Thailand tourism: A systematic review

ABSTRACT

This research performs a systematic review of research on Thailand tourism. We identified emergent research themes and explored the conceptualization of studies regarding the development of Thailand tourism. In accordance with the theory, context, characteristic, and methodology (TCCM) framework, this work offers a comprehensive outline of relevant studies and gaps in the existing literature to edify and advance future research agendas. It successfully enriches knowledge about Thailand tourism in the extant tourism literature. Moreover, this review contributes to Thailand tourism literature and travel industry, particularly during the transitional period from the "old normal" to the "new normal" tourism era.

Keywords: Thailand tourism, systematic review, TCCM framework, tourism development, Thai tourism industry, new normal tourism, journal review

1. Introduction

Thailand is a renowned tourism destination. The country was among the top 10 tourist destinations for international travel ranked by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) for a number of years, including 2019, the year prior to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (UNWTO, 2020). Thailand is recognized for offering a wide range of attractions, including beautiful landscapes, rich cultures, delicious food, hospitable people, and a variety of leisure activities (Jaeheng & Han, 2020). Tourism in Thailand has experienced significant development over the past two decades. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS, 2021a) and the National Statistical Office of Thailand (2016) reported that the number of

international tourists who visited the kingdom substantially increased from 9.51 million in 2000 to 39.92 million in 2019. During the same period, inbound tourism revenue progressively increased from USD 9,500 million to USD 63,727 million, achieving a considerable increase of nearly 700%.

Compared to most tourist destinations in the region, the Thai tourism industry is of great economic significance. For example, in 2019, the tourism sector accounted for 18.21% of Thailand's GDP, which surpassed the global average of 10.4% (Manakitsomboon, 2021). The tourism receipts have also experienced continuous growth since 2011 at approximately 15% per annual (MOTS, 2021b). In addition to its favorable economic impact, the tourism sector is liable for 18.1% of total national employment, demonstrating its strong contribution to the social economy. This phenomenon was not only prompted by rapid global economic development but also by the tremendous effort exerted by the Thai government to promote the country as an eminent tourism destination (MOTS, 2019).

According to Tourism Authority of Thailand [TAT] (2020a), the Thai government has placed tremendous efforts in laying the foundation for tourism over the past decades, including organizing service training courses, developing touristic places, providing tourist guide training, preserving the environment, and conserving local cultures. Along with the development of tourism in the country, a variety of tourism promotional campaigns for domestic and international markets, such as "Amazing Thailand", "Discover Thainess", "Unseen Thailand" and "Thailand Grand Invitation" has continuously been launched to present the beauty, hospitality and culture of Thailand to the world (Figure 1). This work has not only brought substantial incomes to the country but also elevated Thailand as one of the world's leading tourist destinations (TAT, 2020b). In brief, the dynamic development of the Thai tourism

industry has been captivated by worldwide tourism scholars, national tourism organizations (NTOs), policy makers and travelers (Marukatat, 2018; Untong et al., 2014; UNWTO, 2020). This subsequently has contributed to the strong demand to better understand the development of tourism in Thailand. Such a demand to understand the progress of Thailand tourism is not only to identify growth potentials or development opportunities that Thailand tourism has presented, but also allows other developing tourist destinations within the region to identify their competitive positions in the market.

(INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE)

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has recently caused severe economic loss to the country (Chen et al., 2021; Kim & Ryu, 2021; Ryu et al., 2020), the Thai tourism industry was projected to strike back against COVID-19 and get back on track by the last quarter of 2021 (Guild, 2021). Aside for increasing emphasis on domestic tourism promotion, pilot implementations of several campaigns, including "The Phuket Sandbox" and "Samui Plus" models, have been conducted for Thailand's reopening (TAT, 2021a). With these initiatives, the total tourism revenue in 2021 was forecasted to reach USD 30,000 million, with the domestic market comprising 86% and international tourism accounting for 14%, particularly through the "Sandbox" program (Kasemsuk, 2021). However, with the hasty spread of Omicron variant over the peak holiday period in December 2021, most foreign tourists cancelled their travel plans to Thailand because the country suspended its Test & Go travel scheme (i.e., a quarantine-free program) until January 31, 2022 (Duangdee, 2022). Although the new wave of COVID-19 infection put the brakes on tourism recovery, the Thai government has expected five million overseas tourists visiting the Kingdom in 2022. In achieving this aim, travel bubbles with

affiliate countries and a more relaxed regulation regarding COVID-19 testing requirements may need to be executed to get the tourism sector rebooted (Taylor, 2022).

In line with the sturdy development of tourism in Thailand, an increasing number of studies on Thailand tourism have been reported in the past several years (e.g., Ashton, 2018; Rittichainuwat & Mair, 2012; Lee et al., 2020). In the past two decades, a certain amount of research that covered the topic of Thailand tourism under different study contexts was published. For example, Sangpikul (2008) explored the push and pull motivation factors of Japanese senior tourists. Although relaxation, ego enhancement, and knowledge seeking were identified as the three major push factors, shopping and entertainment, safety, attractions, and tourism facilities were regarded as important pull factors that attract senior tourists to visit Thailand. Chubchuwong et al. (2015) investigated the pro-environmental attitudes of international tourists in the context of nature-based tourism. Their findings determined that pro-environmental attitudes can be developed when tourists exhibit a strong sense of attachment to a destination and frequent engagement in nature-based tourism experiences. Kolar and Wattanacharoensil (2020) utilized visual content analysis with semiotic analysis to determine aspects that Internet memes portray the online destination image of Thailand and how such online image differs from traditional sources and formats. These publications have indicated the growth potential of Thailand tourism, which is an imperative area that provides opportunities for extensive examinations.

Although many studies have been conducted on Thailand tourism, the literature on this topic remains fragmented and inconsistent. Given the wide range and diversity of previous studies pertaining to the development of tourism in Thailand (e.g., Bernstein & Woosnam, 2019; Ditta-Apichai et al., 2020; Ramos et al., 2017), scholars and practitioners tend to benefit from a

particular discussion or implication of studies currently conducted under this topic. The growing significance of tourism in Thailand and the fragmentation of research in Thailand tourism context highlight the necessity to increase the comprehension of conceptualizations and relationships among varied topics. Without an in-depth understanding of conceptualizations and tourism research domains, an overall picture of the current dynamics of the literature on Thailand tourism may hardly be identified.

The dynamic growth of the Thai tourism industry over the past two decades has underlined the need and importance of identifying the most recent study trends. However, research undertaken on the synthesis of the existing literature on Thailand tourism and that provides the contemporary trends and development potential of Thailand's tourism through a methodical qualitative review approach has been scarce (Ashton, 2018; Chubchuwong, 2019). To address this gap, the current study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) to provide an in-depth an analysis of research on tourism development in Thailand. Hence, the primary objectives of this study are as follows: 1) to identify emergent research themes regarding tourism in Thailand, 2) to explore the conceptualization of studies pertaining to the development of Thailand tourism, and 3) to present the current dynamics of the literature that advance the research agendas. Given a comprehensive review of this topic, this research provides avenues for future investigations by identifying important voids in the extant literature. This study not only enriches the literature on Thailand tourism, but it also offers insightful knowledge and brings unnoticeable, yet notable points to attention. This study also benefits travel service providers, particularly in comprehending the recent trends and development potentials of Thailand tourism.

2. Systematic literature review approach

Although the body of research on Thailand tourism has continuously progressed, studies under this topic remain at a developing stage with fragmented domains. To capture the progress of Thailand tourism over the past decades and enrich knowledge about Thailand tourism, this study adopted SLR to identify research that is up-to-date and relevant to this topic. In accordance with Marabelli and Newell (2014), SLR offers essential discussions by synthesizing the previous literature, mapping out areas of uncertainties, and identifying research themes that are necessary for further studies. SLR is an appropriate approach for this research because it synthesizes relevant literature to identify research patterns and themes of continuity in the investigated domains (Paul & Criado, 2020). Similar to the previous literature (Dhir et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2017; Zhang & Wang, 2020), this study performs a six-step procedure before the systematic review, as follows: 1) identify the review objectives, 2) devise the review protocol, 3) search the literature, 4) shortlist papers for review against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 5) extract the relevant literature, and 6) synthesize the results.

First, the investigation began by determining review objectives. Second, a review protocol that comprised details about the literature search, such as keywords, selected databases, and screening criteria, was formulated. The current study used Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus, two well-known databases that have been frequently considered in previous SLR research (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020). The present search included the following keywords: (Thailand) and (travel OR tourism). All relevant articles that used the selected keywords in their title, abstract, and keywords published in English from January 2000 were considered in this review. In line with the research objectives, the country/region was limited to Thailand to capture the literature from the tourism field. As of September 2021, 167 papers were identified from WOS and 333 from Scopus, for a total of 500 articles. In accordance with Paul and Criado

(2020), the quality of research articles must be ensured when performing an in-depth analysis of the literature. Thus, this research considered only high-quality papers from journals indexed in the *Journal Citation Reports* (*JCR*) under the category of hospitality, leisure, and tourism. Consequently, the dataset comprised 167 records that appeared in 20 journals indexed in *JCR*.

The remaining 167 papers were verified for eligibility by following the criteria suggested by Macpherson and Holt (2007). A thorough review of the identified research articles further removed 76 papers that 1) were indirectly relevant to the study objectives, 2) provided weak theoretical background, 3) had weak research design, and 4) offered limited theoretical and practical insights. For example, studies that focused on the hospitality sector in Thailand (e.g., hotels, restaurants, and spas) were eliminated because they were not directly related to Thailand tourism. Articles that offered limited insights into tourism development in Thailand (e.g., economic and tourism growth in the ASEAN region) were also removed. Consequently, 91 eligible papers were included for further analysis (Figure 2). These papers were organized in an Excel spreadsheet by considering the following criteria: article titles, authors, journal names, publication years, samples, applied research methods, data collection, perspectives, tourism domains, research themes, and key concepts/variables used (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020).

(INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE)

3. Preliminary analysis

3.1 Distribution of articles

The number of papers about Thailand tourism published in accordance with their publication year (2000–2021) is exhibited in Figure 3. The study in this area remains at a

developing phase because no papers were published in the journals indexed in *JCR* before 2007. The number of published articles was dynamic starting from 2008. The highest number of articles appeared in 2015, followed by in 2019. Although the Thai tourism industry has been affected by COVID-19 since 2020, studies in this domain have continued receiving considerable attention from scholars. Eleven articles were found in 2020, and four papers were published between January and September 2021. The trend line indicated that research on Thailand tourism is emerging. Thus, recent trends and developments of research within the context of Thailand tourism require improved comprehension.

Journal outlets that published articles about Thailand tourism were subsequently examined. As indicated in Table 1, research about Thailand tourism was published in 20 indexed journals in the hospitality, leisure, and tourism category in *JCR*. The number of articles published in each journal was also presented, along with their Association of Business Schools (ABS) ranking of the Academic Journal Guide, which provides a guideline for journal quality. The Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research published the highest number of research papers about Thailand tourism (20% of articles on this topic), followed by Tourism Management and Tourism Management Perspectives (10% and 6.5%, respectively). Interestingly, all top 10 tourism and hospitality journals in *JCR* have published research on this topic (Figure 4).

(INSERT TABLE 1 HERE)

(INSERT FIGURES 3 & 4 HERE)

3.2 Authorship and citations

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The 91 papers included in the analysis were authored by 144 researchers. The 15 most prominent authors, accounting for 52% of the total articles, are listed in Table 2. Rittichainuwat, B. (10) published the most papers about Thailand tourism, followed by Wattanacharoensil, W. (7) and Fakfare, P. (5). In line with the recent SLR research by Jebarajakirthy et al. (2021), Table 3 provides the 10 most cited articles in the field of Thailand tourism. Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty's (2009) article was the highest cited article with 222 citations, followed by Sangpikul's (2008) paper with 101 citations. Taecharungroj and Mathayomchan's (2019) article received the highest average citations per year (i.e., 19 citations), followed by Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty's (2009) paper, with 18.5 citations on average per year. Given both aspects of analysis (i.e., authorship and citations), Rittichainuwat, B. is the most influential author in the study area of Thailand tourism over the past two decades.

Further, based on the analysis of literature in terms of yearly citation counts and research domains (Table 3 and 5), we found studies by Taecharungroj and Mathayomchan (2019), Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty (2009) and Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai (2015) and Sangpikul (2008) to be the most impactful research. In brief, Taecharungroj and Mathayomchan (2019) analyzed online reviews using machine learning approach in such a way that DMOs, NTOs and service providers can gain insights and implement the technique to develop the destinations. Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty (2009) investigated tourists' concerns about perceived risks regarding terrorism and disease. While Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai (2015) examined travel motivations of tourists to visit a film destination, Sangpikul (2008) implemented a push and pull framework to explore investigate travel motivations of Japanese senior tourists to Thailand.

Considering the natures of the aforementioned impactful studies, they tend to be timely conforming with the Thai government's policy actions in support of tourism development (Table 6). For example, TAT (2020a, 2020b) recently announced that Thailand would adjust to the new world order by utilizing big data as a tool to accommodate digital lifestyle of tourists, as well as make positive change to the Thai tourism industry. The study by Taecharungroj and Mathayomchan (2019) responds to this dynamic movement as their research findings, resulting from the analysis of big data could provide useful implications for TAT and destination management organizations to provide experiential value to tourists. Considering Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty's (2009) study, although the unanticipated events such as terrorism and disease outbreak do not transpire frequently, the study results offered comprehensive insight into tourist's perception when traveling during times of crisis, therefore providing a guiding principle for governments to proactively deploy strategies to guard against terrorism and deal with the future pandemic. Sangpikul's (2008) study on senior groups traveling to Thailand was performed to prepare the country for the potential segment which was later promoted by the government (TAT, 2020a). The motivation determinants of the senior tourists identified by Sangpikul (2008) could be useful for practitioners when developing the senior travel market. Based on this analysis, we can see that the benefits of these impactful studies are present in a way that they can forge meaningful links both within and outside of academia in the area of Thailand tourism.

(INSERT TABLES 2 & 3 HERE)

3.3 Methodological viewpoints

3.3.1 Research locations

To analyze Thailand tourism research in terms of geographical coverage, we used the domestic locations wherein the sample was drawn to assess the area of investigation (Dhir et al., 2020). For the papers identified with a broad location for investigation (e.g., Thailand), the study area was specified as Bangkok in the current work. The findings indicated that research on the topic of Thailand tourism originated from 21 primary locations, accounting for approximately one-fourth of the total number of provinces in Thailand. Among these, Bangkok (n = 40; 36.4%), Phuket (n = 20; 18.2%), Phang Nga (n = 8; 7.3%), Krabi (n = 7; 6.4%), Pattaya (n = 7; 6.4%), and Chiang Mai (n = 7; 6.4%) were popular data collection points (Figure 5). Considering this parameter, scholars have mostly focused on examining issues about tourism in Thailand in major cities, although 55 secondary cities in Thailand exhibit potential to develop tourism products (Fakfare et al., 2020a).

(INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE)

3.3.2 Data analysis methods

The 91 selected articles applied three primary research approaches (Table 4). The majority of the papers performed quantitative analysis (n = 43, 47.78%), followed by qualitative (32.22%) and mixed research approaches (21.11%). In general, the articles performed a single study with a survey-based design and convenience sampling that ranged from 100 to 1,200 representatives. ANOVA, regression, factor analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM) were popular statistical approaches used to analyze issues about Thailand tourism. Qualitative and mixed-method approaches were adopted in 29 and 19 papers, respectively, utilizing techniques such as semi-structured interviews, thematic/content analyses, and surveys.

Interestingly, papers were increasingly published using data science techniques, such as machine learning, visual content analysis, and linear discriminant analysis, over the past 5 years (e.g., Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019; Tomaz & Wattanacharoensil, 2020).

(INSERT TABLE 4 HERE)

3.4 Emergent research themes and tourism domains

Research themes identified in the literature were drawn on the basis of the classification framework outlined by Law et al. (2012). Table 5 provides a distribution of the themes and relevant publications regarding Thailand tourism over the past two decades. Experience emerged as the most prominent category, accounting for 16% of the selected papers (Figure 6). Other popular themes included psychology (12%), tourism development (11%), sustainable development (9%), and marketing studies (8%). A noteworthy observation signifies that each of these themes has exhibited the dynamic progress of Thailand tourism research, particularly the research trend over the past 5 years (Figure 7). Interestingly, studies related to information technology and computer systems (focusing mostly on visual content analysis and data mining) have become recently evident, reflecting the contemporary means to advance tourism literature in the current era.

(INSERT TABLE 5 HERE)

In terms of tourism domains, systematic analysis reported the popularity and legitimacy of the topic, as evidenced by the wide range of research contexts in the area of Thailand tourism

(Figure 8). Coastal/marine tourism (7%) and food and festival tourism (7%) were the most popular spheres, followed by tourism demand and forecasting (5%) and tourist destination (5%). Notably, the research foci and associated publications about Thailand tourism over the past few years are geared toward experienced-based and special-interest tourism, such as honeymoon tourism, halal tourism, and community-based tourism (Figure 9). This evolving trend is consistent with the second National Tourism Development Plan (2017–2021) of Thailand, which emphasizes enhancing a positive image of the country through various sociocultural dimensions to target a high-quality tourism segment (Berger, 2016). More detailed discussions of the themes and tourism domains are provided in the discussion section.

(INSERT FIGURES 6–9 HERE)

3.6 Conceptualization of Thailand tourism research

Research on Thailand tourism tends to examine diverse constructs/variables (Figure 10). On the basis of the systematic review analysis, travel motivation (n = 9, 9.89%) was the most frequently discussed concept, followed by the impact of tourism development (n = 8, 8.79%). The literature indicated that two service-oriented constructs, namely, tourist satisfaction and behavioral intention (e.g., revisit intention and recommendation), have been repetitively applied to investigate issues on Thailand tourism (e.g., Vajirakachorn & Chongwatpol, 2017). Figure 11 illustrates the dynamic evolution of concepts/theories applied to Thailand tourism literature over the past 20 years. The time-zone mapping analysis of the applied concepts can identify the concepts/theories used per year, subsequently allowing the identification of the dynamic evolution of the study focus.

Considering the policy actions launched by the Thai government to support tourism development over the past decades (Table 6), it is noteworthy to observe that, before 2008, national priorities were mostly concerned with the development of strategic decisions and tourism infrastructure. The policy of actively promoting Thailand tourism began in 2001, which opened the door for either international and domestic tourists to explore the beauty of the country through travel. In 2008-2016, the Thai tourism authorities started paying greater attentions on the impacts of tourism development, particularly from the social-economic and environmental perspectives. Although the authority's focus, reflecting from the tourism policy during 2012-2016, tended to be on establishing Thailand as a high-quality tourism place, Thailand still projected on volume-growth logic when it comes to tourist arrivals.

To ensure the sustainable growth of tourism in the country, the Thai government set off a vision towards 2036, which is to develop the country as a world's leading destination. Reflecting in the Second National Tourism Development plan (2017-2021), strategies such as creating balance between tourist target groups through targeted marketing that embraces "Thainess" and developing tourism human capital's potential were implemented to take Thailand tourism to the next level (MOTS, 2021b). After performing a comparative assessment of the tourism policy development (Table 6) and the dynamic evolution of concepts/theories applied to Thailand tourism literature (Table 5 and Figure 11), we discovered that theories/concepts used in the Thailand tourism literature generally support the strategic directions and national tourism development policies. For example, in 2000-2012, Thailand was in the early stage of the tourism development; hence research on travel motivation, tourist behavior and destination attributes were popularly conducted. In 2013-2018, the policy focus tended to shift from mass tourism to high-quality tourism. Besides the broad perspective of concepts/theories applied in the earlier

period, scholars gave greater focus on the ideas of sustainability and creative economy to respond to the government's direction in promoting Thailand tourism. Consistent with the Second National Tourism Development plan (2017-2021), research on Thailand tourism performed during this period placed a greater focus on investigating concepts/theories relating to niche tourism market segment, quality of destination, tourism education, tourist experience, innovation management and local culture. In short, the concepts/theories applied in the context of Thailand tourism were found to reflect the development actions and national policies over the past two decades, although the number of research and constructs applied to investigate issues about Thailand tourism were limited.

In terms of research perspectives, more than half of the articles were investigated from the demand side (e.g., tourists; n = 50, 54.95%), followed by the community and residents (n = 14, 15.38%), multiple perspectives (n = 14, 15.38%), and the supply side (e.g., businesses, n = 9, 9.89% and governments; n = 4, 4.40%), highlighting the necessity to further explore issues about this topic from the business, authority, and resident perspectives. More detailed discussions, particularly from the perspectives of key stakeholders are provided in the following section (theories/concepts).

(INSERT FIGURES 10 & 11 HERE)

4. Discussion

4.1 Future development of research on Thailand tourism

Although the topic of Thailand tourism has received considerable attention from scholars, no studies have yet undertaken a synthesis of its current literature. This work is the first to

perform a systematic review on the topic. Such review will help in identifying the contemporary trends and development potential in this research area. By utilizing the theory, context, characteristic, and methodology (TCCM) framework (Jebarajakirthy et al., 2021), various suggestions for future research are highlighted across the four dimensions (characteristic, context, theory, and methodology).

4.1.1 Characteristics

The analysis of research themes (Table 5) enables us to identify prominent research areas in the topic of Thailand tourism. Although several themes have emerged from the literature, the four major domains are evidently experience, psychology, tourism development, and sustainability. These findings cause us to contemplate on primary themes of discussion. The content of each major theme and suggestions for future studies are deliberated as follows.

(a) Experience. Experience was identified as a prominent theme, being present in approximately 16% of the reviewed literature. Experience covers a range of studies related to tourist behavior and experience (Keating et al., 2015). Over the past 20 years, tourist experience was analyzed from different tourism contexts, such as volunteer tourism (Coren & Gray, 2012), honeymoon tourism (Lee et al., 2020), halal tourism (Jeaheng et al., 2020), and wellness tourism (Fu et al., 2015). The theme of experience presents three major dimensions: the psychological, physical, and social experiences of tourists (Rosalina et al., 2021). Physical experience was of higher interest than psychological and social experiences, and it was frequently associated with multidimensional destination attributes (Chavarria & Phakdeeauksorn, 2017; Fakfare et al., 2020b; Jeaheng & Han, 2020). Psychological experience was related to tourist attitudes and

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emotions, such as pro-environmental attitude (Chubchuwong & Speece, 2016), affection (Chavarria & Phakdeeauksorn, 2017), negative/positive emotion (Hosany et al., 2017), and destination attachment (Chubchuwong et al., 2015). Social experience received less attention from scholars and was generally applied to the context of volunteer tourism (Coren & Gray, 2012). Although these findings indicate a wide spectrum of experiences associated with tourism development in Thailand, the experience of tourists in the past has generally engaged the experiential aspects of the "old normal" years (before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic). Research that examines how experience affects the attitude and behavior of tourist in the "new normal" era, particularly in the facets of travel preparedness and response to the pandemic, has barely been conducted on Thailand tourism. Therefore, scholars are encouraged to explore how tourists gain physical, psychological, and social experiences before/during/after a trip and adapt to the "new normal" tourism. The social dimension of experience (e.g., personalized service, interaction with service providers and local communities) may be of particular attention. Tourists are likely to prefer touchless services and avoid mass gatherings during/after COVID-19 (Nisar et al., 2021; Wen et al., 2020). Therefore, examining experience dimensions and their associations with tourists' behavioral change or "adaptive behavior" will be an interesting future research agenda.

(b) Psychology. Psychology was the second theme discussed in 12% of the reviewed papers. Psychology includes an assortment of articles associated with tourist motivation (Law et al., 2012). Several authors (e.g., Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015; Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2010) considered motivation as a collection of attitudes and needs that stimulate an individual to travel to a destination. Notably, the two recognized theories of travel motivation,

namely, Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking dichotomy and Dann's and Crompton's push and pull factors, were predominant and largely emphasized in the topic of Thailand tourism. Several articles relied on these concepts to examine issues concerning travel motivation. For example, Fakfare et al. (2020a) proposed a scale for measuring domestic tourist motivation based on the distinctive characteristics of second-tier destinations. From a wider geographical perspective, Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai (2015) explored the motivations and experiences of Thai tourists visiting filming places in Korea as part of a package tour. Although different authors (e.g., Pookaiyaudom & Tan, 2020; Rittichainuwat, 2008; Sangpikul, 2008; Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2010) associated travel motivation with several tourism activities (e.g., dark tourism, senior tourism, film tourism, agritourism, and business events), our analysis hardly found any study that examined the changing paradigms of travel motivations during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. The trust economy (i.e., health, safety, and security) was not a focused discussion of the current dynamics of Thailand tourism research. Thus, health and safety concerns (along with the risk of developing illness) can be considered in future research to investigate individuals' intention to travel. From the perspective of age group diversity, researchers can dig deeper to provide necessary guidance to tourists from different age groups (e.g., young and senior travelers) on how to stay healthy while traveling.

(c) Tourism development and (d) sustainability. Tourism development was the third theme (12%) in the reviewed literature. From a developmental aspect, most articles under this theme were related to residents' well-being, with mentions of "socioeconomic impact," "cultural impact," and "environmental impact." For example, Tirasattayapitak et al. (2015) investigated the impact of nature-based adventure tourism on the children in a village of Phang Nga. They

discovered many benefits from tourism development with no cultural disruption. Some authors developed scales to measure the success of a destination (e.g., Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015; Sriarkarin & Lee, 2018; Wattanacharoensil & Sakdiyakorn, 2016). Notably, studies under this theme were generally examined from the perspectives of community and residents.

As a theme, sustainability tended to be discussed in 9% of the reviewed articles. Sub-domains are relevant to ecotourism (Jitpakdee & Thapa, 2012), coastal and marine tourism (Martin & Assenov, 2014), and youth tourism (Sangpikul & Batra, 2007). Prior scholars (e.g., Jitpakdee & Thapa, 2012; Martin & Assenov, 2014; 2015) generally focused on establishing a sustainability index that covered environmental, economic, and sociocultural dimensions. Dabphet et al. (2012) applied diffusion theory to examine the diffusion of the sustainable tourism development concept among stakeholders in a destination. Overall, sustainable development studies apparently develop procedures and indicators that are in line with the environmental and socioeconomic values of a place. The findings verified the importance of sustainable development in research on Thailand tourism.

Although Thailand tourism research over the past 20 years focused on tourism development and sustainability, there is a scant research that focuses on a more complex system of sustainability, such as the aspect of circular economy or the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) economy model (Thongdejsri & Nitivattananon, 2019). From 2021 to 2026, the Thai government aims to improve the country's capacity, particularly in the aspect of technology and innovation, and use natural resources more efficiently with the least impact on the environment as much as possible. Thus, the BCG economy model will be adopted to enhance the competitiveness of various industrial sectors, including hospitality and tourism (Bangkok Post, 2021; TAT, 2021b). The BCG model has not yet been fully investigated in Thailand tourism context; thus, future

scholars are encouraged to implement this framework to better understand whether and how the BCG model can put the country on track to building a greener, stronger, and more inclusive economy as the pandemic subsides.

During the last few decades, the environmental concerns have increasingly been raised by worldwide scholars and practitioners (Han, 2015), and there has been an emerging idea that emphasizes on the preservation and sustainable use of marine resources for economic development, called "the blue economy" (The World Bank, 2017). Recently, many countries/regions with marine and coastal environments have attempted to develop a sustainable blue economy and tackle climate and biodiversity crises. For example, the European Union (EU) aims to decarbonize maritime transport and develop greener ports by implementing a mix of recycled marine energy, such as tidal energy and floating wind. This ocean energy mix is expected to generate about 25% of the electricity in the region by 2050 (The European Commission, 2021). In India, the blue economy policy is highlighted by the Indian government as one of the development dimensions of the "New India by 2030", covering key aspects such as coastal marine spatial planning and tourism, and coastal and offshore energy (Press Information Bureau, 2021). In Southeast Asia, the blue economy policies and frameworks have also been formulated for better governance in the region. For example, twelve participating governments, including Thailand have agreed to implement the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA) to provide a roadmap on transformative blue economy in the region in the next decade (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2021). Although sustainable practices and opportunities provided by the blue economy have been evidenced in several countries/regions, research published in the field of blue economy in Thailand has been scant (Koondee et al., 2022). Future research may focus on the blue economy and how the Thai

tourism industry can implement the blue solutions for achieving sustainable development of the coastal destinations in country.

4.1.2 Context

Although research has analyzed diverse tourism domains and activities under the topic of Thailand tourism (Figure 7), extant studies are highly general to demonstrate the characteristics of tourism during the "old normal" period. Future research is suggested to expand its attention toward the volatility, uncertainty, and complexity of tourism demands and other dynamic contexts that respond to the evolving travel lifestyle in the new normal. As recommended by Ratanawaraha (2021), interesting areas to investigate include mass customization, digital literacy and infrastructure, and tourism geopolitics. Future research may examine this trending phenomenon to respond to new tourist demands by considering emerging travel types, such as "workcation," "digital nomad," and "glamping" (TAT, 2021c). The use of *Cannabis* for medical and research purposes has been recently permitted in Thailand. This development makes Thailand the first nation in Southeast Asia to legalize the production, import, and export of *Cannabis*. *Cannabis* tourism should develop Thailand status as an emerging medical and wellness tourism destination (Worrachaddejchai, 2021). Thus, future research on *Cannabis* tourism-related business is suggested.

4.1.3 Theories/concepts

As depicted in Figure 12, extant research used several concepts/variables to examine issues regarding Thailand tourism from different stakeholders' perspectives (i.e., supply, demand, government, and community and residents). From the viewpoint of theoretical

fundamentals, scholars have used theories to support their research, such as theory of dissonance in heritage, theory of intercultural integration, psychology theories, diffusion theory, consumer's behavioral model, and marketing and management theories (Anantamongkolkul et al., 2019; Braithwaite & Leiper, 2010; Chubchuwong, 2019; Dabphet et al., 2012; Fakfare et al., 2020b; Rittichainuwat, 2008). In general, prior research implemented these theories to examine how sociopsychological factors influence tourists' perception and behavioral responses in diverse contextual backgrounds. As suggested by Han (2020), a comprehensive and robust theoretical framework can be established by incorporating different theories or merging discovered variables into a study model. Although theoretical/conceptual models used in prior research have been useful and have contributed to valuable research implications, they typically emerged from different fields of knowledge, such as marketing and psychology. To improve understanding of the tourism phenomenon in Thailand, future research is encouraged to propose and implement a solid theoretical base that purposely emerged from the tourism field.

By considering the applied theories/variables from the perspectives of key tourism stakeholders (Figure 12), particularly the government who has a critical role in initiating and shaping public policy and strategies for tourism development of the country, a few main themes appear, including economic, environmental and social policies. Although studies from the perspective of tourism authority exist (see for example, Wattanacharoensil and Schuckert (2016) for creative economy, Krutwaysho and Bramwell (2010) for tourism-related policy implementation, Muangasame and McKercher (2015) for green policy, Cheablam and Shrestha (2015) for climate change, Ponjan and Thirawat (2016) for crisis response and Rittichainuwat (2013) for travel safety), research under this theme has been scant and not fully covered key strategic policies. Moreover, given the publication timeline of the abovementioned studies,

scholars also tended to follow rather than precede the initiation of government's policy actions in supporting tourism development (see Table 6), thereby precluding the development of theoretical foundations of the stakeholder engagement processes during the several steps from policy formation to the policy implementation and management. Future research is encouraged to perform the systematic comparison of policy alternatives and project their influences for tourism authorities or policy makers. To assess the efficiency of tourism policies, the cost-benefit analysis could be carried out in view of the multi-stakeholders, including business, resident, authority, visitor and environmentalist (Koh and Fakfare, 2020).

Considering the concepts/theories identified from other stakeholder perspectives, such as supply and demand, they tend to evolve overtime in response to the development of the Thai tourism industry. In 2007–2015, studies were generally conceptualized using basic tourism concepts/theories, such as travel motivation, tourist attitude, satisfaction, experience, and behavioral intention. During this early stage, issues concerning Thailand tourism were explored from limited perspectives. In 2016–2018, studies were performed in accordance with broader points of view. A diversification of fundamentals, including pro-environmental attitude/behavior, creative economy, sustainable development, innovation management, and people/destination attachment, occurred. In 2019–2021, studies tended to adopt concepts/theories that can better explain the complexity of the tourism phenomenon. In addition to experiential marketing theories, authenticity, emotion, memory, cultural appreciation, and sense of place emerged as predominant foundations that broadened research perspectives in the recent era.

Based on the theories/concepts applied in Thailand tourism research (Figure 12), a noteworthy observation signifies that the same theories/variables can be used to examine issues in different research domains and can be explored from diverse perspectives. For example, push

and pull framework have been employed to identify travel motivation for different tourist markets (see for example, Sangpikul (2008) for inbound tourism and Fakfare et al. (2020) for domestic tourism) and to perform market segmentation (Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015). On the contrary, different concepts/theories can be applied to the same study domains. For instance, different theories/variables, such image, destination attribute, perceived quality and attitude have been implemented to examine food tourism-related issues (Chavarria and Phakdeeauksornm 2017; Vajirakachorn & Chongwatpol, 2017). Hence, the results of previous research can be compared and the most appropriate theories to a particular topic can be identified for future research in the similar study domains.

INSERT FIGURE 12 HERE

4.1.4 Methodology

Thailand tourism research has been primarily performed utilizing a quantitative method. The traditional statistical approaches of means comparison (e.g., ANOVA and *t*-test), regression, factor analysis, and cluster analysis have been popularly applied to Thailand tourism studies. Although several researchers have attempted to identify and verify the significance and direction of relationships among variables by using more advanced techniques, such as SEM, only a few studies have assessed the asymmetric relationships of the examined variables (Lee et al., 2020). Hence, we recommend future researchers to adopt an asymmetric approach, such as fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis and impact asymmetry analysis, to explain a complex phenomenon in tourism that cannot be explained by a symmetrical approach (e.g., regression and SEM). Notably, most scholars tend to emphasize a single study by using a cross-sectional

method, and thus, more longitudinal research is suggested for future studies on Thailand tourism. For example, in line with the dynamic development of tourism in the "new normal" era, a longitudinal study can be performed to examine whether tourist behavior changes over time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In accordance with Creswell (2012), a qualitative study is exploratory in nature, and thus, can contribute to gaining an in-depth understanding of a study phenomenon. Given that changes in travel patterns, tourism types, and tourist behavior are observed, and health and safety have come to the forefront of tourist needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, future researchers should use a qualitative approach (e.g., in-depth/online interview and netnography) to explain emerging aspects of tourism. Furthermore, other innovative procedures beyond traditional methods, such as visual content analysis (e.g., videos and photos), data mining, and machine learning should be adopted more to enhance knowledge on Thailand tourism.

5. Implication and conclusion

This work reviewed Thailand tourism research over the past 20 years to provide a reference point for understanding existing knowledge on Thailand tourism. To the best of the authors' knowledge, research focused on the synthesis of the current literature on Thailand tourism has been sparse, particularly evidenced by the limited number of empirical studies (Table 5). Hence, this study is among the first to conduct SLR for gaining more comprehensive insights into this topic. The results of this study include the identification of emergent research themes regarding tourism development in Thailand, their conceptualization based on the TCCM framework, and the analysis of research direction in response to the actual tourism development by the government. One of the major issues in the literature is related to the insufficient

investigation of the current dynamics of travel patterns, tourism domains, and behavioral changes of tourists in the "new normal" tourism era. Therefore, on the basis of the synthesis, we present the current dynamics of the literature that advance research agendas in the area of Thailand tourism.

In terms of research contributions, firstly, this study performed the in-depth analysis of Thailand tourism research over time. The evolution of concepts/theories and its current dynamic was discussed. Although research on Thailand tourism has grown for more than twenty years, the literature on this topic area is still developing and remains inconsistent, thereby suggesting that a systematic review is essential. As such, this study revealed the development of Thailand tourism literature with respect to the theory, context, characteristic, and methodology framework. This framework provides a steppingstone for future researchers who are interested in studying Thailand tourism.

Secondly, by synthesizing the Thailand tourism literature, this study identified some under-developed and unexamined areas and provides recommendations for future research stemming from the aspects that can enrich the literature. Particularly, the identification of dynamic evolution of concepts/variables, research themes and tourism domains has led to better understanding of the development of tourism in Thailand over the past two decades. For practical implication, this review offers implications for industry professionals and officials of tourism governmental bodies who are currently developing or are interested in developing strategies and policies for facilitating desirable tourist experience in the future.

Similar to other research, the current study is not without limitations. First, although the review protocols and criteria for selecting articles to analyze were developed on the basis of an extensive understanding of the topic, the keywords used may not be sufficiently comprehensive,

and thus, some relevant articles may have been discarded. Second, the selected articles were confined only to literature written in English and from high-quality journals available in *JCR*. This restriction could have omitted several articles published in other languages and from different databases. Future research is recommended to include literature from other sources to widen knowledge about tourism development in Thailand.

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