

# **Cultural Tourism and Marketing Communications in Thailand: Research Synthesis and Trends**

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## **Abstract**

The objectives of this research were to review and synthesize the research articles in relation to marketing communications in the area of cultural tourism. This research adopted qualitative method to conduct the synthesis. Its population was all the research articles concerned with marketing communications in the context of cultural tourism. Related research articles were published in the databases of EBSCO Host, Routledge, Wiley, and ScienceDirect during 2008 – 2018. An analysis of research synthesis was conducted based on the concept of marketing communications and cultural tourism. The sample was the number of research articles that had been selected from the population with purposive sampling technique. The key words search was as follows: cultural tourism and marketing communications. The findings indicated there were 13 research articles eligible for this research synthesis. It was also discovered the issues that have been studied in the field of marketing communications and cultural tourism were the role of marketing communications in the promotion of cultural tourism, strategic development of integrated marketing communication for cultural tourism promotion, the development of marketing communication channels for cultural tourism promotion, the tools of marketing communications, modelling marketing communications to fix their problems, and obstacles of marketing communication practices. In addition to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods, it was found that research & development approach had been used to examine the issues.

**Keywords:** marketing communications, cultural tourism, cultural tourism coverage

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## **1. Introduction**

Cultural tourism plays an important role in many ways. First, it creates the impacts on economy and society as well as strengthening a nation's identity, image, and cultural and historical preservation. Culture can be viewed as a tool that builds harmony and understanding among people as well as extending the life of tourism. Cultural tourism can shape the identity of a tourist attraction, including drawing the attention from potential tourists. In addition, it helps generate new ideas for and the needs of local people to be part of it (Bonn, Dai, Hayes & Cave, 2007). Identity is vital in cultural tourism in that it can build an image of the nation in an international manner. Cultural tourism helps preserve a wide range of historical and cultural heritages. Moreover, cultural tourism has made a profound impact on a country's economy and society. It attracts a huge amount of income from cultural tourists, leading to an increase in local productivity. This is because cultural tourism is also involved in different economic activities. For example, local people are needed for employment in cultural tourism businesses (Boyd, 2002). When employed by local businesses, they do not need to seek jobs in major cities and stay away from their family. Regional development is, furthermore, triggered by cultural tourism, too. Cultural tourism can fix the problems of population by shedding light on new perspectives for youth. Better infrastructure and environment are a result of cultural tourism mechanism. Not only do the tourists get the benefits from such development, but also the owners of culture in the tourist attractions enjoy the facilitations (UNESCO, 2003).

Besides, cultural tourism also establishes the identity for tourist attractions, as it plays an essential role in strengthening an image for the country. It is the tool that can be adopted to reinforce the country's positive image in an international environment (Greenwood, 1982; Hankinson, 2004). Cultural tourism helps preserve historical and cultural heritages by revitalizing the traditions and serves as source of income that would be used for their protection. The tourists would enjoy those heritages when they visit them. The benefits that come with cultural tourism are the key to supporting politics in the area of management and protection of historical and cultural tourism sources. Cultural tourism with well-planned management can restore the traditions and renovate historical sites, which balances the use and the protection of historical sources. Harmony and understanding among people can be seen through cultural tourism. People who have an in-depth knowledge about culture would spur cooperation from stakeholders as well as promoting communication and getting local people together (UNESCO, 2003).

In Thailand, tourism is an industry that is vital to the social and economic development, as it features a wide variety of tourism resources that can attract income from both local and foreign visitors. Those tourism resources included nature, culture, archeology, and history (Boonkoun & Siriwong, 2015). The country has a huge potential to draw many domestic and foreign tourists by utilizing tourism sources. Tourism industry have been able to generate the large amount of income to the country continuously. Although Thailand's economy has not been fully recovered yet, there are still foreign tourists interested in visting the country. It is ranked one of the top ten destination

in the world that tourists want to visit. Therefore, tourism serves as a main source of income for the country.

*Figure 1: Revenue generated from tourism industry in Thailand*



*Source: Thailand's National Statistical Office*

Obviously, tourism plays an important role in the Thai economy. In addition to a wide variety of cultural tourism sites, one thing that needs attention is marketing communications that are suitable for each cultural tourism site. With the right marketing communication tools, the sites can be made known at a wider level that can satisfy the demands of tourists. Furthermore, the tools allow the potential tourists to evaluate the cultural sites and see the differences among them. They enable the tourists to differentiate and enhance the value of tourism products (Boonkoom & Siriwong, 2015). Thus, this research is interested in synthesizing the previously published articles of marketing communications in the context of cultural tourism for the promotion of Thailand's tourism.

This study contributes to the existing literature on cultural tourism and marketing communications in different ways. First, it reviews the articles that have been published in the journal databases in Thailand. Second, it would reveal the trends of the methodology employed in the study of cultural tourism and marketing communications. Third, this study explores coverage

of cultural tourism. Finally, it is expected to demonstrate knowledge gap found from this research synthesis.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Cultural tourism**

Cultural tourism contained different definitions and there were many researchers who had attempted to define the term. It could be defined into two aspects. In a wide fashion, cultural tourism was explained as the travel that was motivated by cultural activities, for example, field trips, art performance, cultural tours, festivals, events, folklores, heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, sites, monuments, etc. In contrast, it was concerned with the travel that people could experience various human cultures and gain new information and knowledge. Such new information and knowledge could satisfy the needs of an individual (Richard, 1996). It was also explained that cultural tourism was the travel that came with the goals to learn people's lifestyles, food, landscape, environment, architecture, towns and villages (Richard, 2004). Those cultural sources were of interest as much as the historical sites and cultural performance. According to Hennessey (2008), it was difficult to describe cultural tourism since individuals possessed different ideas and perspectives. For tourists, cultural tourism means travel and experience of culture different from their normal residence and daily life. Meanwhile, practitioners and academic people suggested cultural tourism was characterized by its own uniqueness and difference from other tourism sources (Hall and MacArthur 1998; Leask a 1999; Richards, 1996; Shackley, 1998). For instance, cultural heritage, one of the cultural tourism categories, could differentiate the destination.

Lately, the UNWTO has redefined cultural tourism to be a key component of international tourism consumption which represented for more than 39 percent of tourist arrivals. Furthermore, as a result of the growth of cultural tourism research, its related fields have also emerged, such as cultural consumption, cultural motivations, heritage conservation, cultural tourism economics, anthropology and the relationship with the creative economy. In addition, the move of cultural tourism research from tangible to intangible heritage could be seen, including more attention for indigenous and other minority groups. Besides, a geographical expansion of cultural tourism research has been covered. The field also reflects a number of 'turns' in social science, including the mobilities turn, the performance turn and the creative turn.

Chittangwattana (2005) suggested the coverage of cultural tourism that included history and cultural traces, archeology and museum, old architectural works, art, handicraft, sculpture, paintings, statue, carving, religion and pilgrim, music, performance, film, language and literature, lifestyles, clothing, food, traditions, indigenous culture, festivals, and local wisdom.

### **2.2 Marketing communications**

Destinations and tourism products needed communications with possible visitors and tourists to get informed. Tourism marketers could not rely mainly on offering attractive products, reasonable prices, and easy access to tourism market. Communication was required to inform and motivate the visitors to feel the urge to travel to the destinations. Basically, the purpose of

communication was to do demand creation for tourist attractions along with tourism products (Kiráľová, 1995). To achieve successful use of marketing tools, individuals had to utilize it continuously for it was a non-stop process that required monitoring new trends in response to changes (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders & Wong, 2002).

Competitive advantage can be derived from correct and timely responses. The choices of marketing communication tools are strategically significant for establishing long-term relationship with potential customers. Communication offers information sources and can impact consumer behavior. Possible tourists would receive messages from all sorts of sources such as the destination itself, mass media, and travel operators or exhibitions. They respond to the messages sent by the destination by forming motivations, positive expectations, and finally a decision to travel (Leiper, 1990). In turn, those messages become information, and the visitors would use it differently. For example, they use it to evaluate choices in decision making, reinforce previous alternatives as justification, and resolve the conflicts between buying and not-to-buying. The messages could remind the visitors when they should buy.

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) is a paradigm that stems from communication theory (Clow & Baack, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2005; Kliatchko, 2005). Described by the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), “IMC is a planning process of marketing communication that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluate the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines, e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations-and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact” (Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Bergh, 2001, p. 8). Traditionally, the tools of integrated marketing communication would be included in a synergetic manner which resulted in homogeneous communications.

In particular, integrated marketing communication put its emphasis on attitudes, needs, and motivations of consumers (Clow & Baack, 2002; Burnett & Moriarty, 1998). Combined with the customer-centric and data driven method of communicating with consumers, it enables IMC to become a powerful tool in reaching target markets with persuasive messages, but also effectively decides on promotion mix elements (Pitta, Weisgal, & Lynagh, 2006). It offered cost-effective marketing communication program, enhancing influential value for customers and destination (Yeshin, 1998; Duncan, 2002; Fill, 2002; Kitchen, 2005).

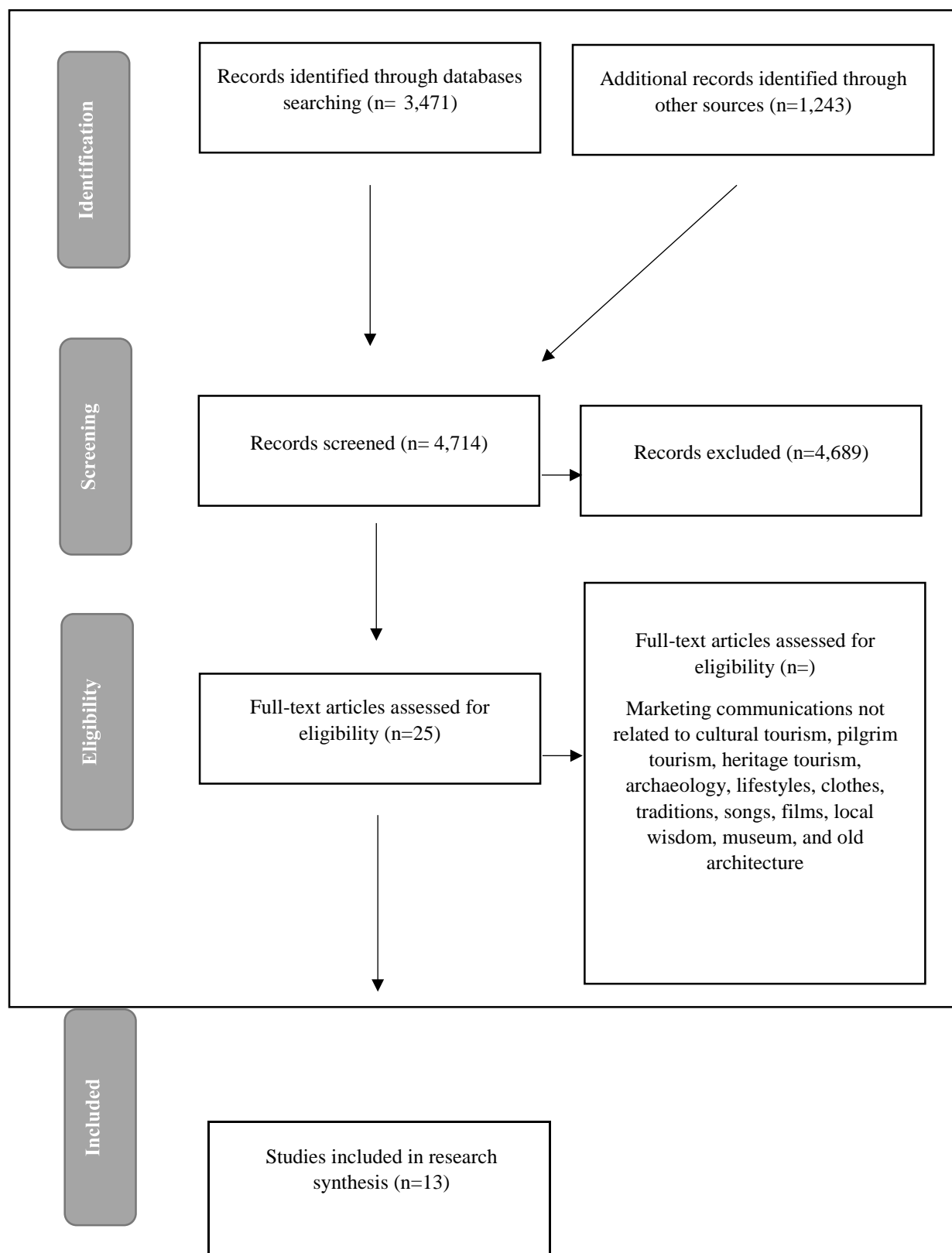
## **Methods**

The objectives of this research were to review and synthesize the research articles in relation to marketing communications in the area of cultural tourism. The matched articles would be reviewed and synthesized. The results gained from synthesis would be concluded to allow the researcher to learn and understand the trends of marketing communications in cultural tourism, including their variables and conceptual framework. This research adopted qualitative method to conduct the synthesis. Its population was all the research articles concerned with marketing communications in the context of cultural tourism. Related research articles were published in the

databases of EBSCO Host, Routledge, Wiley, and ScienceDirect. The sample was the number of research articles that had been selected from the population with purposive sampling technique.

The details of literature search were as the following. First, the peer-reviewed literature for articles published in English between 2008 and 2018 were sought. The titles of 7,612 articles had been screened, resulting in 12 articles and 1 thesis that were assessed for eligibility. The 12 articles and 1 thesis were published in the databases of EBSCO, Elsevier, Google Scholar, and Thai Journals Online. Articles were eligible for inclusion if they report on cultural tourism, marketing communications, heritage tourism, pilgrim tourism, way of life, songs, and any other concerned with cultural tourism coverage. The articles were excluded if they did not show or describe the topics that were of interest. Many articles were reported on the topic of marketing communications when searched from the databases. However, they did not concern the context of cultural tourism. The key words search was as follows: cultural tourism and marketing communications. Figure 2 depicts the details of literature search.

*Figure 2 the details of literature search for conducting research synthesis*



## **Results**

It was found that the issues that have been studied in the field of marketing communications and cultural tourism were the role of marketing communications in the promotion of cultural tourism, strategic development of integrated marketing communication for cultural tourism promotion, the development of marketing communications channels for cultural tourism promotion, the tools of marketing communications, modelling marketing communications to fix their problems, and obstacles of marketing communication practices. Moreover, in terms of methodology, in addition to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods, it was found that research & development approach had been used to examine the issues.

## **Discussion**

Research synthesis on marketing communications in the context of cultural tourism published within the peer-reviewed literature highlighted trends, gaps, and opportunities to inform future research of marketing communications with cultural tourism. Apparently, marketing communications with cultural tourism were limited due to its coverage and definitions. What was found from research synthesis was that marketing communications in cultural tourism was a process of creating awareness and understanding among the stakeholders of cultural tourism. Such stakeholders included entrepreneurs, public officials, and tourists. In addition, the role and forms of marketing communication in the context of cultural tourism were known.

According to the findings and reviews, it could be concluded that the research topics on marketing communications in the context of cultural tourism were not diverse. They tended to explore the role of marketing communication, strategic development of marketing communications, the development of marketing communication for the promotion of cultural tourism, marketing communication tools, and the models that could solve the problems of marketing communication. Many researchers and scholars have tried to define cultural tourism. During the screening of literature review on marketing communication in cultural tourism, it was found that many research articles placed their attention to lifestyles, tradition, heritage tourism, and strategy. No single research article addressed an integrated marketing communication and the use of social media in cultural tourism. This was the gap that needed to be filled since cultural tourists could be aware of more fascinating cultural tourism sites. In addition, the marketing communications activities can increase tourists' intention to visit those cultural attractions.



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