

Does travel interest mediate between motives and intention to travel? A case of young Asian travellers

Abstract

The rising income level of the middle class in Thailand has also raised the disposable income and interest to visit tourism destinations abroad. In last seven years the number of outbound tourists has doubled suggesting a growth rate of 15% per annum. With a population of approximately 63 million and a change in perception of the Thai people that travelling is no longer a luxury but a beneficial and productive activity has given boost to the outbound tourism. This study adapts the Leisure Motivation Scale to determine travel motives of young Thai university students towards holidaying, they are expected to be the tourist of the future. A conceptual model with seven hypotheses is proposed which tests the relationship of constructs experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure with travel interest and the impact of travel interest on intention to travel. Structural Equation Modelling with maximum likelihood method is used to test all relationships simultaneously from the 420 responses using Amos 20.0. The findings suggest that experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure are positively related to travel interest. Further, findings suggest a positive relationship between the travel interest and the intention to travel. Travel interest plays a mediating role between the motives and the intention to travel. The outcomes from the study are unique in relation to travel motives of the young Thai market segment generally, and in relations to experiencing new culture, natural beauty and adventure specifically. On the theoretical front the study has adapted the Leisure Motivation Scale to develop and test constructs through a proposed theoretical model. Considering this from a marketing point of view, exploring new markets is the key for all destination marketers to sustain economic gains from tourism, the current study adds information about an unexplored market segment. Hence, suggesting implications for destination marketers to get to know about this new emerging market segment.

Keywords:

Travel interests, students, adventure, Maori Culture, leisure motivation, Thailand.

1. Introduction

Studying travel behaviour and motives of the university students continues to be an area of interest to both tourism researchers and tourism marketers. This segment is proving to be a social group with complex and unique travel behaviour (Limanond, Butsingkorn, & Chermkhunthod, 2011; Kim, Hallab & Kim, 2012; Chen, 2012). Travel experience amongst the students has been on the increase influenced by discounted travel and tour packages for students, international student exchange programmes, and a general push by universities to send students abroad for cultural and educational experiences. Past travel experience to a destination could impact their future travel decision and choices (Kim et al 2012). The literature also suggests that perceptions and interest of tourists about a destination impacts their travel behaviour and choice of destination (Bonn, Joseph & Mo, 2005; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chon, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). In examining the role of motivations, prior travel experience, social ties and destination choice in pre-trip attitude of the American university students, authors Nyaupane, Paris and Teye (2011) find that academic motivations and social ties influence students' destination selection for study abroad programme with social motivation emerging as the most important factor that impacts attitude towards the destinations prior to the travel. Such information is significant in determining pre-trip perceptions of young students which could well grow into adulthood. Authors Ballantyne, Gannon and Wells (2012) suggest in their findings that as a university student even a short-term study related travel has shown to impact on their attitude, awareness and cross-cultural perceptions. Morgan & Xu (2009), Bicikova (2014) and Pearce and Lee (2005) state in their studies that seeking adventure, interest about new culture, beautiful natural environment and relaxation have an impact on students' intention to travel. The experiences they accumulate as they grow older helps build a travel career which further impacts their intention to choose more challenging destinations. For these reasons travel motives of university students continue to be an area of interest to research.

Though several studies have recently explored the travel motives and perceptions of young university students highlighting significance of the student travel segment and also uniqueness associated with their travel attitudes and perceptions, research on Asian students' travel motives is scarce and in relation to students from Thailand almost non-existent in the tourism and hospitality literature. Based on this premise the current study contributes to the literature by informing travel motives and attitudes of the Thailand university students and their perceptions about different activities offered by a tourist destination. This student market segment is expected to be the tourists of the future. The study also examines the mediating role of travel interest on the experience and intention to travel.

Several studies related to a particular destination have been published, such as American students thinking of travel beyond Europe (Deresiewicz, 2009), students travel behaviour from the UK and China (Xu, Morgan, & Song, 2009), students' travel behaviour in terms of travel/tourism preferences, transportation, housing, food and entertainment were compared between the US, South Africa and Israel by (Shoham, Schrage, & Eeden, 2004), choice intention of students to travel to Mauritius (Phau,

Shanka, & Dhayan, 2009), experiences of Norwegian students abroad (Wiers-Jenssen, 2003), Chinese students' perceptions about Australia (Wang & Davidson 2008), perceptions of international students about Malaysia (Shan, Shah, & Suat, 2013).

The rising income level of the middle class in Thailand has also raised the disposable income and interest to visit tourism destinations abroad (Chaipinit & Phetvaroon, 2011). According to the authors in last seven years the number of outbound tourists has doubled suggesting a growth rate of 15% per annum (Thailand Development Research Institute cited in Chaipinit and Phetvaroon, 2011). With a population of approximately 63 million and a change in perception of the Thai people that travelling is no longer a luxury but a beneficial and productive activity had given boost to the outbound tourism in 2006 (World Tourism Organisation, 2006). The report suggested that the main age group of outbound Thai travellers is between 24-44 years old and travelling for holidays is the largest segment comprising 54.3% (WTO, 2006). The student market segment with better likelihood of finding jobs are also expected to expand the outbound tourism from Thailand.

Thailand in last few years has faced challenges in form of floods and political unrest which impacted both inbound and outbound tourist flows. However, considering the dynamism of the tourism industry of being able to bounce back quickly, as is evident from different regions affected by the Asian tsunami, SARS, act of terrorism etc. it is believed that outbound tourism will continue to grow from Thailand. The outbound travel records from the Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand show that between 2006-2014 (September) 22,203,043 million Thai departed for abroad (Immigration Bureau, Police Department 2014). This reflects that even in adverse circumstances outbound travel of the Thai people did not drop extraordinarily.

Such travel pattern signifies the increasing affluence of this market which became the impetus for the current study. With scarce research on Asian students' travel motives generally in the English literature, and almost non-existent in relation to Thai students, this study provides new and unique information. This information is obtained through proposing a new conceptual model with six hypotheses and testing relationships between the constructs in the model. Further, the outcomes from the study are expected to help the tourism marketers and destination management in planning targeted future promotion and activities to attract outbound tourists from Thailand.

2. Theoretical Background and Research Hypotheses.

2.1 Travel Motives

As a psychological term motivation compels individuals and yearns for action (Schiffman & Kanuk 2003). Several researchers have argued that travel motives is a starting point to study tourist behaviour and obtain a better understanding of their travel choice (Fodness, 1994; Jonsson & Devonish, 2008;

Kim, 2007; Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003; Kim, Jogaratnam, & Noh, 2006; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Rittichainuwat, 2008). The current study largely draws upon the Leisure Motivation Scale of Beard and Ragheb (1983) as it is more of a generalised motivational scale demonstrating both stability and rigour (Loundsbury & Hoopes, 1988; Newlands, 2004). The scale continues to be used either in its original form or modified form by tourism researchers (Ryan & Glendon, 1998; Klenosky, 2002; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Wang & Walker, 2010). In studying travel motivations for the Chinese outbound market Zhang and Peng (2014) suggest that it has been a relatively under researched area and research done between 1999-2010 suggests that most common motivational factors for Chinese tourists to travel overseas were noted to be knowledge, prestige, enhancing personal relationship, relaxation, experiencing different cultures and lifestyle and shopping. Most of these factors relate to the measures used in the Leisure Motivation Scale. Additionally Kim (2014) also suggests that social interaction, cultural immersion, provides memorable experiences which have been widely discussed in the literature to become motives to travel.

2.2 *Travel Activity*

Travel activity helps to segment the market based on holiday makers' interest in the activity and level of involvement in the activity. Examples of such activities could be cultural tourism (McKercher et al., 2002; Kerstetter, Confer & Bricker, 1998), natural tourism (Lang & O'Leary, 1997), adventure tourism (Sung, Morrison & O'Leary, 1997, 2000), and tourism aiming to visit friends and family (Moscardo et al., 2000). This helps tour managers to anticipate personal expectations, the expected benefits (Formica & Uysal, 1998), and understand destination choices (Moscardo et al., 1996), besides improving the image of a certain destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Trauer & Ryan, 2005). Understanding tourists' interest then proposing the travel activity helps to generate meaningful interest and experience to remember from that travel (Kim 2014). Authors such as Morgan and Xu (2009), Bicikova (2014), Pearce and Lee (2005) further highlight that seeking adventure, interest of new challenges in new destinations have an impact on students' intention to travel.

Current study seeks to explore holiday motives of Thailand university students and their interest in activities offered by a destination. The study adapts the Leisure Motivation Scale to identify the push and pull factors which influence the travel decisions of the young Thai students. The 'push and pull' system has been widely used to determine tourist motivations (Dann 1977, Prayag & Ryan 2011). A theoretical model is proposed to test the significance of the relationship of construct travel interest as the 'push' factor with experiencing adventure, Maori Culture and natural beauty as the 'pull' factors and how these impact the intention to travel of the Thailand university students.

The following hypotheses have been developed to test and propose implications from this study.

Experiencing new cultures continues to be an attractive activity and travel motive for travellers as is evident from the contemporary tourism literature (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Tung & Ritchie 2011;

Funk & Bruun, 2007; Morgan & Xu, 2009). Ryan (1998) states that tourism experiences are enhanced when tourists are placed in a realistic situation which could involve interaction with people. Such interaction becomes more meaningful when experienced with a diverse culture and tend to result as a travel motive which is also evident from the work of Richards (2002), Tung and Ritchie (2011), Funk and Bruun (2007) and Morgan and Xu (2009). To test this within the context of Thailand university students' interest in experiencing a new culture such as Maori Culture, following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: the more the Thai students perceive experiencing new culture as an attraction to visit a destination, the higher their travel interest.

Attributes and perceptions about a destination usually impact travel motives to that destination (Kim 2014). For example natural beauty, shopping, cultural immersions and other experiential activities have an impact on destination choice (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim et al., 2012). Destinations famous for its natural beauty and scenic value should take full advantage of their unique attributes and develop a competitive edge (Crouch 2011). Beautiful landscape with natural surroundings is one of the selling attributes of any tourist destination, it adds to the competitive advantage (Bicikova, 2014). Though some researchers have examined the relationship between destination attributes, tourism performance and tourists' experience (Assaf & Josiassen, 2012; Meng, 2006), largely research is scarce in this area (Kim, 2014) Is scenic value perceived to be an attraction to visit a destination by the Thailand university students? Following hypothesis is proposed to test the question:

H2: the more the Thai students perceive experiencing scenic values as an attraction to visit a destination, the higher their travel interest.

Tourists usually seek different travel experiences which are related to their stage in life, hence, determines their travel needs and experiences (Kim 2007; Dotson, Clark, & Dave, 2008). With university students and young travellers, it is found that risk taking and sensation seeking approach impacts their travel behavior and selection of tourism activities and destination (Pizam, Jeong, Reichel & van Boemmel, 2004). To date holiday motives of young Thailand university students have not been studied specifically in relation to experiencing adventure activities offered by a destination. Considering that they represent an emerging segment on the cusp of major life stage change with potential to travel, raises questions such as - what is it that they look for to challenge their abilities and skills as a interestwhile on a holiday? Are adventure activities such as those available at different tourist destination of any attraction to them? Hence, following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: the more the Thai students perceive experiencing adventure as an attraction to visit a destination, the higher their travel interest.

Discovering novelty and visiting new places has always been of attraction to travel. Travel interest is enhanced with activities which become part of discovering new experiences, they are often demanding and need particular interest while on holiday (William & Soutar, 2000; Crompton, 1979; Pizam et al., 2004). Travel interest seeking different activities, exploring new ideas is growing (Bentley, Page, & Laird, 2003) it leads to a question - does travel interest impact the intention of Thai students to travel? Following hypothesis is proposed to assess:

H4: *the higher the travel interest of Thai students, the greater their intention to travel.*

Exploring the role of travel interest is important to understand the relationship among the constructs informing this study. We analyse whether travel interest mediates the effect of experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure on intention to travel. Though several studies suggest the positive role culture, natural beauty and adventure plays in attracting tourists to a destination (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Tung & Ritchie 2011 ; Funk & Bruun, 2007; Morgan & Xu, 2009, Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim et al., 2012, Kim 2007; Dotson, Clark, & Dave, 2008, William & Soutar, 2000; Crompton, 1979; Pizam et al., 2004), our study investigates whether the three constructs have any positive role, without the mediating effect of travel interest, on intention to travel with regard to the Thai students. Hence the following three hypotheses are tested:

H5:

Travel interest mediates the stimulus of experiencing new culture on intention to travel to a tourist destination amongst the Thai students.

H6:

Travel interest mediates the stimulus of experiencing scenic values on intention to travel to a tourist destination amongst the Thai students.

H7:

Travel interest mediates the stimulus of experiencing adventure on intention to travel to a tourist destination amongst the Thai students.

In summary our hypotheses propose to test relationships shown in the conceptual model (Figure 1) within the context of Asian students from Thai universities. Their travel motives and intention to travel to a tourist destination are tested as a relationship between experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure with travel interest as a mediating variable influencing their intention to travel.

Insert Figure 1 about here

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sample and data collection procedure

Growing income level of the middle class in Thailand has also generated interest to visit tourism destinations abroad (Chaipinit & Phetvaroon, 2011). In last seven years the number of outbound tourists has doubled suggesting a growth rate of 15% per annum (Thailand Development Research Institute cited in Chaipinit & Phetvaroon, 2011). With a population of approximately 63 million and a change in perception of the Thai people that travelling is no longer a luxury but a beneficial and productive activity has given boost to the outbound tourism.

The research sample was composed of 420 tertiary level students from Thailand. In order to assess young Thailand students' attitudes towards a holiday destination, young university students were chosen as a sample as they not only represent the youth of Thailand but also a segment which is expected to grow professionally and earn a better disposable income comparatively. We used a structured questionnaire to gather data from our sample. In order to develop the structured questionnaire we extensively reviewed the existing literature in the tourism management area. We also interviewed three academic and management experts in the field to help developing the questionnaire. Following Churchill's (1979) recommendation we asked three experts in the area to assess the content validity of the questions and constructs. The questionnaire was originally written in English and translated into Thai Language by two bilingual experts. Yet, in order to enhance questionnaire's consistency we followed Van de Vijver and Leung's (1997) translation procedure.

With the purpose to gather a sample of Thai students, questionnaires were distributed to 900 tertiary level students in different universities and locations in Thailand. Students were approached in the main entrance of public and private universities in Thailand. They were asked then, to fill out the structured questionnaire. A special attention was given to the gender and public and private universities distribution proportion of students in Thailand. 51% of questionnaires were distributed to male students and 49% to female students on an attempt to meet the gender criteria of the country. We also met the proportion of students from private and public universities. The students were asked to return the questionnaires to the secretariat office with no identification or contact details. That procedure yielded 420 valid questionnaires, representing a response rate of 46%. According to Zou, Andrus, and Norvell (1997) this response rate represents a fairly high response rate for a developing country. Previous

studies that have been conducted in similar research settings are usually in the range of 15 percent to 20 percent (Menon , Bharadwaj, & Howell, 1996).

3.2 Development of Measures and Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire had three sections. The measures used in the questionnaire were largely based on the Leisure Motivation Scale (Beard & Ragheb, 1983) and its modified version used by Ryan and Glendon (1998). The other sources with regard to adventure and tourism activities offered by a destination were adapted from Mohsin (2005) and Mohsin & Ryan (2007). The first section of the questionnaire gauged respondents' motivations for going on holidays. All measures were assessed on a 7-point Likert Scale which ranged from 1 (of no importance) to 7 (extremely important). These measures have been frequently used in previous research (Mohsin & Ryan, 2007; Mohsin & Alsawafi, 2011).

The section 2 of the questionnaire measured the constructs related to *tourists' level of attraction* with regard to activities offered by a tourist destination. These measures were adapted from the study done by Mohsin and Ryan (2007) and Mohsin and Alsawafi (2011). A 7-point Likert Scale was which ranged from 1 (of no attraction) to 7 (extremely attractive). .The section gauged perceptions about travel and touristic activities of the young Thailand students. Such measures help to segment the market for promotional purposes. Examples could be cultural tourism (McKercher et al., 2002; Kerstetter, Confer & Bricker, 1998), natural tourism (Lang & O'Leary, 1997), adventure tourism (Sung, Morrison & O'Leary, 1997, 2000), and tourism aiming to visit friends and family (Moscardo et al., 2000). Understanding tourists' interest then proposing the travel activity helps to generate meaningful interest and experience to remember from that travel (Kim, 2014). How these measures impact the intention to travel draws upon the work of authors such as Morgan and Xu (2009), Bicikova (2014), Pearce and Lee (2005). Their studies highlight that seeking adventure, interest of new challenges in new destinations have an impact on students' intention to travel.

3.3 Reliability and Validity

The content validity was assessed through the literature review and by consulting experts in the tourism management area which helped to conclude that our measures have content validity. We apply the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) paradigm proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to assess convergent validity and scale reliability. The results obtained from the estimation of the CFA model indicate that the overall chi-square for the measurement model was 44.88 ($p < 0.001$) with 29 degrees of freedom (Table 1). Due to the fact that the chi-square value can be inflated by the large sample size (Byrne, 2001), we examined four other measures of fit: comparative fit index (CFI=0.990), Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI=0.985), incremental fit index (IFI=0.990), and RMSEA (0.036). According to the results of the CFA model the items employed to measure the constructs were both considered valid

(convergent validity) and reliable (composite reliability, variance extracted, and internal consistency – Cronbach’s Alpha). The large and significant standardized loadings of all items present in the model ($t > 1.96$; $p < 0.05$) indicate that convergent validity was achieved. In terms of internal consistency and composite reliability, Table 1 shows that all constructs were deemed acceptable, since all Cronbach’s Alpha fell well above the cut-off point of 0.5, ranging from 0.70 (Travel interest) to 0.83 (Adventure) (Cronbach, 1951). Regarding composite reliability, all constructs fell above the minimum threshold of 0.60 established in the literature (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Yet, three constructs fell above the minimum level recommend of 0.5 for average variance extracted criterion. Only the Travel interest factor fell shy below (0.46) the recommended threshold point. Based on the results above presented for the procedures undertaken, the measurement model and its variables were deemed acceptable.

Insert Table 1 about here

3.4 Testing of Hypotheses

Because of the complexity of the specified structural model (Fig. 1) we used structural equation modeling with maximum likelihood method to test all relationships simultaneously (Amos 20.0). The overall chi-square for the structural model was 56.72 ($p < 0.001$) with 35 degrees of freedom (df). Byrne’s (2001) recommendation of using additional fit indices to chi-square in the case of large samples was adopted. We also analyzed the comparative fit index (CFI=0.988), Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI=0.980), incremental fit index (IFI=0.988), and root means squared error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.038). All fit indices (including RMSEA; IFI; CFI; TLI) fell within the recommended range values (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000; Byrne, 2001). We can advocate that the estimated model was acceptable. Table 3 presents the path analysis results and hypotheses of the specified structural model.

Hypotheses 1 proposed relationship between the perceptions of Thai students’ of new culture as an attraction to visit a destination and travel interest. The test shows that the relationship was positive. The results support the notion that the more Thai students perceive experiencing a new culture as an attraction to visit a destination, the higher their travel interest (140; $p < 0.10$). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

The results for hypothesis 2 are significant and positive (.387; $p < 0.01$), revealing that the more Thai students perceive scenic values as an attraction to visit a destination, the higher their travel interest. Thus, hypothesis 2 was also accepted.

Our findings also provide support for H3 (.335; $p < 0.01$), which suggests that the more Thai students perceive experiencing adventure as an attraction to visit a destination, the higher their travel interest.

Regarding the hypothesis 4, the results indicate that the higher the travel interest of Thai students' the greater their intention to travel (.592; $p < 0.01$), providing support for that hypothesis.

In addition to testing the direct effects we also estimated the mediating role of travel interest between the perceived experience and intention to travel. We tested whether the mediating variable travel interest accounts for a proportion of the relationship between the predictor variables (perception of experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure) and the criterion variable intention to travel. We applied the bootstrapping method to test the mediating effect because it provides a higher level of power and control over Type 1 error compared to other methods (Cheung and Lau, 2008). Table 4 shows the results of total, direct and indirect effects of experience new culture, experience scenic values and experience adventure on intention to travel through travel interest.

According to the results presented on table 4 we can argue that the relationship between experience adventure and intention to travel is fully mediated by travel interest. This can be concluded based on the fact that the initial condition of direct effect of experience adventure on intention to travel was met when the mediating variable was not present in the model (.116; $p < 0.01$) and the path coefficient between experience adventure and intention to travel turned to be insignificant when then the mediating variable was included in the model. Thus, hypothesis H7 was supported.

As the initial condition to test the mediating effects of significant direct effect between the predictor variable experience new culture on the criterion variable intention to travel was not met (.037; $p > 0.10$) we can conclude that travel interest does not mediate the relationship between experience a new culture and intention to travel. Thus, H5 was rejected. The results also fail to provide support for H6 which tested the mediating role of travel interest between experience scenic values and intention to travel since the direct effect of the predictor variable on the criterion variable was not significant (-.163; $p > 0.10$).

Insert Figure 2 about here

Insert Table 2 about here

Insert Table 3 about here

Insert Table 4 about here

4 Discussion, conclusions and implications.

Studying tourist behaviour to determine travel motives and interest in travel activities is of significant interest to destination marketers and helps to develop targeted marketing strategies (Bryant & Morrison, 1980; Cha et al., 1995; Jurowski, Uysal & Noe, 1993; Loker & Perdue, 1992; Mo, Havitz & Howard, 1994; Mudambi & Baum, 1997; Cho, 1998; Sung, Morrison & O’Leary, 2000; Shoham et al., 2004; Xu et al., 2009). Exploring new and emerging tourism markets not only provides a commercial opportunity but also adds information to the tourist behaviour literature based on new research findings on trends and interest specific to the market. From this perspective the current study examines the travel motives and level of interest in different touristic activities of the young university students from Thailand. The rising income levels of the middle class in Thailand (Chaipinit & Phetvaroon, 2011) assure good future for the university graduates as future travellers. The findings of the current study provide information on the holidaying attitudes of this new emerging market - Thailand.

The current study adopts the Leisure Motivation Scale to determine the travel motives and level of interest in touristic activities of young Thailand university students. A conceptual theoretical model is proposed (see Figure 1) highlighting seven hypotheses. The hypotheses test relationships between experiencing culture, scenic values and adventure with travel interest based on new culture, cultural souvenirs, natural beauty, wildlife in natural setting, kayaking, ballooning etc. Further, role of travel interest based on challenging abilities and exploring new ideas is tested how it influences the intention to travel of the Thai students. We also analyse whether travel interest mediates the effect of experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure on intention to travel of the Thai students. .

The need to study travel motives becomes necessary to help understand travel patterns and interest of different market segments which vary from market to market and person to person (Shields 2011; Correia, Valle & Moco 2007; Jonnson & Devonish 2008; Kim 2007; Meng & Uysal, 2008). In studying travel motivations for the Chinese outbound market Zhang and Peng (2014) suggest that though this is a relatively under researched market segment, most common motivational factors to travel overseas were noted to be knowledge, prestige, enhancing personal relationship, relaxation, experiencing different cultures and lifestyle and shopping. Most of these factors relate to the measures used in the

Leisure Motivation Scale which has also been used in the current study. Additionally Kim (2014) also suggests that social interaction, cultural immersion, provides memorable experiences which have been widely discussed in the literature to become motives to travel. Further, experiencing new cultures continues to be an attractive activity and travel motive (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Tung & Ritchie 2011; Funk & Bruun, 2007; Morgan & Xu, 2009). However, within the context of young students from Thailand, their interest in experiencing new cultures remains unexplored. In testing the theoretical construct *experiencing new culture* as a motivation to go on holidays and its relationship with *travel interest* as part of **H1**, the results suggest that the relationship was significant and positive (0.140; $p < 0.10$). This suggests that more the Thai students perceive experiencing a new culture as an attraction to visit a destination the higher their travel interest. This finding provides an opportunity for tourism destinations to understand the travel motive and interest of this emerging market, plan and promote new culture immersion activities they offer to build an interest to holiday at their destination. The **H2** tested the theoretical construct *experiencing scenic values* as a motivation to go on holidays and its relationship with travel interest being perceived an attraction to visit a tourist destination. The results suggest that the relationship is significant and positive (0.387; $p < 0.01$). This finding also adds to the opportunity for tourism destinations to understand the significance young Thai travellers place on scenic values and how it arouses their travel interest. Destinations with natural beauty have an advantage to attract potential travellers from Thailand. The results of **H3** suggest that relationship between the construct *experiencing adventure* as a motivation to go on holidays and its relationship with travel interest being perceived an attraction to visit a destination is significant and positive. (0.335; $p < 0.01$). There is no doubt that destinations with a range of soft and hard adventure activities can build on this finding to attract potential tourists from this emerging market. Results of **H4** are also positive and significant (0.592; $p < 0.01$). This suggests that higher travel interest generates greater intention to travel when it comes to the Thai young travellers.

The second stage explored whether travel interest mediates the effect of experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure on intention to travel. Several studies have suggested the positive role culture, natural beauty and adventure plays in attracting tourists to a destination (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Tung & Ritchie 2011 ; Funk & Bruun, 2007; Morgan & Xu, 2009, Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim et al., 2012, Kim 2007; Dotson, Clark, & Dave, 2008, William & Soutar, 2000; Crompton, 1979; Pizam et al., 2004). This study investigates whether the three constructs have any positive role, without the mediating effect of travel interest, on intention to travel within the context of Thai students. The **H5** tested the mediating role of travel interest on the relationship between experience new culture and intention to travel. **H6** in its turn tested the same effect on the experience scenic values-intention to travel relationship. The results indicate that travel interest does not mediate neither of those relationships. Regarding **H7** the results suggest that the mediating variable travel interest transmits the effect of the independent variable experience adventure on intention to travel. This means that travel intention functions as a mechanism through which experience adventure influences intention to travel. Stated differently, young travellers expecting to experience adventure on

their trips who have high travel interest present greater levels of intention to travel than those who are not so curious.

The highlight of theoretical implication of the study has implications for readers internationally. The results based on the seven hypotheses testing the relationships between the constructs *experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure* with *travel interest* find it significant and positive. The impact of *travel interest* on *intention to travel* is also positive. This suggests that the young Thai university students are keen to visit destinations which provide new cultural experiences, scenic values and adventure to satisfy their travel interest and affirm their intention to travel to the destination. Several studies have noted that young travellers enjoy thrill which challenges their abilities (Dotson, Clark, & Dave, 2008; Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999; Hallab, Price & Fournier, 2006; Pizam et al., 2004, Bywater, 1993) however, in the context of Thailand, insights based on current findings are new and unique.

So what is the significance and implications of this study?

The distinctiveness of the study is embedded in the fact that it explores travel motives of young Thai generation towards holidaying. Comparatively the literature is full of studies done in the Western context on young travellers' motivations to travel. Within the context of young travellers from Asia, studies are scarce and in relation to Thailand almost non-existent. From this perspective the study adds to the literature on travel motivations. On the theoretical front the study has adapted the Leisure Motivation Scale to develop and test constructs through a proposed theoretical model (Figure 1). These constructs and their results are unique in relation to travel motives of the young Thai market segment generally, and in relations to mediating role of travel interest specifically. The conceptual contribution through the model informs that *experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure* become reasons to generate travel interest amongst young Thai students. Considering this from a marketing point of view, exploring new markets is the key for all destination marketers to sustain economic gains from tourism, the current study adds information about an unexplored market segment. Hence, suggesting implications for destination marketers to get to know about this new emerging market segment.

Like any other study, the current study also has limitations in form of small sample size, subjectivity in responses hence cannot claim to be wholly conclusive. The results should be considered in light of this limitation. However, the study provides some value through its findings for other researchers for comparative studies and suggests further research with a larger sample size and focus on cultural and other leisure related issues.

Table 1
 Constructs Measurements Summary
 Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Scales Reliability

Constructs/Variables	Standardized Loading	t-Value	AVE	Composite Reliability (ρ)*	Cronbach's Alpha (α)**
Factors of Importance					
1. Travel Interest			0.46	0.71	.70
To challenge my abilities		.578			
To see new cultures		.683			
To explore new ideas		.753			
2. Experience New Culture			0.67	0.80	.80
To buy authentic indigenous Maori souvenirs		.878			
To experience indigenous Maori culture		.754			
3. Experience Scenic Values			0.65	0.79	.79
To experience wildlife in natural setting		.810			
To experience other natural attractions		.806			
4. Experience Adventure			0.62	0.83	.83
A chance to go canoeing/kayaking		.794			
A visit to Albatross colony		.775			
A chance to go for ballooning		.799			
Chi-square = 44.88					
Degrees of freedom = 29					
RMSEA: 0.036					
CFI: .990; IFI: .990; TLI: .985					

* ρ - composite reliability ($\rho_c = (\sum \lambda_i)^2 \text{var}(\xi) / [(\sum \lambda_i)^2 \text{var}(\xi) + \sum \theta_{ii}]$) (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

** α - Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951)

AVE = Average Variance Extracted (Fornell and Larcker, 1981)

Table 2
Correlation between Constructs

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1 Travel Interest	.68				
2 Experience Scenic Values	.50	.81			
3 Experience New Culture	.43	.50	.82		
4 Experience Adventure	.47	.43	.45	.79	
5 Intention to Travel	.49	.28	.30	.36	1

Note: Diagonal represents square root of average extracted.

Table 3
Path analysis of the Structural Model and Hypotheses Results

Linkages in the model	Standardized parameter estimates		Hypotheses Results
	Estimate	t-value	
H1) Experience a new culture → travel interest	.140	1.743*	S
H2) Express scenic values → travel interest	.387	4.454***	S
H3) Experience adventure → travel interest	.335	4.538***	S
H4) Travel interest → Intention to travel	.592	5.648***	S

Note:

* p<0.10

** p<0.05

*** p<0.01

R – Rejected

S – Supported

Table 4
Standardized direct, indirect and total effects on Intention to Travel^a

Linkages in the model	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects	Hypotheses Results
H5) Experience a new culture	.037 ^{ns}	.097 ^{ns}	.133 ^{ns}	R
H6) Express scenic values	-.163 ^{ns}	.260***	.097 ^{ns}	R
H7) Experience adventure	.116***	.261***	.377***	S

ns: non-significant

^a Bootstrap bias-corrected confidence interval based on 2000 bootstrap subsamples.

*** p<0.01

R – Rejected

S – Supported

Figure 1
Conceptual Model

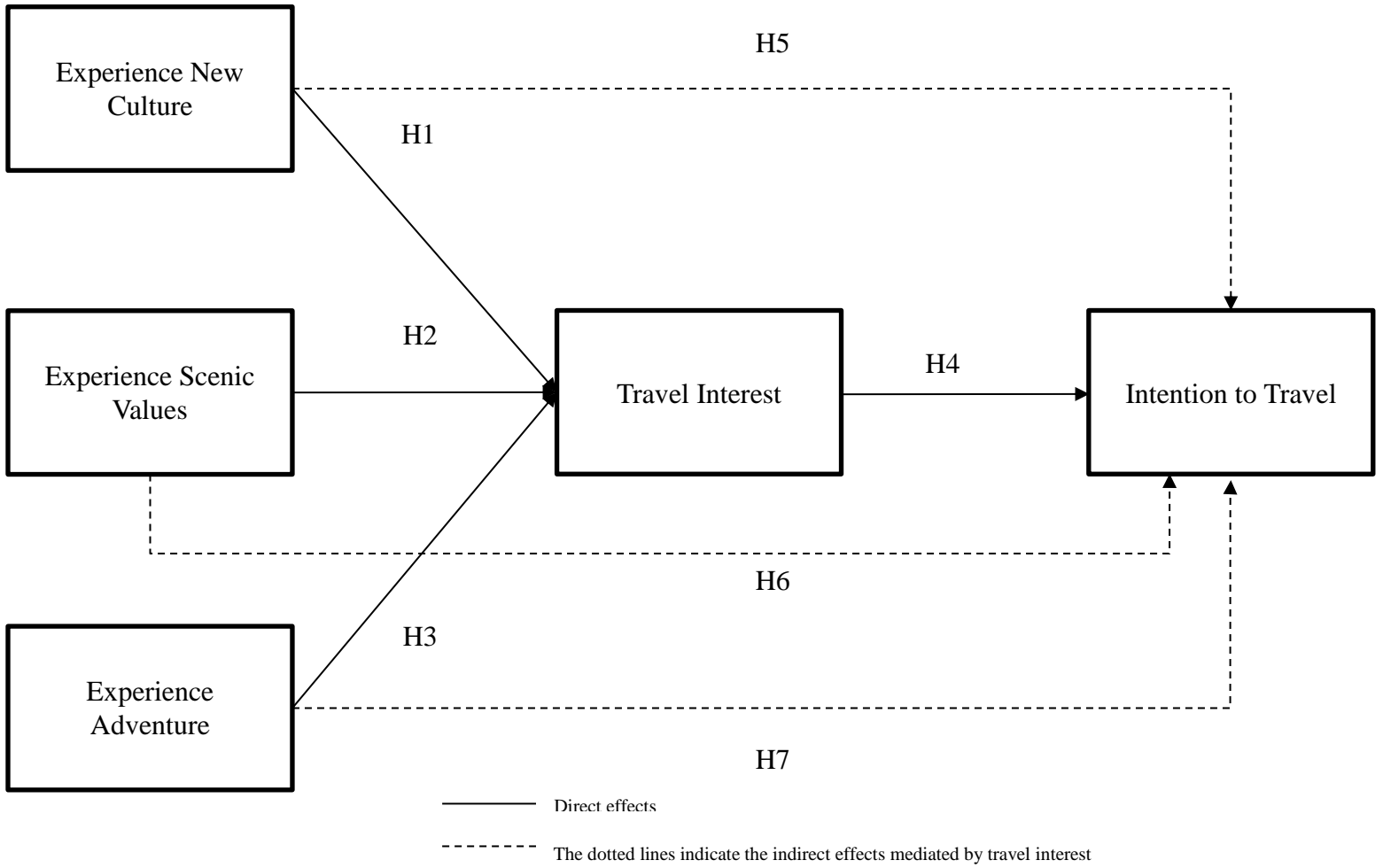
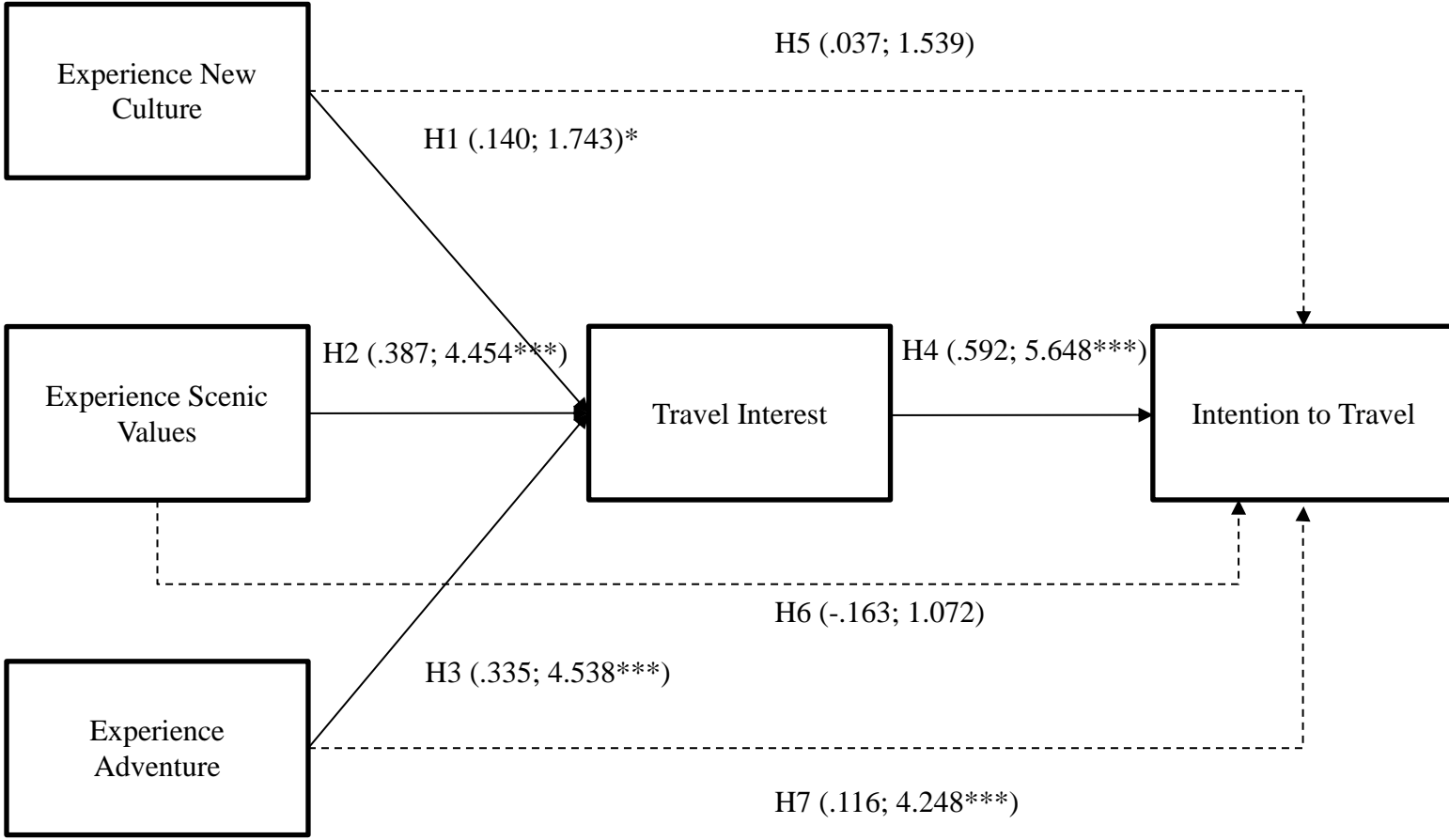


Figure 2
Final Model



———— Direct effects
 - - - - - The dotted lines indicate the indirect effects mediated by travel interest

Note:
 * p<0.10
 ** p<0.05
 *** p<0.01

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