



Emotional and Psychological Marketing Influences on Foreigners' Decisions to Travel to Thailand

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Abstract

This research investigates how psychological and emotional marketing strategies influence international tourists' decision-making processes when choosing Thailand as a travel destination. Drawing upon the push and pull factor framework, the study examines both internal motivations such as the desire for relaxation, adventure, escape from routine, and cultural curiosity and external attributes of Thailand that attract tourists, including emotional safety, affordability, natural beauty, and rich cultural heritage. A quantitative research approach was employed, using structured online surveys administered in two phases, gathering data from 215 international respondents across diverse age groups and backgrounds. The findings reveal that emotional drivers play a central role in shaping travel intentions. Tourists are particularly influenced by emotionally engaging content shared on digital platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, where storytelling, influencer endorsements, and visual representations of Thai culture significantly enhance destination appeal. Additionally, the study highlights a growing trend among travelers who seek meaningful experiences that align with their personal values, such as environmental consciousness, cultural respect, and social responsibility. The research concludes that Thailand's tourism industry must go beyond traditional marketing by focusing on emotionally resonant, culturally immersive, and value-driven strategies. By aligning marketing efforts with tourists' psychological and emotional needs, Thailand can not only increase tourist arrivals but also strengthen destination loyalty, support sustainable tourism development, and maintain competitiveness in the global tourism market in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Tourism, Psychological, Emotional, Digital Marketing, Thailand

1. Introduction

Thailand, a top tourist destination, suffered significantly from the COVID-19 epidemic. Thai tourism plummeted due to worldwide travel restrictions and lockdowns caused by the virus. Millions of hotel workers, tour guides, craftsmen, and small business owners lost income due to this abrupt cancellation. Beyond lost income, the economic impact led to rising unemployment and threatened tourism-dependent cities and regions. Thailand's tourist industry must adapt to post-pandemic guest preferences (Asian Development Bank & World Tourism Organization, 2022). During this rebuilding phase, psychological and emotional marketing may help to restore traveler confidence, emphasize safety, and connect potential travelers with Thailand's tourist attractions. Understanding their function is vital. For example, advertising Thailand's beautiful beaches, rich culture, and wellness offerings can help create emotional connections with potential visitors. Psychological and emotional marketing may attract visitors and transform Thailand's tourism narrative by inspiring powerful emotions in customers and helping them bond with their chosen country like Thailand. Establishing foreigners' trust and enticing them to visit Thailand can strengthen the Thai economy (Snyder, 2024).

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The term “psychological” refers to internal processes related to the human mind, including cognition, perception, and behavior. In the context of marketing, psychological elements are tied to how individuals mentally process stimuli, assess situations, and make decisions based on both cognitive reasoning and emotional reactions (Consoli, 2010). The term “emotional” refers to a mental and physiological state associated with feelings such as happiness, fear, sadness, or excitement. Emotions are responses to stimuli—like images, sounds, or messages—and they involve bodily reactions (e.g., heart rate changes), behavioral expressions (e.g., facial gestures), and subjective experiences. Emotions often bypass rational processing and are key drivers of decision-making and consumer behavior (Consoli, 2010, p. 33).

Since marketing combines beliefs and values with strategic methods, it serves as a means to reach the intended audience, increase sales, and elevate brands' reputations. The strong influence of belief systems on consumer behavior is demonstrated by a current trend that is sweeping Thailand: value-driven marketing that appeals to the customer's head, heart, and soul. Products need to become engraved in consumers' minds for a brand to achieve long-term recognition. There is a shift from product-focused strategies to consumer-focused approaches, emphasizing the psychology of decision-making and its implications (Yaşar, 2014). The psychological factors that drive traveler behavior are fundamental to tourism marketing. This approach offers several potential benefits to businesses. First, the market segmentation based on age and gender is a standard practice in market research, where relevant data are collected to help market products to specific target groups.

This understanding enables us to identify and respond to consumer needs. The second benefit of marketing is that it allows businesses to inform consumers about the promises made by their products and the benefits they offer. Based on this impression, a strong brand identity and persona can be developed, which will greatly aid in future brand advancement and boost the retention rate—the third key benefit of marketing (Twin, 2024). Travellers frequently seek new experiences, unique situations, and fresh perspectives on life as a way to escape the stress and monotony of daily living. Such activities typically involve both personal emotional and financial investment. Tourism psychology defines a tourist's profile based on an analysis of their behavior and actions in “alternative” environments, as tourists generally spend their free time in settings they have chosen that differ from their daily routines. Tourist behaviors are influenced by social, emotional, motivational, and cognitive factors, creating opportunities for psychological observation (Ryglová, 2014).

Tourists seek out experiences that satisfy their emotional needs—including those for safety, self-actualization, esteem, love, and belonging—as well as their physiological demands. A helpful framework for examining how tourism satisfies both fundamental and higher-level needs is provided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which plays a vital role in tourism marketing. It helps businesses understand traveler motivations and design experiences that fulfil their needs. At the basic level, tourists seek comfort, food, and accommodation, while safety concerns include secure destinations, reliable transportation, and health measures. Social connections drive interest in group tours and cultural experiences, whereas esteem needs attract travelers to luxury offerings, exclusive services, and status-driven trips. At the highest level, self-actualization influences the demand for adventure, wellness retreats, and meaningful travel. By aligning marketing strategies with these psychological needs, tourism businesses can enhance customer engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty (Auksorn and Pattaro, 2019).

The push-and-pull framework serves as a fundamental theoretical lens for understanding psychological and emotional marketing in the tourism industry. Push factors refer to the internal motivations that drive individuals to travel, such as the desire for relaxation, cultural immersion, novelty, and personal growth. These motivations align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, where travelers seek self-actualization, belonging, and esteem through travel experiences. On the other hand, pull factors represent the external attributes of a destination that attract tourists, including cultural heritage, local cuisine, entertainment, and digital engagement. This study highlights the growing role of digital marketing and user-generated content in strengthening pull factors, as social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram create emotional engagement



and shape travel decisions. The integration of psychological triggers with compelling pull attributes enhances destination appeal, reinforcing Thailand's position as a preferred travel destination. By applying the push-pull model within an emotional marketing framework, this study provides insights into how Thailand's tourism industry can effectively influence tourist behavior, fostering both short-term visits and long-term loyalty (Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014).

Push and pull motivation factors significantly shape foreign tourist behavior in Thailand. Push factors, as described by Crompton (1979) and Wearing (2001), are internal psychological drives that influence individuals to travel, such as the need for escape, novelty, social interaction, and self-esteem. These motivations explain why tourists choose to visit Thailand, seeking experiences such as relaxation, adventure, and cultural enrichment (Kim & Prideaux, 2005). Pull factors, on the other hand, are external attributes that attract tourists to a destination, including Thailand's unique cultural identity, natural beauty, and modernized facilities (Li Miao & Wei Wei, 2013; Jiang, 2014). Tourists are drawn to Thailand by its vibrant nightlife, rich heritage, affordability, safety, and reputation for hospitality (Prayag & Ryan, 2010; Dann, 1981). Understanding the interplay between push and pull factors helps identify the emotional and psychological appeals that make Thailand a preferred destination for foreign travelers.

Digital marketing is crucial for Thailand's tourism. Digital platforms have altered the landscape of emotional marketing in the tourism sector. Tourism places may use social media to tell stories, publish photos, and make films to sway potential visitors. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are essential for emotional connection. Social media engagement, search engine optimization (SEO), and targeted advertising are core components of effective digital marketing. These technologies allow tourism organizations to promote Thailand's attractions globally and interact with prospective tourists. The Tourism Authority of Thailand attracts visitors through targeted ads and engaging content as part of its digital marketing strategy. The organization recently launched "TAT Connex," a new platform (Pawlowicz, 2024). Modern tourists seek personalized, visually appealing content that resonates emotionally, opening up opportunities to reach new audiences. Success in the Thai tourism market depends on understanding psychological and emotional factors that shape consumer behaviour. Emotional and psychological marketing is essential for Thai tourism to strengthen its connection with tourists. Digital platforms combined with cultural engagement can significantly enhance tourism. Addressing these elements can help Thailand attract tourists from across the world with its rich culture and breathtaking natural beauty.

The expansion of media has allowed cultural influences—such as music videos and films—to cross borders and influence consumer behavior in numerous regions. Thus, Thai films and dramas have gained popularity among international audiences, impacting purchasing decisions. According to a study, viewers who frequently consume foreign media are emotionally influenced by the characters and settings, leading to consumer choices and travel decisions (Pholprasert & Leelakulthanit, 2019). Another viral phenomenon is Moo Deng, a baby pygmy hippopotamus born on July 10, 2024, at Thailand's Khao Kheow Open Zoo, who has become an internet sensation, significantly boosting tourism in the region. Her playful demeanor and viral online presence have captivated global audiences, resulting in a notable increase in zoo attendance and broader interest in Thai tourism (Nation Thailand, 2024). BLACKPINK member Lalisa "Lisa" Manobal has also contributed to Thailand's tourism. Her appearance in HBO's *The White Lotus*, filmed in Thailand, attracted international attention to Koh Samui and spurred tourism in the area (Chua, 2025). Lisa's music video "Rockstar," produced in Bangkok's Yaowarat neighborhood, has likewise increased local tourism (Ainslie, 2024). In Thailand, visually striking locations, compelling narratives, actors of Chinese descent, celebrity influence, and cultural phenomena all contribute to heightened audience engagement. This media-driven consumer behavior underscores the potential of Thailand's entertainment industry as a tool for soft power, economic growth, and international market expansion (Jiang et al., 2018).



As global tourism becomes more competitive, leveraging psychological and emotional marketing strategies is essential for Thailand to continue attracting international travelers. Thailand's economy relies heavily on the tourism sector, which generates approximately 7% of the country's GDP from foreign visitors. With its temples, people, and tropical islands, Thailand is frequently perceived as an ideal travel destination. Its reputation as the "Land of Smiles" along with its rich history, cultural heritage, and modern capital city, continues to attract tourists. Thai entrepreneurs seek to capitalize on these features by developing goods or services that cater to the tourist market (Kongprasert & Virutamasen, 2015). In the hotel industry, customer emotions—such as pleasure and excitement—have a direct impact on behavioral preferences and overall satisfaction (Lert Basin, 2015b). This suggests that emotional marketing can enhance both the customer experience and brand loyalty. This study aims to explore how these marketing techniques impact tourist decision-making, providing valuable insights that can inform the development of effective and sustainable marketing strategies for Thailand's tourism sector. By examining Thailand's distinctive approach, this research seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how psychological and emotional marketing can be effectively applied to enhance destination appeal and strengthen long-term tourism engagement.

2. Objective

1. To explore the emotional and psychological factors influencing foreign travelers' decision-making when selecting Thailand as a travel destination.
2. To analyze the impact of psychological and emotional marketing strategies within the push- and-pull framework on foreign travelers' decision-making processes when choosing Thailand as a travel destination.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employs a quantitative research approach to examine the psychological and emotional factors influencing foreign travelers' perceptions and responses to marketing efforts within Thailand's tourism industry. Quantitative methods allow for the systematic measurement of consumer emotions, preferences, and behavioral patterns, enabling researchers to draw objective and statistically significant conclusions (Bryman, 2016). To collect relevant data, the study uses a structured questionnaire as its primary research instrument, which was distributed through an online survey targeting foreign individuals who have either visited Thailand in the past, currently reside in the country, or plan to visit in the future.

The survey comprised 19 questions in the first round and 23 questions in the second round, including Likert-scale items that required respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to emotional and psychological responses to travel motivations and marketing messages. This format enabled the standardized evaluation of nuanced attitudes, providing measurable insights into travelers' perceptions, emotional triggers, and decision-making behavior. The questionnaire was developed based on well-established tourism motivation frameworks (e.g., Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981), incorporating both push and pull factors. Push factors refer to internal motivations such as the desire for relaxation, escape, or adventure, while pull factors relate to external attractions such as Thailand's cultural heritage, cuisine, affordability, and natural scenery.

Data were gathered through snowball sampling, in which initial participants were asked to share the survey with their friends and acquaintances, thereby helping to reach a broader range of nationalities. The survey was distributed online via platforms such as Facebook and Google Forms. The first round of data collection took place between October 1 and November 1, 2024, with 135 responses. To enhance



demographic diversity, a second round was conducted a few months later, targeting participants from different age groups and national backgrounds, resulting in an additional 80 responses.

For data collection, the primary method used in this study was an online survey. The main objective of the survey was to analyze the psychological and emotional factors influencing the travel decisions of foreign participants, with data gathered from international respondents. The survey collected information about their perspectives and experiences when deciding to travel abroad, as well as the key factors they considered during the decision-making process.

The survey incorporated Likert-scale questions to quantitatively measure respondents' psychological and emotional reactions. Likert-scale questions present a statement and require participants to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement using a multi-point scale, typically ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This approach enabled researchers to capture nuanced attitudes and opinions on specific topics in a structured and measurable manner. By utilizing these predefined response options, the study ensured a standardized evaluation of foreign travelers' perceptions, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of marketing strategies in Thailand's tourism sector.

In this research, a quantitative method was employed. Quantitative research, in the context of psychological and emotional marketing in tourism, plays a critical role in identifying consumer preferences, emotional triggers, and behavioral patterns. This approach utilizes structured methods such as surveys to measure variables including tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, or the effectiveness of marketing strategies. By analyzing this data, researchers can uncover significant trends—such as the types of destinations that evoke positive emotions or the impact of storytelling on travel decisions. Through quantitative surveys, researchers can assess how emotional appeals—such as messages of relaxation, adventure, or cultural immersion—affect travelers' intentions and perceptions of a destination, and whether cultural heritage campaigns are more effective than those emphasizing luxury experiences.

By examining the underlying influences, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the factors that drive international tourism and guide future marketing strategies in Thailand's travel industry.

4. Results and Discussion

In the first round of the survey, a total of 135 respondents participated. The majority were female (71.9%), followed by male participants (25.2%), and 2.9% identified as "Other." This suggests that female participants may have a particularly strong connection to the emotional and psychological aspects of marketing within Thailand's tourism industry, while male respondents also contributed valuable perspectives on travel-related decision-making. In terms of age distribution, the largest group—80% of respondents—were between the ages of 16 and 24 years old, followed by 14.8% aged 25–34, and 5.2% aged 35 and above.

The First Round of Survey

Emotional Motivations

The emotional motivations behind travel decisions are a central focus of this study, as they play a significant role in shaping how foreigners perceive and respond to marketing efforts. Understanding these emotional drivers is essential for developing targeted marketing strategies that effectively resonate with potential visitors. In this section, the results explore the emotional factors influencing respondents' decisions to visit Thailand, including feelings of excitement, relaxation, adventure, and cultural curiosity. By examining these motivations, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how emotions influence travel behavior.

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Emotional Influences on Destination Choices

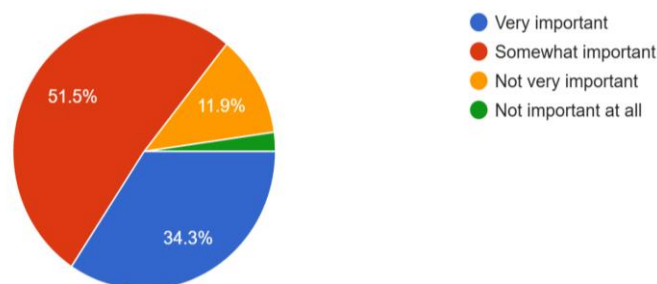


Figure 1 The importance of personal connection in influencing destination choices

Figure 1 explores the significance of personal connections to the destinations individuals select, emphasizing their critical role in shaping travel decisions. The chart reveals that almost half of the respondents consider this factor important. Specifically, 34.3% rated it as extremely important, 11.9% as very important, and 2.2% as not important. Overall, approximately 86% of participants believe that having a personal connection to a place is an important reason for their travel choices.

The emotional influences on destination choice also indicate that relaxation is a significant factor, accounting for 41.8%, followed by excitement and cultural connection at 23.1% and adventurousness at 11.9%. The majority of responders prioritize stress reduction and relaxation as key motivations for travel. Excitement and cultural connection are also considered highly important. The findings further reveal that adventure seekers represent only a small portion of the overall population.

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Psychological Factors

Psychological variables impact travelers' impressions and motivations to visit Thailand. Foreign visitors are drawn to the destination by its promise of leisure, cultural discovery, personal satisfaction, and adventure, as well as emotional motivations such as escape, cultural connection, and new experiences. These psychological determinants help explain why foreign travelers are attracted to Thailand and how they shape travel preferences and behaviors.

How Tourists Make Decisions

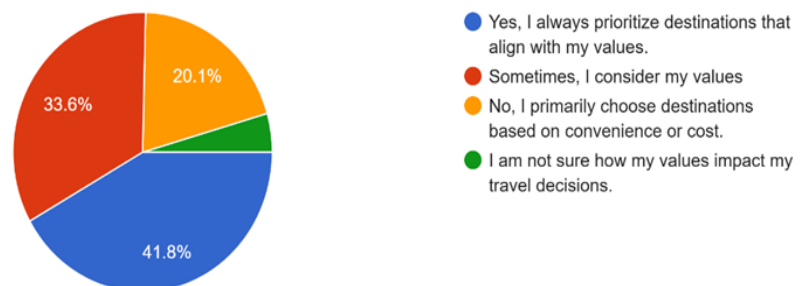


Figure 2 The role of personal values in travel decision-making

Figure 2 presents a pie chart based on a survey of 135 participants, illustrating how personal values—such as environmental concerns or social impact—influence travel decisions. The majority (41.8%) reported that they always prioritize destinations that align with their values. An additional 33.6% stated that they sometimes consider their values when selecting travel destinations. Meanwhile, 20.1% prioritize convenience or cost, and 4.5% are uncertain about the role their values play in their decision-making process.

The survey also found that tourists' decisions are influenced by perceptions of safety and security in Thailand. A total of 87.3% of respondents indicated that safety greatly or somewhat affects their decision to visit, highlighting the significance of feeling secure while traveling. In contrast, 12.6% reported that safety



has little or no influence on their decision-making, suggesting that they either perceive Thailand as inherently safe or prioritize other factors such as cost or available activities.

Marketing and Media Influence

Media and marketing significantly influence travelers' psychological and emotional decision-making, particularly in the context of tourism. Effective Thai marketing strategies utilize social media platforms, travel blogs, and influencer content to create emotional engagement with potential visitors. These campaigns appeal to travelers' desires for leisure, adventure, and cultural immersion by showcasing Thailand's natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and wellness experiences. Media not only influences decision-making but also fosters emotional connections, making Thailand appealing to a wide audience. To develop marketing efforts that resonate with travelers and enhance their overall experience, it is essential to understand how different media channels interact with psychological factors.

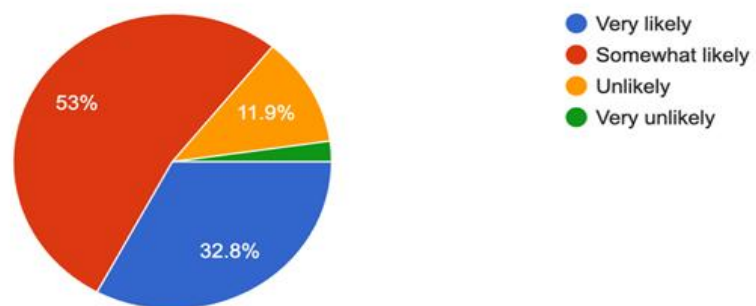


Figure 3 The impact of social media content on travelers' choice of Thailand as a destination

Figure 3 presents a pie chart illustrating the likelihood of individuals choosing Thailand as a travel destination based on user-generated content on social media, such as emotional travel vlogs or Instagram posts highlighting meaningful experiences. The majority of respondents (53%) indicated that they are somewhat likely to be influenced by such content. Additionally, 32.8% stated they are very likely to choose Thailand after viewing these types of social media posts, underscoring the strong impact of user-generated content. A smaller portion (11.9%) reported being unlikely to be influenced, while an even smaller group indicated that they are very unlikely to be swayed.

Effectiveness of Thailand's Cultural Marketing in Creating Memorable Travel Experiences

This section presents respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of Thailand's cultural marketing—such as festivals and local customs—in creating a unique and memorable travel experience for international tourists. Among the 135 respondents, 38.1% somewhat believed in its effectiveness, making up the largest group. An additional 35.1% strongly believed in its impact, indicating considerable confidence in Thailand's



cultural appeal. Meanwhile, 23.1% remained neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. A very small portion of respondents indicated that they did not believe in the effectiveness of Thailand's cultural marketing efforts.

The Second Round Survey

The second round of the survey included 80 participants. The majority (46.3%) were between the ages of 21–30, indicating that young adults once again formed the largest age group. This was followed by 15% aged 41–50, 12.5% over 60, 10% aged 51–60, 8.8% under 20, and 7.5% aged 31–40. Regarding gender, 50% of respondents identified as female, and 47.5% as male. In terms of occupation, the largest group (46.3%) identified as students, followed by employees (23.7%) and business owners (16.2%). The questionnaire was developed based on well-established tourism motivation frameworks (e.g., Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981), incorporating both push and pull factors. Push factors refer to internal motivations such as the desire for relaxation, escape, or adventure, while pull factors relate to external attractions such as Thailand's cultural heritage, cuisine, affordability, and natural scenery

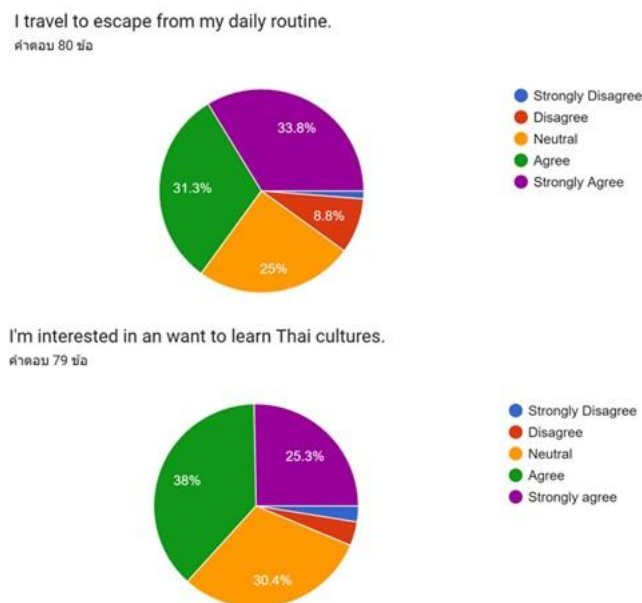


Figure 4 Travel motivations—escaping the daily routine and learning Thai culture

Push Factors Influencing International Travel Decisions

The two pie charts illustrate key push factors influencing international tourists' decisions to visit Thailand. In the first chart, a majority of respondents (65.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that they travel to escape their daily routine, indicating that personal refreshment and a break from monotony are significant

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motivators. Only a small percentage (8.8%) disagreed with this statement, suggesting that it is a broadly accepted push factor. In the second chart, which explores interest in Thai culture, an even greater proportion (63.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that they are interested in and want to learn about Thai culture. This finding suggests that cultural curiosity is another strong motivator. Combined, the charts highlight that both psychological escape and cultural exploration are prominent push factors driving tourism to Thailand.

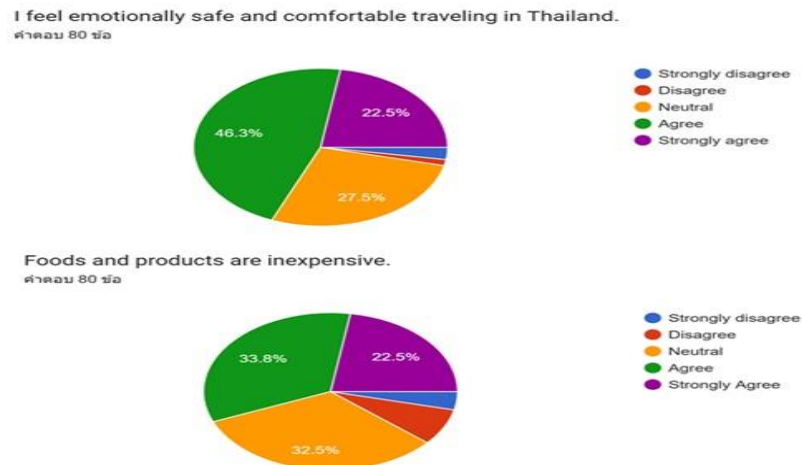


Figure 5 Safety, comfort, and affordability of food and products in Thailand

Pull Factors Influencing International Travel Decisions

The two pie charts present key pull factors that attract international tourists to Thailand. The first chart shows that a significant portion of respondents (68.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that they feel emotionally safe and comfortable traveling in Thailand. This reflects Thailand's reputation as a welcoming and tourist-friendly destination. Only a small fraction (3.7%) expressed disagreement, indicating that emotional security is a strong draw for visitors.

The second chart focuses on perceptions of affordability, specifically whether food and products are inexpensive. In this case, 56.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, suggesting that the cost-effectiveness of traveling in Thailand is another major attraction. Taken together, these findings suggest that tourists are driven not only by emotional reassurance but also by the economic value that Thailand offers.

Discussion

The findings of this study emphasize the profound role that emotional and psychological factors play in shaping international tourists' decisions to visit Thailand. The survey results underscore the importance of push factors, such as the desire to escape daily routines, experience relaxation, and engage with new cultures. Over 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they travel to escape routine life, and a similarly high percentage expressed interest in learning about Thai culture. These results align with psychological theories,



particularly Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as they reflect motivations related to esteem, belonging, and self-actualization.

Equally significant are the pull factors, which reflect Thailand's external attractiveness. A majority of participants (68.8%) indicated that they feel emotionally safe and comfortable while traveling in Thailand. This finding is crucial, as emotional safety is often an underexplored yet pivotal determinant in destination selection—especially in a post-pandemic context. Furthermore, the perception of affordability—with 56.3% agreeing that food and products are inexpensive—enhances Thailand's appeal as a cost-effective destination, making it especially attractive to budget-conscious travelers.

The integration of media and digital storytelling has further enhanced Thailand's tourism appeal. As highlighted in both the survey and the literature, digital platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have become powerful tools for creating emotional engagement. The viral impact of cultural figures (e.g., Lisa from BLACKPINK), user-generated content, and Thai dramas reinforces the idea that modern travelers are influenced by emotionally resonant content that emphasizes authenticity and personal experience. More than 85% of respondents indicated that social media content influenced their consideration of Thailand as a travel destination.

Another important theme revealed by the research is the rising importance of personal values and responsible tourism. Many tourists expressed a preference for destinations that align with their values, including sustainability, community support, and ethical consumption. This shift implies that traditional marketing tactics may no longer be sufficient; instead, emotionally driven campaigns that emphasize cultural respect, environmental awareness, and immersive experiences are more likely to drive engagement and foster long-term loyalty.

This research reveals that both emotional and psychological motivations—internal (push) and external (pull)—are essential in influencing foreign travelers' behavior. Emotional safety, cultural interest, affordability, and digital media engagement are key factors that shape tourists' perceptions and decisions. To maintain its position as a leading tourist destination, Thailand's tourism marketers should prioritize strategies that foster emotional connections, promote authentic storytelling, and align branding with consumer values. This strategic shift will not only enhance visitor satisfaction but also contribute to long-term destination loyalty and the development of sustainable tourism.

5. Conclusion

This research underscores the crucial role of emotional and psychological marketing in influencing international tourists' decisions to visit Thailand. By applying the push-and-pull factor framework, the study reveals that travelers are driven by internal motivations—such as the need for relaxation, cultural exploration, and escape from routine—as well as external attractions, including Thailand's affordability, perceived safety, and cultural richness. The findings also highlight the growing impact of digital media, particularly social platforms like TikTok and Instagram, in shaping emotional connections and enhancing destination appeal. Tourists are not only influenced by visual content but are also increasingly drawn to experiences that align with their personal values, such as sustainability and cultural authenticity. To remain competitive in the global tourism landscape, Thailand must continue to integrate emotionally resonant storytelling, value-driven marketing, and immersive cultural experiences into its tourism strategies. By doing so, it can strengthen visitor engagement, build long-term loyalty, and promote sustainable growth in the tourism sector.



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