

The Use of Mascots in Marketing Communication to Promote Tourism in Thailand: A Case Study of The Northern Provinces

Suchada Wattanarak^{1*}, Jantima Kheakao²

¹ D.Com.Arts in Marketing Communication (candidate) in the School of Communication Arts, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Thailand

¹ Associate Professor and Director of the Doctoral Program In Marketing Communication, School of Communication Arts, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Thailand *

Abstract

This study synthesized the researches, on the use of mascots in marketing communications to promote tourism in Thailand, the marketing communication tools that used mascot and reason to use them. The Five studies related to mascot to promote tourism in northern of Thailand published during the year 2014-2018 were retrieved from ThaiJo DB and content analyzed. The findings were as follows:

1. It was found there were 2 marketing communication tools that used mascot to promote tourism in northern Thailand, PR and sale promotion. Mascot found in PR materials such as in posters, animation media and signs backdrop. In sales promotion, mascot was used in activates and souvenir products
2. It was found that there were five importance reasons in using mascot to promote tourism in northern Thailand; 1) to communicate about their respective provinces and localities, 2) to create awareness and recognition to tourists, 3) to create value added to local products and services or provinces, 4) to create destinations' uniqueness and attract attention to tourists, and 5) creating emotional bonding between tourists and the target destination , respectively

Keywords: mascot, tourism, city, province, northern Thailand

I. Introduction

The northern region of Thailand is a region which is historically related to the Lanna Kingdom and its culture. Geographically, the region is characterized by several mountain ranges lining from the Shan Hills along Myanmar to Laos, and the river valleys which cut through them. Its relatively high elevation and latitude contribute to a cooler winters than the other regions with beautiful scenery. These make a region rich in culture and nature.

The region comprises of 17 provinces: Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan, Phitsanulok, Tak, Uttaradit, Sukhothai, Phetchabun, Nakhon Sawan, Kamphaeng Phet, Phichit and Uthai Thani (Payap University, 2009). Many provinces in the north are popular major tourist destinations. Among them, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai And Mae Hong Son are world heritage and ecological heritage sites which attract tourists' attention to visit the region continuously. In 2018, the number of tourists visiting the Northern provinces totaled 202.51 million, generating revenue from tourism worth over 3,075.70 trillion baht (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018).

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) set the 2019 tourism promotion plan according to the 20-year National Strategic Plan (2017-2036) targeting to make Thailand the preferred destination and to continuously increase revenue from tourism industry at 10 percent. The plan will promote the Thai value concept allowing the tourists to have valuable experiences from the unique local Thai experiences. In the Northern provinces cluster, the "Amazing Stories of the North" was planned to prepare the learning sources and tourist attractions such as museums and communities for the tourists to enjoy history and culture in a more authentic way (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019).

The important driving force to implement the plan is marketing communication campaign to reach as many tourists as possible through advertising, public relations, sale promotion activities. Having organized various activities to promote tourism, mascot was also part of the tourism promotion activities to attract more attentions from the tourists and represent the destination. Mascot has been introduced as a tool to promote tourism in many provinces. Likewise, mascot has helped boosting the sales of tourism-related businesses (Phongthanalert, 2015; Sukpatthi, 2016), therefore, mascot promote economic and tourism opportunities in the Northern provinces and various regions of Thailand. If the development of marketing communication knowledge will be more effective understanding the use of mascot in marketing communications synthesizing the related research papers could increase knowledges about the use of mascot in marketing communication. Research gap could also be identified.

Research objectives

1. To synthesize research related to the use of mascot in marketing communications to promote tourism in Thailand, a case study of the study that focused on the Northern provinces tourism.

Related literature review

Marketing communication can add value for customers, because customers need to be informed on aspects, such as the features and potential benefits of a product, where it can be bought, and whether it is a well-known brand with a good reputation, or whether it has already formed a positive association in the minds of the consumers (Duncan, 2005:15). It influenced the target audiences' perceptions of crucial features and symbolic associations that are superior to those of the competitors. Likewise, it can add value for the company/advertiser by building brands and creating brand equity. Since marketing communication mainly occurs at brand level, it can be used by companies to create popular, well-known or valued brands. Branding can also bring in economic advantages for companies, because of the potential to produce in vast quantities and to create barriers for new brands trying to enter the market.

Integrating the marketing communication elements has moved from being a planning process to a strategic process (Schultz and Kitchen 2000:10). To effectively communicate and to achieve the desired objectives, many communication tools must be used together (Kotler.1997: 604). These included advertising, public relations, sale promotion, personal selling and direct marketing.

As far as brand mascot or spoke – character is concerned, Schiffman and Kanuk (2000: 232) describes spoke - characters or trade character as the characteristics of using cartoons characters or other similar as a spokesperson of products or services. It is the presentation of ideas, imagination and providing information that is important to the product or service through the character created to act as a spokesperson or sometime to create personality for products or services such as the friendliness of Ronald McDonald. Philips (1996) provides the definition of Spoke - Characters or Trade Character as symbolic objects that are created to support products and services, which are responsible for communicating brand characteristics and personality. The meaning of spoke – characters is a character that has been created to be linked to products or service for life in various forms, such as human beings, animals, objects, cartoons or images, in order to be consistent with the products and services of that brand

2. Research method

The samples used in the study were the research papers published the year 2014-2018 which were retrieved from the Thai Journals Online database and other academic databased. The search terms used in searching were mascot, tourism, city, province and north. Five research papers concerning the use of mascot in tourism promotion in the Northern Thailand were selected. The coding form was used to record the data resulting from content analysis of the research papers.

3. Findings and discussion

The findings were divided into 2 parts; 1) the marketing communication tools that used mascot and 2) the importance of using mascot in communication marketing as follows.

1) The use of mascots in marketing communications

Findings revealed that public relations and sale promotion were the marketing communication tools that used mascot in their activities. Mascot was used in PR materials such as posters, animation media and backdrop signs. In sales promotion, mascot was part of campaign activities and in souvenir products. Details were shown in Table 1. Table 1 Marketing communication tools that used mascot

No	Resources and Research published year	Marketing communication tools (Kotler,1997)				
		Advertising	Public Relation	Direct Marketing	Sales Promotion	Personal Selling
1	Prabhon Pruengpong-2014		✓		✓	
2	Nuchnat Chiangchai-2015		✓		✓	
3	Supatra Lukrak-2016		✓		✓	
4	Narupon Komson -2017		✓		✓	
5	Maniwan Chatvanich and Somphop Chatvanich-2018		✓		✓	
	Total	0	5	0	5	0

The findings indicated two marketing communication tools public relations and sale promotion used mascot. Communicate with broad audience which the advantages of public relation are costed lower. The news published is more reliable than other communication tools (Lamb, Hair and McDaniel.1992). Sales promotion uses special events such as organizing events in the fair and exhibitions and the production of souvenir products for sale to create more value for the province (Sukphatthi, 2016; Soltani & Piters, 2017), creating the success of using mascot to promote tourism of a city or province to a widely known and able to generate more revenue, must implement by using marketing communication tools. Marketing communication is an important factor that creates recognition, and communication to consumers. Through various marketing communication tools, both online and offline, in line with the integrated marketing communication of Kotler & Keller (2009) that said integrated marketing communications is the marketing communication planning process, with the introduction of a variety of communication tools in order to be able to deliver news clearly, consistency and relationship from the messenger who sends the information

in the form of letters, images, sounds, symbols through communication channels to the recipients in order to ultimately achieve the desired results

2) Importance of using mascot in marketing communication

It was found that the most important of reason to use mascot was to communicate the personality of the province and locality followed by to create value for local products and services or provinces and least in creating emotional ties for tourists as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Importance of using mascot in marketing communication

No	Research papers	The importance of using mascot in marketing communication				
		Communicate the personality of the province and locality	Create outstanding and appeal to tourists	Create awareness and recognition of tourists	Create value for local products and services or provinces	Create emotional ties for tourists
1	Prabhon Pruengpong2014	✓	✓			
2	Nuchnat Chiangchai-2015	✓			✓	
3	Supatra Lukrak-2016	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Narupon Komson -2017	✓		✓	✓	✓
5	Maniwan Chatvanich and Somphop Chatvanich-2018	✓		✓	✓	
	Total	5	2	3	4	1

Using mascot in marketing communication is important to promote tourism, especially in tourism competition. Each province must make their own provinces stand out and be different from other provinces in order to attract tourists. Consistent with many research studies that study mascot to promote tourism, there must be the identity of the city and province, with the design, appearance, shape and personality that is favored to the audiences, The mascot must be friendly and able to identify identities in connection with social and cultural contexts (Prungphong, 2014; Luk Rak, 2016; Komson, 2017).

4. Conclusion

It could be concluded that using mascot worked well in public relations and sale promotion to communicate the personality of the province and locality and create value for local products and services or provinces but less use in creating emotional ties for tourists. To fill up the knowledge on the use of mascot more analysis from research in other regions should be conducted. Creating awareness and recognition of tourists is also important to continuously attract endless tourists to certain destination, therefore, this topic need to be further explored.

Appendix: List of researches used in this synthesis

- [1] Chatawanich, M. and S.,(2018).The Influence of Semiotics towards the memorable images of Destination through the intellectual and cultural capital. Dusit Thani CollegeJournal,12 (2).
- [2] Chiangchai, N.(2015).The identity using to Promote tourism in Lampang Province (Master's thesis).Silpakorn University.Bangkok.
- [3] Komsan, N.(2017).The development of the district mascot Phitsanulok Province. Naresuan Journal,12,pp.1516-1529.
- [4] Lookraks, S. (2016). Study of design guidelines for lucky symbols for local public relations and products in Thailand(Master's thesis).Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Bangkok.
- [5] Praphaiphon, P.(2014). Mascot Design for Chiang Mai Cultural Events(Master's thesis).Chulalongkorn University.Bangkok.

Reference

- [1] Duncan, T. (2005). *Principles of advertisings & IMC (2nd ed.)*. Boston,MA:McGraw- Hill/Irwin.
- [2] Kotler, P. (1997). *Marketing Management: Analysis, planning, implementation and control* (14th Globaled.).Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- [3] Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2009). *Marketing management*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- [4] Ministry of Tourism and Sports. (2018). *Tourism marketing direction of the year 2019 of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)*. Retrieved June 10,2019, from <http://www.Mots.go.th/contents.php?nid=10572&filename=/>.
- [5] Phillips,B.J.(1996). Defining trade characters and their role in American popular Culture. *Journal of Popular Culture*,29(4),143-158.
- [6] Phongthanalert,K.(2015).*Mascot and Tourism in Japan*, Chula 101.5 (Radio).Bangkok.
- [7] Soltani, A.& Piters, J. (2017). Exploring city branding strategies and their impacts
- [8] on Local tourism success,the case study of Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. *Journal Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* ,23(2), 158-169.
- [9] Sukpatthi, T. (2016). Urban mascot design concept to promote the image of tourism of
- [10] Schiffman, L.G; & Kanuk, L. L. (2007). *Consumer Behavior*. (9th ed). New Jersey:Prentice-Hall. Tourism Authority of Thailand. (2019). *Summary of the annual tourism promotion plan 2019*. Retrieved June 10,2019, from <https://www.tourismthailand.org/fileadmin/downloads/pdf/>