

# STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION APPROACHES FOR REVITALIZING PATTAYA'S TOURISM INDUSTRY TARGETING CHINESE TOURISTS THROUGH INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION

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## Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the needs, behaviors, and attitudes of Chinese tourists towards Pattaya and to examine marketing communication strategies for revitalizing its tourism industry. The industry faces a severe decline in Chinese tourists due to a crisis of confidence regarding safety. This qualitative study utilized in-depth interviews with 14 key informants, including tourists, tourism executives, academics, and local entrepreneurs. Data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed five primary tourist needs: 1) safety and trust (specifically concerns about scams), 2) cleanliness and environment, 3) price fairness and transparency, 4) cultural experiences beyond beaches, and 5) unique, specialized activities. While general attitudes towards Pattaya's charm and Thai hospitality remain positive, significant barriers include pervasive safety anxiety and language difficulties. Two primary revitalization strategies were identified: 1) Implementing Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) to clearly and proactively communicate safety assurances via Chinese digital media (e.g., Douyin, Xiaohongshu) and KOLs/Influencers, and 2) Building Brand Equity by fostering Brand Trust. This involves repositioning the brand towards a 'Safe, Family, and Cultural' image, supported by Experiential Marketing to cultivate long-term brand loyalty.

**Keywords:** *Pattaya tourism, Chinese tourists, marketing communication, destination image, brand trust, tourism revitalization*

## Introduction

Tourism is a primary mechanism driving Thailand's economy, contributing significantly to national revenue, employment, and infrastructure development. It also plays a vital role in regional income distribution and the dissemination of Thai cultural heritage. Consequently, the Thai government has prioritized tourism as an economic engine, implementing strategies focused on quality and sustainable development across environmental, economic, and social domains.

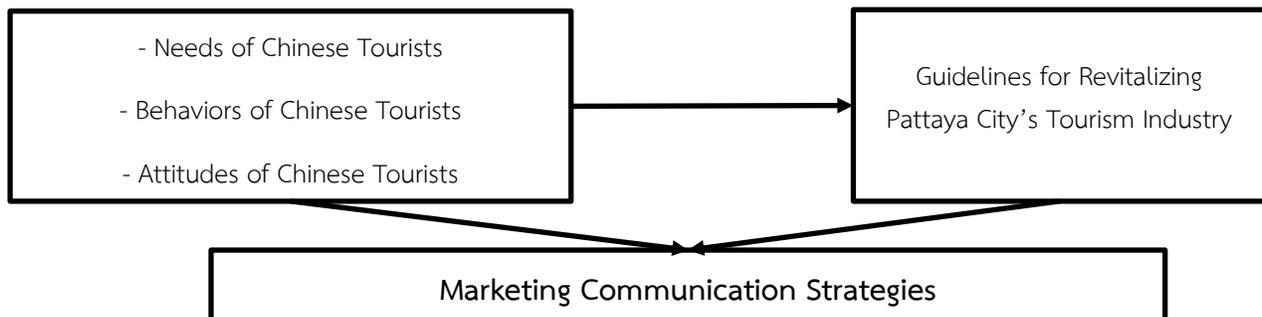
However, the Thai tourism industry currently faces a significant challenge, marked by a decline in international arrivals. In the first four months of 2025, the primary Chinese market decreased by approximately 30% (Katchwattana, 2025). This decline is principally attributed to Thailand's negative safety

image, stemming from incidents reported in the media, crackdowns on illicit businesses, and various disasters. This crisis has severely eroded confidence, as a recent survey indicated that over half of Chinese respondents perceive Thailand as unsafe, a significant increase from the previous year (Dragon Trail International, 2025).

Pattaya has been the most acutely impacted region, having historically depended on Chinese tourists for 41% of its market. Local entrepreneurs report a drastic reduction in Chinese visitors, with some seeing proportions fall from 70% to just 10%. In this context, tourism communication assumes a critical role in image building and restoring trust, particularly among Chinese tourists who are highly sensitive to information disseminated on social media.

This research, therefore, investigates guidelines for revitalizing Pattaya's tourism industry through marketing communication strategies aimed at the Chinese tourist market. The study aims to understand the current needs, behaviors, and attitudes of Chinese tourists and to identify effective communication strategies for recovery. The findings are intended to provide actionable insights for entrepreneurs, policy considerations for Pattaya's administrative bodies, and a foundation for future academic research.

### Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework of Strategic Marketing Communication for Revitalizing Pattaya's Tourism Industry Targeting Chinese Tourists

### Research Objectives

1. To study the current needs, behaviors, and attitudes of Chinese tourists towards Pattaya.
2. To study guidelines for the revitalization of Pattaya's tourism industry through marketing communication strategies for Chinese tourists.

### Literature Review

This study reviewed concepts and theories structured around two principal frameworks: Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and the Brand Equity Model. IMC is defined as the integrated planning of communication channels to project a "One Voice," thereby building consumer memory and credibility

(Schultz, Patti, & Kitchen, 2011). Keller's (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model posits that brand value is the outcome of consumer knowledge and experiences, which influences brand loyalty through four stages: Brand Awareness, Brand Meaning, Brand Response, and Brand Resonance.

To understand tourist needs, the review incorporated Brand Trust, defined as a consumer's expectation that a brand will mitigate risk (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001). This is supported by research from Çelikkol (2020), which found that Brand Trust significantly and positively influences Brand Loyalty in the hospitality sector. Other relevant concepts included Destination Image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), which is determined by qualitative dimensions such as cleanliness. Beerli and Martín (2004) further noted that environmental image impacts the intention to revisit. Perceived Value (Zeithaml, 1988) describes the consumer's calculus of weighing benefits received against costs incurred (price). Experiential Marketing (Schmitt, 1999) emphasizes that sensory and emotional experiences (sense, feel, think, act, relate) are central to the brand. Finally, Plog's Psychographic Model (1974) was used to explain tourist behaviors based on psychological classifications (e.g., Allocentric, Mid-centric).

## **Research Methodology**

This study employed qualitative research design. A total of 14 key informants were purposively selected and divided into four groups: (1) 5 Chinese tourists currently in Pattaya, (2) 3 executives from tourism-related organizations, (3) 3 academics specializing in tourism or marketing, and (4) 3 tourism entrepreneurs in Pattaya. Research instruments included (1) documentary research protocols and (2) semi-structured in-depth interview guides, which were validated for content validity by three experts. Data was collected through desk research (reviewing existing literature and reports) and fieldwork (interviews). The researcher ensured data trustworthiness using Data Triangulation (comparing data from the four different groups) and Member Checks (verifying interpretations with informants). All collected data were analyzed via thematic Content Analysis.

## **Research Results**

The results for the first research objective revealed five primary needs. The most prominent need was Safety and Trust. According to Chinese Tourist 1, there is significant anxiety regarding scams and unexpected incidents, creating a desire for a clear and visible security presence to provide reassurance. The second need involved Cleanliness and Environment. Chinese Tourist 2 reflected that while the beaches are beautiful, persistent issues with waste management remain, and there is an expectation for the city's actual condition to match its clean advertising imagery. The third need was Price Fairness and Transparency. Chinese Tourist 3 indicated a strong demand for standardized pricing, particularly for seafood and beach chair rentals, to prevent overcharging. Furthermore, tourists sought deeper Cultural Experiences. Chinese Tourist 4 expressed interest in activities beyond typical beach and nightlife attractions, such as Thai cooking workshops or traditional dance classes. Finally, regarding Unique

Activities, Chinese Tourist 5 pointed out that while Pattaya retains its charm, new and non-repetitive activities are necessary to incentivize return visits.

In terms of behavior, findings indicated a diversity extending beyond the nightlife stereotype, encompassing economic, cultural, and family-oriented activities. Interviews confirmed this range; for instance, Chinese Tourist 1 reported enjoying nightlife and fashion, while Chinese Tourist 2 focused on shopping in malls. Meanwhile, Chinese Tourist 3 engaged in water sports, contrasting with others who explored local food in night markets. Regarding attitudes, Chinese Tourists 1 and 4 generally perceived Pattaya as charming and described Thai people as friendly and helpful. However, this positive view was offset by significant barriers. Chinese Tourist 3 primarily cited pervasive Safety Concerns, while Chinese Tourist 2 emphasized Language Barriers, expressing a strong desire for more Chinese-language signage and menus.

The results for the second research objective identified two primary revitalization guidelines. The first is the implementation of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) aimed at rebuilding trust and shaping a new image. The Deputy Manager of DASTA identified key components, including the utilization of Chinese-specific digital media such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu, alongside deploying KOLs to create "social proof" of safety and quality. Additionally, an Entrepreneur from Underwater World Pattaya emphasized the crucial need for clear and verifiable Safety Communication via apps or short clips on Douyin. The second guideline is Brand Equity Building by fostering Brand Trust. The Deputy Director of the TAT Pattaya Office proposed that Pattaya's City Branding must pivot, shifting its focus from nightlife to a 'Safe, Family, and Cultural' position. To support this repositioning, the Deputy Mayor of Pattaya City suggested using Experiential Marketing, such as a 'Seafood Festival' promoted directly by Chinese influencers. An Independent Academic noted that such strategies are essential to create Perceived Value associated with quality and credibility.

## Conclusion

The research findings regarding Chinese tourist needs align with established theoretical frameworks. The predominant concern for safety and scams corresponds directly with the concept of Brand Trust (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001), which posits that trust mitigates perceived risk. This further links to findings by Çelikkol (2020) that Brand Trust positively influences Brand Loyalty. The demand for cleanliness aligns with the qualitative dimensions of Destination Image (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Beerli & Martín, 2004), while the need for fair pricing reflects the cost-benefit calculus of Perceived Value (Zeithaml, 1988). The desire for authentic cultural engagement supports the tenets of Experiential Marketing (Schmitt, 1999).

The identified revitalization guidelines thus emphasize the application of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) (Schultz, Patti, & Kitchen, 2011) through Chinese digital platforms to create a unified, reassuring message. Concurrently, the focus must be on building Brand Equity, consistent with Keller's (1993) CBBE model, wherein a positive Image and high Trust cultivate Loyalty. In summary, rebuilding

Pattaya's brand for the Chinese market hinges on establishing a new image of safety, fostering verifiable trust, and delivering high-quality, memorable experiences.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed for policymakers and practitioners: public sector bodies should enhance tangible safety measures, such as establishing dedicated Chinese tourist assistance centers, enforcing price transparency standards, and promoting sustainable environmental management, as these are critical factors in substantively building Brand Trust and validating the communication strategy. However, this study is subject to the limitations inherent in qualitative research, including a small, purposively selected sample. Therefore, future research should expand sample groups to other tourist cities or compare demographics (e.g., generational cohorts). The use of Mixed Methods Research is recommended to quantify the attitudes and relationships identified in this qualitative study. Furthermore, in-depth research on City Branding is needed to measure the specific elements of Pattaya's brand equity in the long term, aligning with CBBE theory.

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