

Using Media for Public Relations of Thai Food to Global Market in China

Sarinya Paisarnsombat

Kasetsart University, Thailand, fscisnpa@ku.ac.th

Cherdpong Kheerajit

Kasetsart University, Thailand

Nattaphon Rampai

Kasetsart University, Thailand

Narong Sompong

Kasetsart University, Thailand

Abstract: This research aims 1) to study media exposure behavior of various age target groups: teenager, working age, and elderly, 2) to develop suitable media for public relations of Thai food to specific target groups, and 3) to study media satisfactory of Chinese to the integrated media for public relations of Thai food innovation to global market. The studied groups include 249 tourists both Chinese and others who travelled in Thailand and 100 Chinese tourists in Shanghai, China. The research tools are 1) integrated public relations media of Thai food innovation including website, video, mobile application, and publications, 2) satisfactory survey, and 3) questionnaire on media exposure behavior on public relations media of Thai food to global market. The survey and questionnaire were offered in Chinese and English languages. Results suggest that media exposure behaviors of the tourist on Thai food information are not significantly different among nationality. There is no relationship between age and media exposure behavior. The most favorable media among tourists is online social media, followed by mobile application and website, respectively. Chinese prefers to receive information on Thai food via online social media, while the others prefer to receive the information via mobile application. Chinese would like to know about Thai food innovation, while others would like to learn about Thai food recipe. The study suggests that the suitable integrated media for public relations of Thai food to Chinese should be presented in Chinese language and published in most common social media among Chinese such as WeChat and Youku.

Keywords: Thai cuisine, Integrated media, Public relations

Introduction

Thailand is an agricultural country, in which agricultural products have been domestically consumed and exported in global market. Many Thai food innovation as well as Thai food media (e.g., Paisarnsombat et al., 2018; Kheerajit et al., 2019) have been studied in order to improve quality of Thai food products for a great benefit of Thai food business especially export goods and public relations of Thai food to world. Thai Government has established a policy to promote Thai food to global market as well as to promote Thai food culture for supporting of tourism. The policy would lead to income growth of the country. Our main target is China, which is the most populated country in the world. Besides, the highest number of foreign tourists in Thailand is from China, which its number as high as 10.5 million people per year and 5.8 hundred billion baht per year (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2019). Thus, the research on strategic planning for public relations of Thai food in other countries such as suitability of media channel for different age target group, type of media specified for target group, and media assessment, is necessary to achieve a goal of public relations of Thai food to global market.

Method

Population and Samples

Researchers identified population and sample of the research into 2 groups: 1) 249 foreign tourists including Chinese, Indian, English, and Asian at Nongnooch Tropical Garden for a study of media exposure behavior using accidental random sampling and 2) 100 Chinese tourists who participated in the Essence of Thainess event in Shanghai, China.

Research Tools

The 3 research tools have been developed for the study including 1) a research questionnaire on media exposure behavior of media consumers on public relations media of Thai food using 5-level rating score (1 = Not at all needed, 2 = Slightly needed, 3 = Moderately needed, 4 = Highly needed, 5 = Extremely needed), 2) integrated media for public relations of Thai food innovation including website, video, mobile application, and Augmented Reality (AR) publications, and 3) media consumer satisfaction survey, with 4-level rating score (1 = Dissatisfied, 2 = Moderate, 3 = Satisfied, 4 = Highly satisfied), on the integrated media.

Procedure

First is a study of media exposure behavior of foreign tourists on Thai food by surveying. The survey was performed at the Nongnooch Tropical Garden in Pattaya, Chonburi Province. There were 249 tourists participated in the survey. Data collected from the media exposure behavior survey was analyzed via focus group discussion. The discussion focused on establishing a strategy for public relations of Thai food in China. The focus group consisted of 13 members including experts in various fields, Thai food technical officers, and Thai food business operators in the People's Republic of China. After the strategic planning, an activity aiming for public relations of Thai cuisine to global market was organized and held at the Lu One Tower in Shanghai, China.

Data Analysis and Statistical Study

Descriptive statistical analysis including percentage, average, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and hypothesis testing was used to analyze data collected from the survey on the media exposure behavior of foreign tourists to Thai food. A score system used to interpret the data is listed in Table 1. The Chi-square test was used to analyze a relationship between gender and media exposure behavior of Chinese tourists as well as other nationalities. Analysis of the public relations of Thai food to global market in China was performed using a 4-level rating score media consumer satisfaction survey. Descriptive statistical analysis (i.e., percentage, average, and Standard Deviation: S.D.) was used for data analysis (see Table 2).

Table 1. Score System for Media Assessment

Score	Meaning
4.50 – 5.00	Extremely needed
3.50 – 4.49	Highly needed
2.50 – 3.49	Moderately needed
1.50 – 2.49	Slightly needed
1.00 – 1.49	Not at all needed

Table 2. Score System used in Media Satisfaction Survey

Score	Meaning
3.51 – 4.00	Highly satisfied
2.51 – 3.50	Satisfied
1.51 – 2.50	Moderate
1.00 – 1.50	Dissatisfied

Results and Discussion

Media Exposure Behavior

Data from the study of media exposure behavior of foreign tourists on Thai food were collected from 249 respondents, which are grouped into 2 groups. The first group consists of 186 Chinese, in which 71.5% are female. Nearly 76.9% of Chinese respondents are in a working age (23-59 years old). 71% of the Chinese respondents have Bachelor's Degrees. The second group is 86 respondents holding other nationalities such as Russian, British, American, Indian, and Saudi Arabian. 77.8% of the second group respondents are also in a working age (23-59 years old). 36.5% of the second group graduated from high school (see Table 3).

Table 3. General Information of Respondents

General information	Chinese tourists (n = 186)		Other nationalities (n=63)		Total (n=249)	
	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
<u>Gender</u>						
- Male	53	28.5	31	49.2	85	34.1
- Female	133	71.5	32	50.0	164	65.9
<u>Age</u>						
- Teenager (10-22 years old)	43	23.1	13	20.6	57	22.9
- Working age (23-59 years old)	143	76.9	49	77.8	191	76.7
- Elderly (over 60 years old)	-	-	1	1.6	1	0.4
<u>Educational level</u>						
- Primary	1	0.5	3	4.8	4	1.6
- High school	33	17.7	23	36.5	56	22.5
- Bachelor's	132	71.0	18	28.6	150	60.2
- Master's	17	9.1	13	20.6	30	12
- Doctorate	3	1.6	6	9.5	9	3.6

Results on media exposure behavior (see Table 4) show that the respondents, regardless of nationality, would like to be exposed to mobile application due to its ease of access to information and convenience. In addition, people of all ages are able to access to smart appliances such as smartphone, tablet and iPad. The results also show that Chinese tourists would like to expose to social media and website at a *highly needed* level, according to the 5-level rating score questionnaire, followed by *moderately needed* media that are video broadcasted on television, printed media, and Augmented Reality (AR), respectively.

For the second group respondents, social media is a type of media that is highly needed, followed by moderately needed media including website, video, AR, and printed media, respectively. The result for non-Chinese tourists is more likely to be related to unconditional accessibility to any types of media, which is different from Chinese tourists. Thus, the level of need for every types of media are moderate and not specific to one type of media.

Table 4. Media Exposure Behavior of Foreign Tourists

Types of media	Chinese tourists (n=186)			Other nationalities (n=63)		
	Average	S.D.	Level of need	Average	S.D.	Level of need
1. Website	3.99	1.14	Highly needed	3.35	0.57	Moderately
2. Online social media Facebook, YouTube, Line, Twitter, Blog, WeChat	4.04	1.08	Highly needed	3.59	0.96	Highly needed
3. Mobile applications on smartphone, tablet, iPad	4.12	1.06	Highly needed	4.10	0.73	Highly needed
4. Video broadcasted on television	3.39	1.31	Moderately	2.84	1.02	Moderately
5. Printed media (pamphlet, poster, brochure, billboard)	2.93	1.44	Moderately	2.60	1.07	Moderately
6. Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality	2.90	1.51	Moderately	2.65	1.23	Moderately

Tourists' needs of Thai food contents in Thai food media was also studied. The results indicate that Chinese tourists would like to receive information on Thai food at the *highly needed* level in all aspects especially Thai food innovation. Although Thai food is very famous in China, ingredients and cooking methods are different. Thus, Chinese tourists are not able to cook and taste authentic Thai food. That could be a reason why Chinese tourists are mostly interested in Thai food innovation. Similarly, tourists with other nationality would like to receive information on Thai food at the *highly needed* level in all aspects. However, the most needed Thai food content for non-Chinese tourists is Thai food recipe due to its unique taste, aroma, color, and appearance as well as identity of Thai food. Another topic about Thai food such as Halal Thai food is also interesting among non-Chinese tourists. However, its level of need is at *moderately needed* level due to specific group of consumers. British, Russian and American tourists are not quite interested in Halal Thai food. On the other hands, Indian and Saudi Arabian would like to receive information about Halal Thai food. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Tourists' Need of Thai Food Contents

Contents	Chinese tourists (n=186)			Other nationalities (n=63)		
	Average	S.D.	Meaning	Average	S.D.	Meaning
1. Thai Food Business for Entrepreneur	3.57	1.17	Highly needed	3.56	1.09	Highly needed
2. Nutritive Information of Thai Food	3.95	0.96	Highly needed	4.06	0.82	Highly needed
3. Vegetables and Herbs in Thai Food	4.06	1.01	Highly needed	3.89	1.02	Highly needed
4. Vegetarian Thai Food	3.78	1.04	Highly needed	3.68	1.16	Highly needed
5. Halal Thai Food	3.58	1.08	Highly needed	3.19	1.41	Moderately
6. Authentic Thai Cuisine	3.96	0.97	Highly needed	4.08	0.90	Highly needed
7. Thai Food Innovation	4.09	0.95	Highly needed	3.81	1.06	Highly needed
8. Dessert and Drink	3.97	1.13	Highly needed	4.02	1.11	Highly needed

Relationship between Gender, Age and Media Exposure Behavior

The study shows that gender difference does not have statistically significant effect on the tourists' media exposure behavior. Correspondingly, the study shows that age does not have statistically significant relationship to media exposure behavior. Teenage, working age people, and elders have similar behavior in media exposure (see Table 6). According to the results, a difference in age and gender does not affect media exposure behavior of tourists.

Table 6. Relationships between Gender, Age and Media Exposure Behavior

Media exposure behavior on Thai food of tourists	Gender				Age			
	Male	Female	Ave.	Sig.	Teenager	Working age	Ave.	Sig.
<u>Website</u>			9.672	.086*			7.889	.056*
- Often	17	34			12	31		
- Always	51	97			53	97		
- Sometimes	9	29			11	31		
- Rarely	8	3			8	4		
- Never	0	1			1	1		
<u>Online social media</u>			9.267	.058*			19.584	.062*
- Often	12	30			8	10		
- Always	57	101			60	91		
- Sometimes	7	27			11	33		
- Rarely	8	4			3	30		
- Never	1	2			3	0		
<u>Mobile application</u>			16.477	.064*			13.623	.074*
- Often	9	9			12	28		
- Always	6	30			58	101		
- Sometimes	64	92			6	27		
- Rarely	5	30			9	4		
- Never	1	3			0	4		
<u>Television</u>			3.033	.057*			13.956	.054*
- Often	1	4			3	14		
- Always	1	8			2	9		
- Sometimes	61	107			65	88		
- Rarely	20	40			12	49		
- Never	2	5			3	4		
<u>Printed media</u>			17.161	.062*			3.033	.058*
- Often	3	11			1	4		
- Always	4	12			1	8		
- Sometimes	67	90			61	107		
- Rarely	10	51			20	40		

- Never	1	0	2	5
<u>Augmented Reality (AR)</u>	10.344	.093*	13.723	.062*
- Often	0	0	0	0
- Always	2	0	0	1
- Sometimes	56	126	48	127
- Rarely	23	27	20	23
- Never	13	11	17	13

Satisfaction Survey on Public Relation of Thai Food to Global Market

Satisfaction survey on public relations of Thai food using integrated media was performed on Chinese tourists who attended the Essence of Thainess event held at Lu One Tower in Shanghai, China. The results indicate that Chinese tourists are satisfied with the public relations media at the *satisfied* level (2.51 – 3.50 scores) both in media design and media contents. The results are shown in Table 7 and Table 8, respectively.

Table 7. Satisfaction Level of Chinese Tourists on Thai Food Media Design

Assessment topics	Average	S.D.	Meaning
<u>Video</u>			
- Interests of sound and computer graphic	3.17	0.52	Satisfied
- Presentation technique	2.96	0.72	Satisfied
<u>Database website</u>			
- Easy access to the information	3.10	0.54	Satisfied
- Computer graphic	3.25	0.75	Satisfied
<u>Augmented Reality (AR)</u>			
- Computer graphic	3.04	0.60	Satisfied
- Suitable content and picture	3.02	0.65	Satisfied
<u>Application</u>			
- Easy access to the information	3.25	0.63	Satisfied
- Suitable content in each menu	2.75	0.82	Satisfied

Table 8. Satisfaction Level of Chinese Tourists on Thai Food Media Content

Assessment topics	Average	S.D.	Meaning
<u>Contents</u>			
- Clarity of the content	3.33	0.59	Satisfied
- Suitable content	3.27	0.63	Satisfied
- Interests of the content	3.18	0.52	Satisfied
- Suitable content sequence	3.02	0.65	Satisfied
<u>Media Application</u>			
- Easy access to media and its application	3.10	0.67	Satisfied
- Media can be publicized for public relations of Thai food	3.02	0.69	Satisfied
- Media can be used as reference for Thai food research	3.27	0.61	Satisfied
- Overall integration of the media	3.34	0.54	Satisfied

Discussion

The study shows that tourists have similar media exposure behavior regardless of nationality. In addition, Chinese tourists are mostly exposed to online social media, while other nationality are mostly exposed to mobile application. It suggests that both Chinese and other nationality tourists would like to expose to online public relations media. The result is corresponding with previous study on media development stated that online social media has effect on current media exposure behavior (Amelia, 2014; Aikaterini et al., 2016; Kaur, 2016). For media contents about Thai food, Chinese and other nationality tourists have similar interests in Thai food contents at *highly needed* level with highest to lowest scores ranging from vegetable and herb in Thai food, nutrition of Thai food, Thai food innovation, and Thai food recipe, respectively. It suggests that foreigners are interested in healthy food, which is currently a topic of interest in the global market. Moreover, a study suggests that public relations media targeted Chinese consumers should be developed using Chinese specific online

media that are popular among Chinese and can be accessed by people of all ages such as Baidu website, WeChat application, and Youku video online media.

The hypothesis testing of a relationship between age, gender, and media exposure behavior shows no statistical significant relationships. Every tourist of all 3 age gaps (i.e., teenager, working age, and elder) does not have statistical significant (.05) difference in media exposure behavior, in which the most exposed media are mobile application and online social media. It suggests that Chinese, as well as other nationality, tourists at all ages can easily access to online media, which is corresponding with the concept proposed by Rodriguez (2011). Rodriguez (2011) states that current behavior of tourists is consuming social media for searching information as well as sharing travelling experiences including food, place, activities, and accommodation. Thus, a publication of Thai food innovation via online social media is the most suitable media channel that reach needs of target groups. It would provide effective outcome to Thai food business in the future.

According to the satisfaction survey of Chinese tourists on public media of Thai food, Chinese tourists are satisfied with the integrated media both in media usage and contents. It indicates an excellent outcome of the public relations of Thai food to global market in China both in media development, media content, and media usage. In addition, the study assures that the integrated media would provide a great benefit in public relations of Thai food to global market. The relevant organizations should further publish the media for continuous promoting and supporting of Thai food business as well as tourism of Thailand.

Conclusion

Foreign tourists, both Chinese and others, commonly receive information via social media and website, followed by, television, printed media and augmented reality, respectively. Chinese tourists would like to learn about Thai food innovation at most, followed by vegetable and herbs in Thai food. The rest of the study group would like to learn more about Thai food recipe.

The study shows no significant difference in media exposure behavior among youth, working age, and elder (p -value $< .05$). Thus, there is no relationship between gender and age and media exposure behavior of foreign tourists. The satisfaction survey on public relations media of Thai food, collected from 100 Chinese tourists, indicates the *satisfied* level of satisfaction, according to the 4-level satisfaction survey, on the media design, media content and media usage. It indicates an achievement of the strategic plan for public relations of Thai food in China. The study process should be furthered apply to other target groups for supporting an expansion of Thai food to global market.

Recommendations

Any organization who participates in tourism of Thailand, both government and private organization, can use the integrated media in public relations of Thai food. The knowledge gained from this research can be applied for further development of the media. The future public relations of Thai food to any target country should consider media platform that are commonly used by population in the targeted country, rather than globally used media platform.

Acknowledgements

Authors would like to give great attitude to the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) for financial support throughout the research, as well as the “Thai Cuisine to Global Market” research program. The research was in collaboration with the Institute of Food Research and Product Development, Kasetsart University and the Department of Educational Technology, Faculty of Education, Kasetsart University.

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