

Bangkok Brand Power Image via the Perspective of Japanese and South Korean (JK) Tourists: A Study on Focus Group Methodology

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Abstract

Bangkok city is the popular tourist destination recognized by international tourists around the world. More than 18 million international tourists have visiting Bangkok annually. Despite, international tourists understand Bangkok a capital of Thailand in holistic view as well as “*The Land of Amazing*”. Most of the international tourists view Thailand as a cheap destination rather a leisure destination nearly 20 years ago. To persuade a quality tourists from Japanese and Korean which contribute to Thailand tourism income worth 1,647 to 1,656 million US\$ annually come to visit Thailand destination. Therefore, it is necessary to persuade Japanese and Korean tourist attitude and positive experience about Bangkok city image and correct the negative tourist’s perception in order to motive Thailand tourism industry. Thus, this study aims to identify Bangkok brand power city into five attractive characteristics defined by Tokyo brand power in order to make Bangkok as a premium tourist’s destination like ever.

Keywords: Bangkok, Image, Japan, Korean, Tourist

1. Introduction

Thailand tourism industry has been contributing up to 9.2 percent of national gross domestic product (GDP). Thailand travel and tourism generated 2,314,000 jobs directly in 2016 or 7.0 percent of national employment and this is forecast to growth by 14.3 percent in 2027 (The World Travel & Tourism Council, Thailand, 2017). After Thailand military coup in

May 2014, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) uses the slogan ‘*Amazing Thailand: Discovery Thainess*’ campaign to promote Thailand internationally. As the result of TAT promoting plan, Thailand becomes the top-ten most visited country in the ‘*World Tourism Ranking*’ with 29.9 million international guests visiting Thailand in 2015 and continue increasing up to 32.5 million international tourists in 2016, an increase of 2.33 million or 8.91 percent from 2015 (refer to TABLE 1.1).

Table 1.1: Thailand Tourist Situation from 2012-2016

Rank	Country or territory	2016/2559	2015/2558	2014/2557	2013/2556	2012/2555
*	ASEAN	8,658,051	7,886,136	6,641,772	7,282,266	6,281,153
1	China	8,757,466	7,934,791	4,636,298	4,637,335	2,786,860
2	Malaysia	3,533,826	3,423,397	2,613,418	3,041,097	2,554,397
3	South Korea*	▲1,464,218	1,372,995	1,122,566	1,295,342	1,263,619
4	Japan*	▲1,439,629	1,381,690	1,267,886	1,586,425	1,373,716
5	Laos	1,409,456	1,233,138	1,053,983	976,639	975,999
6	India	1,193,822	1,069,149	932,603	1,050,889	1,013,308
7	Russia	1,089,992	884,085	1,606,430	1,746,565	1,316,564
8	United Kingdom	1,003,386	946,919	907,877	905,024	873,053
9	United States	974,632	867,520	763,520	823,486	768,638
10	Singapore	966,909	937,311	844,133	955,468	831,215
11	Germany	835,506	760,604	715,240	737,658	682,419
12	Vietnam	830,394	751,091	559,415	725,057	618,670
13	Australia	791,631	805,946	831,854	900,460	930,241

Visitor Statistics, 1998–2016”. Department of Tourism Thailand. Retrieved 10 January 2017

Despite international tourists still understand Thailand's image as “*The Land of Amazing*”, they concerned Thailand is a cheap destination rather a leisure quality destination nearly 20 years ago (Suchat Siritama, 2016). Since 1997, the government has launched “*Amazing Thailand*” campaign; Thailand tourism has growth up based on the number of international tourists of which the quality seems to degrade over time. Thailand tourism has become mass tourism whereby tourists spending most of their time visiting and taking photographs of interesting places. As of this point, to enhance a leisure quality destination Thailand needs shift of interests from tangible cultural resources to intangible resources (Richard, 2010). To persuade quality tourists to think and react positively to the destination, it is necessary to rebranding Thailand brand image by highlighting on specific activities like shopping, nightlife, cuisine, sport, atmosphere, adventure, history, good value for money, history, gastronomy, culture, golf, nature, and secure destination, these are recognized as an important determinant of brand loyalty (Kim & Kerstetter, 2016; Suhartanto, Ruhadi & Triyuni, 2015; Montenegro, Costa, Rodrigues and Gomes, 2014). Thus, it is undoubtedly, city image and tourists attitude are interrelated (Lita, Surya, Maruf & Syahrul, 2014), and the attitude toward a particular place or city influence overall city image (Han, Hsu & Lee, 2009). One of the world's most vibrant cities, value for money and time affordable costs, it is not surprise Bangkok is the world's fourth ranking most visited destination

after Hong Kong, London and Singapore (Barry Neild, 2016). Similarly, “*Time Magazine*” reported that in 2013 Bangkok was identified as the most global destination visited city in the world, while Suvarnabhumi Airport was the most geo-tagged location on Instagram (Kristene Quan, 2013; Ben Abramson, 2013).

Bangkok city is the popular tourist destination welcomes international tourism arrival 18.5 million following by Phuket 8.3 and Chonburi 7.2 million tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, Thailand 2015). This evidence indicated that Thailand tourism is not as common industry but rather, it is a social and economic activities running across business sectors and pushing national economic development forward. In case of Japanese and South Korean (JK) tourists are the major Thailand tourism market and seem not to be decline for several decades. Japanese and Korean tourists averagely stay in Thailand 7-8 days and capital spending per day 5,188 Baht to 5,418 Baht, respectively. These tourists contributed to Thailand international tourism market worth 1,647 and 1,659 million US\$ (Department of Tourism, 2016). According to Pike, (2002) confirm that tourist perception on city image influence on tourist behavior such as length of stay, frequency of visits and perceived value of city brand. Therefore, it is necessary to persuade tourist attitude positive experience about Bangkok city image and correct the negative tourist's perception in order to motive Thailand tourism. Tourist's attitude neither very unpleasant/ very pleasant toward a tourist city

plays influence to city image and also city image significantly influence on tourists visit intention (Doosti, Jalivand, Asadi, Pool & Adl, 2016). Thus, this study aims to identify Bangkok brand power city into five attractive characteristics defined by Tokyo brand power in order to make Bangkok as a premium tourist's destination like ever.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Destination Image

Destination image consists of two dimension namely 'cognitive' and 'effective', such cognitive component can be understood as a beliefs of knowledge about physical characteristic for those particular destinations while an effective refers to tourist attitude and feeling toward destination environment (Baloglu & MacCleary, 1999). Thus, destination image is the attitudinal concept of tourism beliefs, ideas and impression of a destination (Machinda, Serirat, Anuwichanont & Guild, 2010; Crompton, 1979). Rendering of several studies indicate that to be a successful destination must have a strong positive image to influence tourist behavior and the travel decision making (Milman & Pizam, 1995; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Pearce, 1982). Despite, the limitation of destination images promoted by tourism authorities does not fully match the tourist's perception and demand in the following aspects; lack of regular monitoring and evaluation procedures cause difficult to defined strategy, de-concentration on the supply side while ignore the demand side, lack of consistency messages, generating confusion and discouragement regarding to possible visit, inadequacy of the communication channels make it difficult to achieve the target (Montenegro, Costa & Gomes, 2014). These factors are the major source of inefficiency to promote tourist destination image for supply and demand sides. Hence, based on the cognitive and effective images congruence we can conduct that image can be promote by tourism destinations and markets' perception. Moreover, cognitive and effective images congruence has a positive influence on tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit in Shanghai marathon tourism (Mao, Wang & Zhang, 2015).

2.2 Tourist Experience

Tourist experience occur underline on the interaction between subjective responses of customers (Tourists) and objective feature of a product (Country) (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). Since, tourist's expectations of the region are often formed based on the experience of previous

trips, advertisements and other incentives and the quality of services. In tourist research, tourist experience has been concerned with visiting, seeing, enjoying, learning and living different lifestyles during trips (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Thus, tourist experience has been shape as a unique of human mind with the high personal value and also played a main construct in travel and tourism (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007, McIntosh & Siggs, 2005). Reviewing literature, several studies have found that 'tourist's experiences' and their revisit intentions are positively related (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Cole & Chancellor, 2009, Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007). Since, tourists are satisfied with their travel trip then they are more likely to repeat it (Petrick, Morais & Norman, 2001). According to Lee, Lee, and Lee, (2005) point out those tourists with a favorable destination image would perceive their on-site experiences positively, which may lead to a higher satisfaction level and behavioral intentions to revisit the site.

Chang, Backman and Huang, (2014) investigated the relationships between tourists motivation, experience, perceived with revisiting intention to creative tourist destination in Taiwan. The results indicated that 'tourist experience' was the most influential antecedent of revisit intention to creative tourism sites. These creative tourism sites are such as pottery, crafts, arts, workshops and other creative activities that integrate authentic culture to engage tourists with fulfilling and meaningful experiences. The study has suggested that if country of creative destinations would like to attract repeat tourists; they should pay more attention to make understanding of what tourist needs and meets what they wants when they visit creative tourism attraction. Prior studies point out that a tourist's experience has a direct relationship with revisit intentions (Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Hsu & Crofts, 2006; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007). Most of them found that tourists' experiences and their revisit intentions are positively related. In other words, tourists' intentions to revisit are believed to influence their positive evaluations of the experience (Um, Chon, & Ro, 2006).

3. Research Design

The objective of this study attempts to investigate and identity the essential of five characteristic of Bangkok city image via the perspective of Japanese and Korean (JK) tourists. The expected outcome of study is to improve the attractiveness of Bangkok as the capital city of Thailand and to boost up its international

competitiveness and increase the number of foreign visitors particularly Japanese and Korean visitors to Thailand destination.

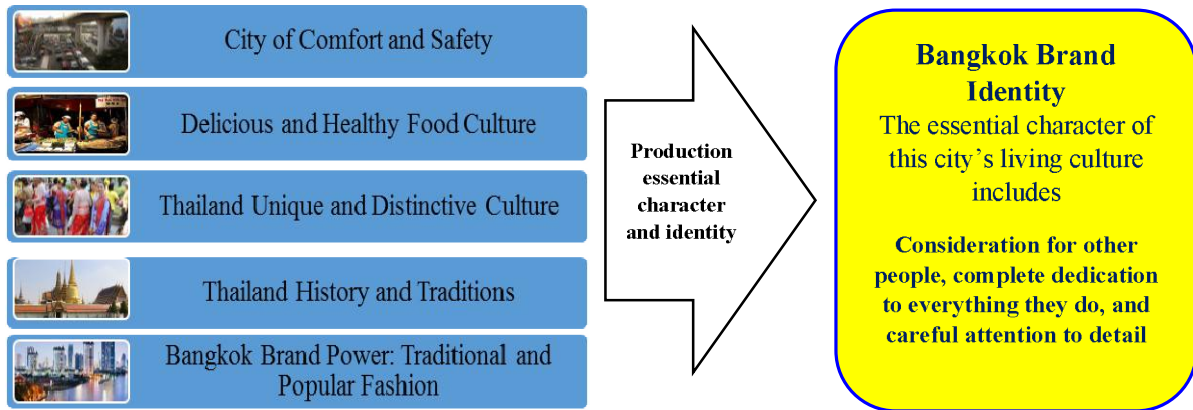


Figure 1: Bangkok Brand Power Image

Sources: Five attractive characteristics that are the admiration of the world adapted from Tokyo Brand Power : The Mori Memorial Foundation

4. Methodology

Focus Group Study

To answer the research objective *‘what are the Bangkok brand power via the perspective of Japanese and Korean tourists?’* As of this research question, the focus group study was used to interpret Thailand brand power image by using semi-interview structure. This is because focus group interview possessed the capacity ideas to emerge from the group discussion than individuals alone don't possess (Krueger, 2015).

Simi-Structure Interview Development

This study use semi-interview structure adapted from the Mori Memorial Foundation (MMF) represented the concept of Tokyo brand power classified into five attractive characteristics that are the admiration of the world. There are five sections was designed for to investigate and collecting the interview data such as (1) city of comfort and safety; (2) delicious and healthy food culture; (3) Thailand unique and distinctive culture (4) Thailand history and traditions and (5) Bangkok brand power: Traditional and popular fashion.

Sample Group Study

This study interview the two difference sample groups are as Japanese and Korean tourists separately. Twenty tourists from each country were identified as the target group study. The data collected from the several times in difference places as exhibited in the following TABLE 1.2 below.

Table 1.2: Data Collecting on Focus Groups Study

No	Place	Date	Nationality	Country	Sample
1	Toyo University Tourism Contest: 'About Inbound-Outbound Thai-Japan Tourism	15 Oct 16	Japanese	Toyo University, Tokyo Japan	15
2	Suvarnabhumi International Airport,	5-6 Feb 17	Japanese Korean	Bangkok Thailand	10
3	Korean Town Plaza, Bangkok	30-31 Jan 17	Korean	Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok Thailand	15

Beginning the Focus Group Discussion

Starting the focus group discussion the moderator (interviewer) introduced the overall of the topic and objective of the study. The moderator asked the respondents to given useful information about your perception on Thailand brand image. We want to know *“what do you like”* and *“what you*

don't like”, both in positive and negative aspects (Krueger, 2002). There are no wrong answers please feel free to share your idea and please remind that we are interesting in negative comments rather than positive. The negative comments are helpful that might be enhancing Bangkok image. By using focus group interview enable the researcher access to valuable insights Bangkok brand power image investigation (Wadeecharoen & Lertnaisat, 2015). By using the interview methods can help the research to gain a deeper understanding of specific issues by discover the actual problem relate to statement of the study (Dabphet, Scott & Ruhanen, 2012) The results of the study will be analysis by using analysis and classified into five parts as in the following section.

5. Results of the Study

The focus group discussion method was used for collecting data given by Japanese and Korean tourists whose have known and been to Thailand for several time (repeat visitors). The total of 40 target sample cases were given the information regarding to Bangkok image both negative and positive aspects as will be discussion in the following;

5.1 City of Comfort and Safety

Japanese tourists have an attitude and felling on Bangkok city and safety in the positive aspects such as sanitary and infrastructure in Thailand are higher as compare to neighboring country like Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar and Lao, the medical service in Bangkok is very famous and recognize. Bangkok shopping centers are good with cheap price, hotel is safe and secure, Thai police look after international tourist's security and safety. Thus, in summary Bangkok city is clean and safe place.

Bangkok negative image are such as communication problem with local people and taxi drivers drive so fast and unsafe that always make an accident happen. *Tuk-tuk* taxis ask for 3 times over price as compare to taxi meter. Even taxi drivers don't want to open the meter that they supposed to do. Pickpocket in shopping center make tourists scary to go to crowded shopping place, *'crowded stress and traffic jam become a characteristic of Thailand capital atmosphere'*. Pollution and decadent environment in Bangkok is reflect Thailand image, electrical wires near the sidewalk and cross to bridge street look scarcely and unsafe. Local road is narrow and having a

hollow on the road surface. Local water can't drink direct from the tap. Traffic in Bangkok is horrible makes unconvinced to go to target place as expected. Some of tourist places in Bangkok like Kha-san and Nana Street are not safe and secure. Thailand hot weather and high thermal make tourists feel frustrated. Some of shopping center, the commodities price are not display while the same location sale the same thing but different price. The facility of Public transportation is limited, crowded and rather danger cause by careless driving. There is sanitary problem such as garbage and toilet are unclean and insufficient that may affect Bangkok image.

Korean tourists have an attitude and felling on Bangkok city and safety in the positive aspects such as cost of living rather low while high standard. Most of Korean tourists love Bangkok as the second home country. Hotel near the center Bangkok is safe and clean, thus, Bangkok is a safe place for tourists even on day and at night.

Bangkok negative image are such as traffic jam in Bangkok seems like to be Thailand major problem and reflect Thailand traffic problem never improve since I came here for long time ago. Bangkok traffic jam is very frustrated make tourists inability to change or achieve a meeting. Pollution in Bangkok become a major problem and seems to be characteristic of Thailand capital city. Bangkok city atmosphere is very hot and crowded with pollution, cross-road in Bangkok are very difficult, dangerous and unsafe. Addicts come to Thailand for Drugs, unavailable of sanitary and toilets in Bangkok skirt area. Thai taxi driving is horrendous and they don't care how the passenger fell about security. A lot of places in Bangkok are very dirty making afraid of infection.

5.2 Delicious and Healthy Food Culture

Japanese tourists have an attitude and felling on Bangkok city and safety in the positive aspects such as Thai food along road side is attractive, amazing test and cheap price. Even it's not well sanitary but acceptable and popular for Japanese tourists. Bangkok negative aspects are such as food along the road side is not sanitary, the street vendors welcome to try to force to buy fruits. Thai Food Street is very cheap but the bad thing is sanitary problem. Korean tourists have an attitude and feeling on Bangkok city and safety in the positive aspects that *'we love Thai food and Thai traditional massage'*. There are so many types of Thai restaurants, from lowest up to highest standard. Thai fruits are very unique and so amazing

like durian and rambutan. Thai food is healthy, low calories and tasty. Korean tourists are more favorable because Thai restaurants are available in variety in Bangkok make them convenience to find their favorite meal.

5.3 Thailand Unique and Distinctive Culture

Japanese tourists have an attitude and felling on Thailand unique and distinctive culture in the positive aspects such as people are friendly and helpful, the demise of the king is an amazing Thailand phenomenal, multicultural and traditional performance in Thailand differently from regional like fingernail dance (*Fawn Lep*) in north and shadow play in south. Thailand natural resource like beaches and national parks are very beautiful. Thai people are very friendly, kindness and always giving smile that is '*charming of Thailand*'. Thai people culture respect to the king make so impressive Thai hospitality same like '*Japanese Omotanashi*' (Japanese hospitality) make feel at home. Thai people are very religion and honestly. There are a lot of Buddhist temples in Bangkok so it is usual to see monks wearing saffron-colored robes when they are out gathering morning alms. Most of Thai people are very nice, kind and helpful. In negative aspects Thai society poor-middle-rich gap are highly different.

Korean tourists have an attitude and felling on Thailand unique and distinctive culture in the positive aspects such as Thai people are very kind, sincere, helpful and warmest hospitality. Thai culture are respectful to foreign visitors, they are very active and look so powerful energy in a daily life. Bangkok people are friendly and fashionable, their smiles make very attractive with warmest hospitality. Bangkok girls are very beautiful, friendly and open minded. Thai massage and spa is very popular and it is a recommend thing for foreign visitors.

5.4 Thailand History and Traditions

Japanese tourists feel that Thailand historical thing is very interesting, particular Thai traditional house is simple but very attractive. A lot of temples in Thailand are most like to visit. Thai cultural and history in Ayutthaya is similar to Japan history. Thailand scenery like temples and beaches are attractive. Korean tourists felt that Thailand history and traditional are varieties such as lot of beautiful temples and sightseeing around Bangkok.

5.5 Bangkok Brand Power: Traditional and Popular Fashion

Japanese tourists feel that Bangkok is traditional and has popular fashion. A lot of famous shopping centers in Thailand can become a paradise of shopping. Bangkok city is called the "Venice of the East" because the Chao Phraya River, which runs through the city, is connected by several canals. The special sightseeing attractive program in Bangkok is Chao Phraya cruise. In Bangkok city can be travel for 24 hours, it could be defined as '*night trip paradise*'. Thailand is a good travel tourist place; Bangkok is a life city with providing a lot of staffs from all over the world. In negative aspects some of shopping center didn't display the commodity price and ask extra price as compare to local. Hotels and shoppers make a different price between Thai and foreigner.

Japanese tourists feel that commodities in Bangkok are very cheap and fashionable. Thai fashion is very model while the price is three times lower than Korea. The shopping center and cheap markets are everywhere in Bangkok even along roadsides. Traditional and modern commodities are sold along together make excited. Bangkok is the modern city and variety on day and night. There is shopping in Thailand because '*Bangkok is the City of fashion*'. In the negative aspects is shopping venders are close to the footpath look so scary.

6. Conclusion

Bangkok is one of Southeast Asia's most exciting and dynamic cities. This city offers Japanese and Korean tourists wonderful mix of ancient and modern cultures. The reason why is Bangkok the popular destination chosen by Japanese and Korean tourists? This is because Thai traditional unique and distinguished culture such as, Thai people have a simple way of life, archaeological things like Golden Mountain and Grand Palace are arguably the most popular sightseeing attractive for foreigners to visit Bangkok as tourist destination. This result is similarly supported by Montenegro, Costa, Rodrigues and Gomes, (2014) given the reason '*why Portugal was the destination chosen for tourists holidays?*' The 32 percent of respondent declare that Portugal is beautiful and specific country; 28 percent attributed the reason to the unique cities, traditional history, people hospitality, unique culture and 4 percent attributed to architecture of places.

Bangkok has many wonderful restaurants and it is renowned in among Japanese and Korean tourist about street food stalls that make a variety of testy dishes. Despite, street food is not well

with sanitary but acceptable whereby most of the customers are concerned on cheap price. A variety of street foods stalls are very preferable by Japanese and Korean tourists, they called Bangkok the food capital of Asia. Undoubtedly, the best Bangkok product rate by Japanese and Korean tourists is street food, Thai fruit, Thai traditional massage and spa, respectively. Similarity to Portuguese tourism products were food, wine and city breaks (Montenegro, Costa, Rodrigues and Gomes, 2014). Based on the results food is the most important factor effecting on Singaporean, Malaysia and Laotian on Thailand destination satisfaction (Wadecharoen, 2016). In additional, the research asked what the key Thai menu food should be promotes and communicate internationally. There are top five Thai food menu voted by Japanese tourists such as Tom Yam, Pad Thai, Som Tam, green curry and sticky rice. Korean Tourists vote Pad Thai, Tom Yam fried rice, Tom yam seafood, grill chicken and Som Tam.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) are promoted *Pad Thai* menu and communicate internationally via simple cooking video of Pad Thai. As of Dr. Yuthasak Supasorn, TAT governor said, "This Pad Thai viral video marketing firms part of our Amazing Thailand Discover Amazing Stories initiative aimed at attracting travelers from around the world to explore the charms in everyday life of the Thai people that boast a mix of culture and traditions that epitomizes "Thainess" and make the country stand out as offering unique experience to all visitors who visit Thailand". The Pad Thai viral video marketing has attracted over 1.5 million views within a few days after it was posted on the social media channels and has become a popular Thai menu through social media sharing (TAT News, 8 February, 2016). The Thai food is tasty, healthy and low calories, it's become a popular menu available in Thai restaurant and street food stalls in Bangkok. This city is unless of happiness by traditional culture and shopping. In every year many Japanese tourists travel to Bangkok city to appreciate Thailand's special cultural traditional. There are a hundred Buddhist temples surround the city so it is usual to see monks wearing saffron-colored robes when they are out gathering morning alms. Japanese tourists discover Thai way of life and impressive Thai culture, traditional, heritage. An awareness of Thai culture will stimulate international tourists travel driven by the unique identities of multicultural communities across Thailand (The Government Public Relation Department, 2016). Thai trip is complete unless tourists have experienced Bangkok's vibrant nightlife. The

city become alive at night, there are many venue to enjoy and become nigh trip paradise. Korean tourists perceived Bangkok brand image as 'city of fashion' whereby shopping centers are several varieties in the city (Suhartanto, Ruhadi & Triyuni, 2015). Japanese and Korean tourists consider Bangkok is safe place and clean environment. Despite transportation facilities has not sufficient, Taxi driver do not act on the regulation such as using meter, drive carefully and safely reach to destination. Pollution and decadent environment in Bangkok is reflect to Thailand image. These are the important factors effecting on international tourists destination satisfaction (Arasli & Baradarani, 2014). Hence, this study point out the important factors to fulfilled of Japanese and Korean tourists satisfaction. All respondents were agree to revisit Thailand for the next 2 years and will recommend Thailand for their friend and relative. This is because of they are impressive on Thailand travel experience whereby associated with using word of mouth among prospective tourists (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2010). Thus, making strong brand image such as shopping, nightlife, transportation, scenery, fair, cities, cuisine, safe, climate, beach, accommodation, atmosphere and hospitality will be directly associate with willingness to visit on destination (Kim & Kerstetter, 2016).

7. Suggestions for Further Research Study

Japanese and Korean tourists describe the negative and positive perception up on five characteristics of Bangkok. In positive aspects should be point out outstanding factors for making further qualitative and quantitative research study. What are most important and attractiveness factors should be promoting Bangkok internationally.

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