

EXPOSURE TO MEDIA AND INFORMATION ON TRAVEL TO THAILAND AND LIFESTYLE SEGMENTATION OF LGBT+ TOURISTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the differences in LGBT+ lifestyles that would potentially influence their selection of a destination. A questionnaire-based survey was conducted to collect data from 600 non-Thai LGBT+ and Thai LGBT+ tourists. The study found that both groups of tourists mostly use social networks to find information to make travel decisions and use a set of AIOs (activities, interests, and opinion items) and tourist behavior (purchase decision process) to measure psychographic lifestyle typologies of LGBT+ tourists. Factor analysis of the data identified five lifestyle factors, which were further analyzed using cluster analysis. The cluster analysis revealed three groups of LGBT+ tourists: Explorers, Simpliciter, and Strivers. These findings offer valuable empirical insights to the marketers as to sources for travel information to cater to different tourists having different motivations with the aim of influencing the destination image in a most favorable way.

Keywords: Touristic Lifestyles, LGBT Lifestyle, Factor Analysis, Lifestyles, LGBT+, Tourism Information,

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the primary industries that drive the global economy. In particular, in developing countries, tourism is the number one source of foreign exchange and export income, generating essential employment and development opportunities (UNWTO, 2012). For example, medical tourism is an important sector and business for the tourism industry in Thailand (Fongtanakit, Somjai, Prasitdumrong & Jermisittiparsert, 2019). Therefore, travel destinations try to make their goals more attractive to emerging consumer groups, especially those who travel more often (UNWTO, 2017). As travel marketing and tourism shift online, consumers cannot experience them. The tourists use various media to find information to make travel decisions (Lew, 2011). Digital 2021 Global Overview Report revealed that out of 7,830 million people worldwide, 4,660 million people are internet users, and 4,200 million people use social media with an average of 2 hours and 48 minutes daily. Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp are the top 3 most popular social media platforms (Kemp, 2021).

LGBT+ travelers are a very attractive group: Community Marketing & Insights (CMI) (2019) surveys indicated that, on average, LGBT+ respondents had taken 3.1 vacations and 1.5 business trips in the past 12 months. In addition, respondents made an average of 2.2 visits, mainly to visit family or friends. Therefore, this LGBT purchasing power is essential in the global and local tourism industry.

Therefore, it is essential for tourism marketers to create products and services preferred and valued by target markets to know how to travel life and their sources and types of information and expectations. Finding out the travel group is needed to guide future

research related to the travel lifestyle of LGBT+ travelers. This study explores the exposure to media and information on travel to Thailand and the lifestyle segmentation of LGBT+ tourists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lifestyle

The concept of lifestyle and tourism decision behavior was reviewed to facilitate the research instrument construction. The concept of lifestyle was first applied to marketing in 1963 (Park, Lee, & Chung, 2013) when Lazer defined lifestyle as representing the overall different way of life by creating a developed pattern from a continuous societal way of life. At present, the AIOs consumer lifestyle gauge is the most popular tool with three parameters: activities, interests, and opinions (Plummer, 1974). A lifestyle is a specific form of routine activity that expresses the individuality of a person. A measure of a consumer AIOs lifestyle is as follows:

Pumduang & Pornsuksawat's (2020) systematic review of the lifestyle measurement suggested five measurements to describe activity elements (daily routines, hobbies, entertainment activities, social activities, and spending activities), ten to represent interest elements (family, self, home, participating in community's activities, tourism, clothes, food, media, technology, and job/success), and ten to describe opinion elements (self-related, social matters, economic and political matters, educational matters, business matters, product matters, future matters, cultural matters, technological matters, and mottos).

Tourist Behavior

There are three primary forms of tourism (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2011): natural tourism, cultural tourism, and tourism with special interests. An analysis of the motivations involved in each mode of travel explains the travel career ladder theory (Pearce, Morrison, & Rutledge, 1998), consisting of a five-step decision-making process. First, the need awareness phase occurs when consumers are aware of the problem or are stimulated to demand. Pearce et al., (1998) further classified this need into five components: need to relax and receive new experiences, need for safety leading to the search for news and information, need to build a relationship with others, need to be proud of and to improve oneself, and need to receive the utmost satisfaction.

Salient factors influencing gay travelers' holiday motivations can be found in (Herrera & Scott, 2005; Hattingh & Spencer, 2017). Trihas (2018) found that leisure travel, as with most other travelers, is followed by an escape from the community or the traditional social situation for comfort, novelty, and intellectual enrichment. The most salient pull motivation is a dramatic and beautiful landscape and scenery and a gay-friendly environment.

Second, the information search phase occurs when finding information about tourism and tourism services' essential features. There are five components of tourism information: the attraction data component, the facilities information component, the accessibility of information component, the element information of conferences and events, and the elements of accommodation information (Dickman, 1997; Pravatmuang, 2011). Third, the alternative phase evaluation is when consumers use the information obtained from the data acquisition stage to assess where to travel. The marketing mix concept consists of four elements: product, price, place, and marketing promotion (Kotler, Armstrong & Oliver, 2019).

Fourth, the purchasing decision step is to decide where to travel. The elements involved in a traveler's decision-making include location, travel method, group of persons participating in the trip, length of the journey, the tour's purpose, the type of accommodation,

and travel time (Jittangwattana, 2005). Fifth, the post-purchase behavior phase is an event that occurs after the trip is over. There are issues to consider such as the satisfaction of the product received, the value of pleasure, ease of travel, details of the location, friendliness of people within the organization, condition, relationship during tourism, strategic commitment to re-visit, and word of mouth (Kotler et al., 2019).

The concept of both the lifestyle and the travel decision-making process mentioned above forms a framework for drafting questions about the components of the touristic lifestyle of foreign LGBT+ tourists, as shown in Figure 1.

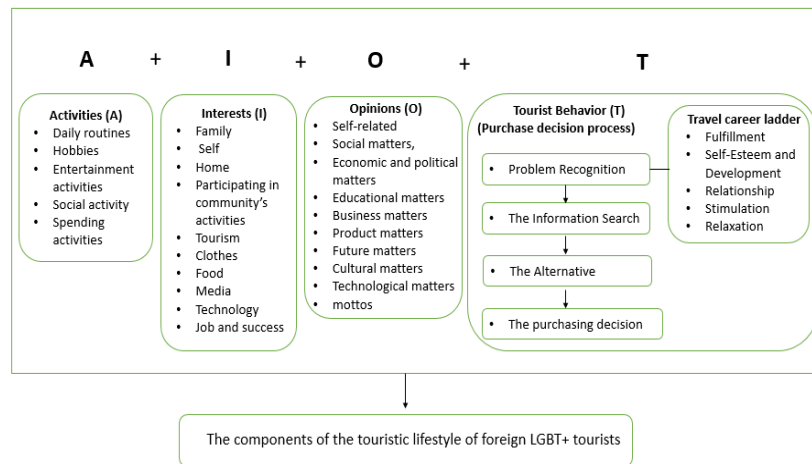


FIGURE 1
THE COMPONENTS OF THE TOURISTIC LIFESTYLE OF FOREIGN LGBT+ TOURISTS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK. MODIFIED FROM PUMDUANG & PORNSUKSAWAT (2020), PEARCE ET AL. (1998), AND KOTLER & KELLER (2016)

Tourism Information

Consumers actively search for and use external information to make informed decisions. The extent of consumers' information-seeking depends on perceived utility, the uncertainty of their decision-making, the importance of the decision, and the cost of acquiring information (Chon, 1990). With diverse attractions and many tourism destinations, potential tourists will likely face difficulty selecting a place to visit. Wilson (2014) found that information is the key to the formation of destination images, and differential uses of different sources of information have other impacts on the destination images. The longer the travel planning horizon, the stronger the destination images. The service marketing mix is used to promote and encourage potential customers to buy their service. The service marketing mix, also known as the 7Ps, invites potential customers to buy their service (Kotler & Keller, 2016). However, companies or service providers have to change their views with increasing market competition.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study population was two groups of LGBT+ respondents, Thai LGBT+ and non-Thai LGBT+. The total numbers of which were infinite population and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) by Comrey & Lee (1992); Kline (2014) suggested a sample size of 300 was good. Therefore, this study needed 300 respondents of each group (600 respondents in total)

to fill up an online questionnaire posted on the Facebook page related to tourism in general and the community of LGBT travelers to solicit LGBT travelers to answer or share questionnaires. The Facebook page included LGBTQ Global, LGBT Brighton, LGBTQ+ global community, YES LGBT (non-Thai LGBT), LGBT community, LGBT News (Thai LGBT), etc.

Five experts screened the item quality; the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) Index calculation yielded 0.93 ($IOC > 0.50$); therefore, the content validity was achieved (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2013). Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire was 0.913. Frequency distribution, percentages, and exploratory factor analysis were employed to analyze the data.

The Ethics Review Board of Boromarajonani College of Nursing Saraburi reviewed the research proposal and issued IRB number E.C. 2-003/2020 to approve this research project. The respondents consented to participate in the data collection.

Most (71.30%) of the non-Thai respondents were in generation Y. Majority (70.00%) of the respondents were Sales/Service/Office Workers who had an annual income in the lower class (72.30%) and were European (46.30%). Most (69.30%) Thai respondents, similar to non-Thai, were in generation Y. Majority (63.70%) of the respondents were Sales/Service/Office Workers who had an annual income in the lower class (47.70%).

RESEARCH RESULTS

Sources of Tourism Destination Information

The majority of respondents searched for information from a social network (74.00%), followed by a travel guide book (66.00%), and the media that respondents used to search the least is Online Travel Agency (38.30%). Similarly, Thai LGBT+ used social networks to find information about the destination the most (90.30%), followed by a travel guide book (72.30%), and the media that respondents used to search the least is Online Travel Agency (40.00%).

The Expectation for the 7Cs Travel Information among the Non-Thai LGBT+ when Traveling to Thailand

A significant number of non-Thai LGBT+ tourists expect travel safety for alternative gender people (90.30%) and being welcoming to alternative gender people (89.00%). Other significant findings include the expectation of convenience of visa or immigration policies (81.70%) and ICT infrastructure (78.00%). It is also crucial for non-Thai LGBT+ tourists to see beautiful architecture (82.30%), while the value for their time (45.00%) is not as significant.

Lifestyle Segmentation

Analysis of Components of LGBT+ Tourists' Lifestyle

Factor analysis was employed, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.822, more significant than the minimum acceptable limit of 0.5 (Fadun & Saka, 2018). The qualified items totaled 30 items. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at 0.000. Both tests indicated that the variables were significantly correlated, hence appropriate for factor analysis (Table 1). The exploratory factor analysis yielded five factors as follows:

Factor 1: Innovators comprised eight items; they were very interested in social aspects; they kept updating stories or information to be current and up-to-date.

Factor 2: Seekers comprised ten items; they liked to travel. They were constantly seeking new attractions to fulfill their life, to find inspiration, and to relax.

Factor 3: Experiencers comprised four items; they liked to learn new things, especially in arts, culture, traditions; they enjoyed participating in activities or getting involved with the community to understand the culture truly, and they liked reasonableness.

Factor 4: Shoppers consisted of four items; they liked to shop or liked the products that are in trend. It makes this group of people often work more than one job to get more income.

Factor 5: The simpliciter consisted of easy-going, convenient, unhurried, and indulgent persons. When they chose a tourist destination, they let the travel companions decide.

Table 1 RESULTS OF THE EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (EFA) (N=600)								
No.	Items	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	% of Variance explained	Cumulative %	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Overall mean
Factor 1: Innovators			6.624	17.902	17.902	0.863		3.05
1	I am interested in the things that are in trend.	0.737					3.41	
2	The communication device is essential for my life.	0.716					3.43	
3	Laws or policies for LGBT+ groups in the destination country are essential.	0.711					3.54	
4	Selling channels are essential in decision-making to purchase products.	0.697					3.56	
5	The safety of LGBT+ affects decision-making.	0.694					3.72	
6	Businesses should consider social interest apart from their business.	0.682					3.29	
7	I like to join parties.	0.595					3.46	
8	The diversity of touristic places plays a part in decision-making.	0.574						

Factor 2: Seekers			5.069	13.701	31.603	0.853		2.72
9	I have to find some time to travel abroad at least once a year.	0.720					2.73	
10	I always travel when I have time.	0.711					2.80	
11	Traveling is considered relaxation.	0.698					2.95	
12	I must go to a popular tourist destination at least once a year.	0.677					2.85	
13	I follow the news mainly online.	0.669					2.53	
14	I am always searching for new touristic destinations.	0.666					2.68	
15	I like to purchase products from the market.	0.656					2.59	
16	The Thai government should support education more.	0.556					2.83	
17	Travel empowered my life.	0.535					2.90	
18	I am interested in designing and home decorating.	0.523					2.37	
Factor 3: Experiencers			2.194	5.930	37.533	0.698		3.24
19	Tourism on arts and science education.	0.759					2.95	
20	I am interested in joining seminars to gain knowledge.	0.698					3.13	
21	Historical tourism	0.611					3.20	
22	A good product is a worthwhile product compared to the money to be paid for it.	0.582					3.66	
Factor 4: Shopper			1.851	5.003	42.536	0.683		2.98

23	I usually join the club or social activities when I have time.	0.711					2.91	
24	I like to watch sports.	0.694					2.64	
25	I like shopping.	0.579					3.18	
26	I always try to find a new job for better pay.	0.549					3.20	
Factors 5: Simpliciter			1.762	4.761	47.296	0.672		3.34
27	Travel companions affect the decision to choose a place.	0.716					3.26	
28	I like relaxing activities such as picnicking, going to the park.	0.660					3.19	
29	I spend time each day online, such as on Facebook.	0.572					3.55	
30	The destination that is convenient for traveling affects decision-making.	0.548					3.37	

The Cluster of LGBT+ Tourist Lifestyles

Cluster analysis was applied to the five factors to classify LGBT+ tourists into mutually exclusive groups. The analysis was performed using a K-Means cluster procedure (Vanichbuncha, 2019). Trials analyzing three, four, and five clusters were conducted, and the results were compared to identify the most appropriate cluster interpretation and size. Three clusters were labeled as 1) Explorers: The first cluster was the largest; they are interested in society and trends. They update stories or information to be current and up-to-date. They prefer well-known and popular destinations and tend to be early adopters of new things, like learning and developing themselves. They like to go to historical and cultural performances, see the arts, and learn new indigenous knowledge and local cuisines. 2) Simpliciter: The second group represents LGBT+ travelers with simple lifestyles. They love the comfort and like outdoor activities such as walking in the park, exercising, or shopping. This group of people likes to shop for functionality and necessary products and rarely follow trends. 3) Strivers: The third cluster represents the LGBT+ tourists interested in social trends, so they like to shop for products that are in trend. This cluster enjoys regular physical exercise, outdoor sports, and activities with friends such as partying and going out.

Demographic Profiles within Clusters

Explorers were mainly generation Y (42.90%) and European (43.90%). They were middle class (43.40%) and were unemployed (housewives, university students, or retired) (53.3%). Simpliciter were mainly baby boomers and beyond (37.00%) and Thai (34.00%). They were middle class (36.80%) and agriculturists (29.00%). Strivers were mainly generation X (38.40%) and Asian (53.80%). The majority of strivers were professionals/managers/business owners (46.70%). Most of them were lower class (40.20%), followed by upper class (38.10%).

DISCUSSION

Most respondents found online information on social networks. This finding is consistent with Rattanaprayoon, et al., (2018), who saw public relations or advertisements necessary in travel. In particular, LGBT+ people do this through social media. That is because consumer behavior has changed. Everyone now has a smartphone and can find information without time limitations and distance. Therefore, social media quickly and directly reach target groups. In addition, Choi, Lehto & O'Leary (2007) found that the process of searching online channels for travel information is popularly used to plan travel because of the reviews or information from tourists who have experienced traveling to a place.

Non-Thai LGBT+ tourists expect travel safety and being welcoming to alternative gender people. According to Vuuren & Slabbert (2011); Lubowiecki-Vikuk (2016); Barbosa, De Moraes & Rocha (2017), LGBT groups use the safety data and geographic information and infrastructure to determine leisure, activities, safe, friendly, and inclusive environments. They must express themselves freely, physically and emotionally, and safely and engage in tourist destinations that align with their lifestyles. They also expect the hotel booking system, ticketing, or activities to be convenient and reliable. According to Henry (2018), the development of online booking systems constitutes a total revolution.

LGBT+ tourists were divided into three groups, which were classified from five lifestyle factors. Explorers were interested in society and popular trends and liked to develop themselves. They loved going to historical places and learning about new cultures. Most of these groups belonged to generation Y, according to CMI (2019). LGBT+ people in Millennials+ (1981-2001) had a very high interest in traveling to historical sites and famous sights. They were in the middle class, mainly seeking information from social networks because it was up-to-date and could be updated when attractions or activities were trending and saved on costs.

The simpliciter represented LGBT+ tourists with simple lifestyles. They liked outdoor activities. Most of this group belonged to baby boomers and beyond, and they were in the middle class. This group of people aimed for safety and security, did not like anything too trendy and shopped for functionality and necessity. Visnjic (2020) said, "Older generations aren't prepared to take risks." There is a conflict because older generations always advocated for stability and safety over risk-taking, which they are not prepared to do or adapt to learn new things.

Strivers were interested in social trends, so they liked to shop for products that followed trends. This cluster enjoyed regular physical exercise. Most of this group belonged to generation X, and they were in the lower class. From CMI (2019), the motivations of generation X to take vacations (1965-1980) were the highest percentage of all generations. They liked to rest and relax, get away from typical everyday life, explore someplace new, experience and learn about other cultures, etc.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The sampling methodology was convenience-based, and data were collected only on Facebook. The selection of respondents was influenced by visitors' ability to understand English and use Facebook. This research recommends considering qualitative methods for collecting empirical data, especially on factors already developed in this study, using the qualitative approach to further support this paper's findings with a more profound analysis or other conclusions.

This research suggests Tourism Authority of Thailand set up an all-inclusive application providing tourism information and planning trips in Thailand for LGBT+. The entrepreneur should adopt LGBT+ influencers for online marketing communications, assuring a safe and welcoming environment for LGBT+.

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