecting income generation and social development, many governments have set a policy to promote tourism in the National Economic and Social Development plans. In Thailand 11th Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) focused on developing tourism-related services to serve the special interests of tourist groups such as language and culture learning (Lochaiyakul, 2009).

The report of Tourism Authority of Thailand based on the survey of the tourists' attitude and behavior in three major markets (United States, United Kingdom and China) has found that today tourists pay more attention to cultural tourism and cultural activities. (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2008). However, the foreign cultural tourism is not only a

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tour to visit historical places, but also participation in rituals in rural areas, learn about Thai culture, especially Thai Cooking and Thai Massage (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2006).

The interest in Thai food and Thai massage is increasing. Thai food is a culture heritage uses complex ingredients and cooking processes which can create a variety of artistic food in terms of texture, aroma, delicacy, good taste and health effects. Throughout the long period, Thai food has become products of interest to many countries around the world in the form of Thai restaurants, Thai food ingredients, Thai condiment or just Thai food. For Thai massage, it is a technique that helps relieve stress, relieve aches and pains, reduce muscle sprains, and also allow the body to heal itself and health care. Therefore, the knowledge of massage techniques has been extended to the society in order for people to know how to help themselves for a better quality of life, as well as reducing unnecessary drug use (Aphaijit, 2008). From the value of two bodies of knowledge, there are more foreigners learn cooking and traditional massage techniques during their visitation of Thailand.

Because if tourists usually learn Thai cooking classes and traditional Thai massage during their traveling most of Thai cooking schools and traditional Thai massage institutes are located in attractive provinces such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket.

This research is in line with the National Economic and Social Development Plan on tourism business development to serve the niche market segments following the global tourism market trends. This research can also fulfill the research vision and research mission of developing economic potential through cultural tourism, linked to the added value of social and cultural capital. The information provided by the research will be useful for the entrepreneurs of Thai cooking and Thai massage businesses to determine the service marketing mix that attracts foreign tourists in non-popular among foreign tourists provinces of Thailand. New teaching places and improvement of the marketing mix of existing properties to be more attractive can maintain Thailand's potential tourism management advantage. Therefore, the research study on marketing mix for Thai cooking school and Thai massage business for foreign tourists is sharply important.

Literature review

Marketing mix refers to the commercial suitable factors offered to consumers (Baron, Harris & Hilton, 2009: 25), or the marketing tools used by the company to achieve marketing objectives. (Kotler & Keller, 2006: 19). McCarthy (1971) introduced marketing mix (4P's) to serve the target market, consisting of four components: product (which includes tangible goods and services that are intangible and cover the service quality, facilities, brand, service standard, packaging services and product classifications); price and promotion (communication between the seller and the buyer includes advertising activities, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations and other forms of consumer communication).

While Weaver & Lawton (2006: 219-229) states that there are eight marketing mixes for travel industry: place (destination to go which is relative to the location); product (service

that includes quality, warranty, after-sales service); people (person who is involved in tourism such as service personnel, the tourists and residents in the service area and service personnel cannot be excluded from service performance); price (quantitative value of product or service package, which is a set or all components of a travel experience in one product, relative to the package includes special events, activities, or programs that incorporate a variety of attractions); promotion (activity to stimulate demand in tourism products includes product displays, salesman selling, publicity, sell promotion and advertising); partnership (cooperation with other operators involved in similar or related businesses in order to promote or support services coproduction or co-management). Mill & Morrison (2002) states that the marketing mix for tourism business consists of seven factors: product, price, distribution channel, marketing promotion, programs, people and partnerships

This research is a studying the cultural tourism related with Thai cooking teaching and Thai massage therapy teaching; more than 4 marketing mixes were used. In addition to the four marketing mixes (people, service process, physical evidence and partnership) we also considered employees.

McCarthy (1971) and Li, Kinman, Duan & Edwarda (2000) theoretically emphasized the impact of marketing mix on customer value perception and as stimulus for product's purchasing (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Empirical findings in various industries show that the marketing mix affects customer satisfaction (Irtaimah, 2012; Sarker, Aimin, & Begum, 2012; Murshid, Halim & Osman, 2014). From the research work of Murshid, Halim & Osman (2014), it shows that the marketing mix has influences on perceived value that leads to customer satisfaction which influences satisfaction loyalty. This will allow customers to buy more products, to do the word –of-mouth, and to protect the reputation of the company (Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011; Chi & Qu, 2008).

Thai food and Thai massage are as follows: Thai Food is a kind of food that Thai people use local raw ingredients to cook and continue doing it for many generations. The reasons of Thai food popularity based on Thailand's large territory with different climates and different cultivated crops, resulting in a variety of food with the most sophisticated cooking methods in Southeast Asia. Also, Thai people can create a variety of artistic dishes in terms of texture, nice smell, delicacy, beautiful taste and health effects. There are plenty of the popular menu of Thai food for the foreigners, such as sour prawn soup (tom yum kung), shrimp salad with lemon grass and mint (pla kung), chicken in ground peanut-coconut cream curry, chicken in coconut milk and galangal, green curry chicken in coconut milk, beef curry and potato, curry-fried shrimp, and Thai fried noodle (pad Thai) etc., (Suksakarn, 1994). Thai cuisine can be classified as savory dish, desserts or sweets, and savory snack and starter or appetizer.

Thai Massage is diagnosis for the treatment of disease, health promotion and rehabilitation by gentle pressing on energy lines and the yoga-like stretching, twisting, squeezing, bracing, bending, or other methods according to the art of Thai massage or medication under the law governing the treatment of Thai traditional medicine. Traditional

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Thai massage is the science and art of the ancient Thai wisdom. It is one of the oldest traditional healing methods that are included in traditional Thai medicine, improving the quality of life and reducing unnecessary drug use (Aphaijit, 2008). The history of Thai massage was dated back to Sukhothai period by appeared stone inscriptions of treatment with massage therapy and more prosperous development from the Ayutthaya period to Rattanakosin period. There were the evidences from the inscriptions of herbal medicine texts at the temple pavilion or walls of ordination hall of the temple and Contorted Hermit Mount which was built during the reign of King Rama I, at Wat Pho (Wat Phra Chetuphon Vimolmangklararm Rajwaramahaviharn). This temple is also considered as Thailand's first university of traditional medicines, history, and literature and the center of Thai massage knowledge from the Ayutthaya period.

Thai massage can reduce stress, muscle tension, relieve aches and pains, sprains, to cure some simple diseases and bring healthiness. Most importantly, create a culture of incorporating hands-in-contact with meditation and psychic powers for internal healing. This creates a good relationship between the massage therapists and the service consumers (Aphaijit, 2008). The benefits of Thai massage can be summarized in four aspects include health promotion, disease prevention, treatment and rehabilitation (Limtiyayothin, 2008). Also, Thai massage is divided into two types: the court-type Thai traditional massage or Royal Thai massage and traditional Thai folk massage. Royal Thai massage is the massage for the king and the noble of the court, while traditional Thai folk massage is the service to the common people only. This kind of latter massage can be taught in school (Limtiyayothin, 2008).

Methodology

This study is a quantitative research. Research area and a sample plan for this study is Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket. The sample populations were 100 Thai cooking and Thai massage instructors for foreign tourists. Three criteria were used in selecting the sample persons - knowledge and experiences in offering Thai cooking or Thai massage classes for foreign tourists, leaders, skills and willing to sacrifice time for in-depth interviewing. Research tools for this research were field notes, in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. Documentary study and field studies were used to collect data from in-depth interviews with key informants. In addition, non-participant observation of marketing mix of Thai cooking and Thai massage schools for foreign tourists in the researched area was done.

Research result

The research found that Thai cooking and Thai massage schools manage marketing mix in 8 areas as follows:

1. Product. Thai cooking and Thai massage schools offer product mix with a variety of courses, short-term and long-term courses which are based on the learner interests. Usually, Thai cooking school offers a short-term course consisting of half day- 3 hours, or full day -6 hours. The cooking course is consisted of 3-7 items of savor food and sweet food, some menus are compulsory or based on free choices for the learners. Long term courses include vegetable and fruit carving courses and have 150-300 hours length. Every class is unique and each learner can select what he wants to learn. However, the popular dishes in the savor dishes courses are sour prawn soup (tom yum kung), pork in peanut-coconut cream curry, chicken in coconut milk and galangal, green curry chicken in coconut milk, ground pork salad, chicken curry and potato, fish cake ,pork satay, Thai fried noodle (pad Thai), Thai fried rice and fried thin noodles with soy sauce, etc. For snacks courses, the popular dishes are fried spring rolls and steamed rice-skin dumplings, etc. For Thai desserts courses, the popular dishes are banana in sweet coconut milk, mock pomegranate seeds, and dumplings in coconut cream, etc. Some places offer free tea, coffee, dessert or snacks to students.

For the traditional Thai massage courses, there are broad ranges of products including traditional massage courses, massage for medical healing, foot massage, oil massage, and aromatherapy, infant & child massage. Duration of study is about 4-90 days or learning by hours. After finishing the courses, learners receive a certificate. The most popular course for foreigners is the Thai traditional massage course which mostly taught in English. Some Thai massage schools offer food and accommodation for students.

2. Price. We found that the price is primarily determined by the cost factor, the desired profit and the reputation of the schools. The factors of competition and the demand of the learners are also considered. Although Thai cooking schools and Thai massage schools take these factors into account but each school charges different price. Generally, the famous Thai cooking school institutes of academies or hotels will charge a higher price than the cooking school institutes in restaurants. Long term courses are usually offered by the cooking schools which are registered by Ministry of Education. Usually, the half-day course is priced at 21-90 US\$ (700-3,000 Thai baht) while the full course is priced at 27-148 US\$ (900-5,000 Thai baht). The long-term course is 5-day around 450-890 US\$ (15,000-30,000 baht) and the 10-day course is about 890-1,440 US\$ (30,000-50,000 Thai baht), etc. For the Thai massage classes, the prices are around 148-1,200 US\$ (5,000-40,000 Thai baht) and mostly include raw materials, supplies and equipment.

Distribution channels (Place). Thai cooking schools and Thai massage schools use distribution channels through the counter of the service place and the school branches or the students can apply through the social media such as e-mail, Facebook, Twitter and the Line. In addition to the described distribution channels the name lists of Thai cooking school and traditional Thai massage school are also available through the Travel Agency or available for sale through the hotel and accommodation businesses. Most Thai cooking school are located near tourist attraction places or in the city. In addition, some of the popular schools for foreigners expand their branches.

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3. Promotion. Thai cooking schools and Thai massage schools use advertising through brochures, website, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter and the Line. They conduct sale Promotion by discount for learning many courses, group study and repurchase, also use gifts such as, textbooks, learning materials or free special classes. Personal selling is conducted through the salesman use at a counter service or use special employees. Direct Marketing is also used by offering courses and subscription services in Internet, social media and telephone media. In addition, special event is used by the Thai cuisine demonstration booth or offer free Thai traditional massage at the booth during trade fairs in Thailand and abroad. Electronic word of mouth or viral marketing is also used to provide the opportunity for the student to comment through the E-mail, Facebook, Twitter and Line.

4. People. Usually, Thai cooking are taught by chefs who have experiences in Thai culinary with fun teaching skill. In the Thai massage teaching business, experienced instructors use to be Thai massage service providers. Some places required that the instructor must have at least 5 years of massage experiences with the knowledge in anatomy and good skills in knowledge transfer. Teachers both in Thai cooking and Thai massage schools must be able to transfer knowledge in English. In case of many non-English speaking learners in class, some schools provide interpreters such as Japanese interpreters, etc.

5. Process. Generally, Thai cooking courses and traditional Thai massage sources have to be reserved for 1-2 days in advance and are available for payment on the day of reservation. Teaching is both theoretical and practical. The theoretical lecture is an explanation, not more formal description. Some schools organize visitation of markets to select raw material or to pick raw materials from the farmland.

Demonstration of peeling crushing, slicing, and decorating raw materials is doing directly by the teachers but in some places is done through television. After that, the students practice cooking, tasting food and dish decoration which is evaluated by the teacher. Evaluation of the long-term course may also use a written test. For the admission of Thai massage classes, the learner can apply in advance or apply and study in the same day (paying tuition on the application day). In some courses, there is theoretical study before practicing, some courses can teach theory parallel with practices. The lesson can be taught in groups of 2-6 students. Learners and instructors can take turn to massage to examine the practice of the learner. Some courses require a lot of practice and the school will recruit the person for the students to do massage practice. In some schools, meditation is prepared before class by praying. At the end of the course student will be assessed by a practice examination. However, even Thai massage instruction is more academic than Thai cooking both are the same in terms of teaching with a friendly atmosphere.

6. Physical Evidences. Thai cooking school and traditional Thai massage school are usually designed and decorated in the Thai style such as the decoration of Thai cloth, Thai art pictures and Thai style. Some of the schools show Thai cooking ingredients. If the school has more space, it will arrange one set of training equipment per student. If space is limited, the

school will provide one set of training equipment for 2-3 students. For traditional Thai massage courses, the specific classrooms are available for each course.

7. Partnership. Most Thai cooking schools and most traditional Thai massage schools are being partners with travel agencies, hotels and other accommodation businesses to get the cooperation in sales and admissions as well as linking the website of the schools with such business's site. Also, being partner with the accommodation in order to provide a place to stay for foreigners who come to learn Thai cooking and Thai massage in the long-term course. In addition, Thai cooking instructors may be assisted by the raw material suppliers who offer the ingredients in accordance with their training needs.

Suggestion

1. To motivate foreign tourists to learn Thai cooking through the use of word-of-mouth, clear product positioning for each school such as Thai royal cooking school, Thai cooking school with a garden or organic vegetable farm, Thai cooking school of vegetarian food, etc. The school is characterized by beautiful atmosphere. Some Thai cooking schools provide Thai-style shows.

2. Make a social interaction with the learners to communicate, answering or clarifying misunderstandings by fan club. Sharing Thai cooking experiences with friends and relatives is more credible than the school advertising. Learners can bring in more authentic experiences that the school can use viral marketing with low communication budgets.

3. Privacy Policy should be used to testimony the opinions of those who have been learning Thai cooking and Thai massage before in the advertising. Posting on websites, social media and other media or using personal data to communicate for repurchasing should meet the standards acceptable to foreigners.

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