

**ชื่อเรื่อง** จินตทัศน์เกี่ยวกับการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวและผลกระทบการท่องเที่ยวของคนไทย

**Title** Thai residents' social representations of tourism development and its impact

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**บทคัดย่อ**

การวิจัยเรื่องนี้ศึกษาถึงจิตนทัศน์ทางสังคมด้านการท่องเที่ยวและการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวของประเทศไทยของคนกรุงเทพฯ โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1. ศึกษาจินตทัศน์ด้านการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวและผลกระทบการท่องเที่ยว 2. ศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ของการแลกเปลี่ยนทางสังคมที่มีผลต่อการจินตทัศน์ด้านการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวและผลกระทบของการท่องเที่ยว

การวิจัยครั้งนี้ได้นำทฤษฎีการนำเสนอทางสังคมและการแลกเปลี่ยนทางสังคม มาเป็นกรอบแนวคิดในการศึกษาผ่านวิธีวิทยาเชิงคุณภาพ โดยใช้วิธีการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก จำนวน 40 คนและการสัมภาษณ์แบบกลุ่มจำนวน 4 กลุ่ม โดยแบ่งกลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็น 2 กลุ่มคือ กลุ่มผู้ทำงานในอุตสาหกรรมด้านการท่องเที่ยวและกลุ่มผู้ที่อยู่นอกอุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยว

ผลการวิจัยพบว่ามีปัจจัย 6 ประการที่มีผลในการสร้างจิตนทัศน์ด้านการท่องเที่ยวและการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยว โดยแบ่งเป็นปัจจัยภายใน 4 ประการคือ ผลประโยชน์ส่วนตัว ลักษณะทางสังคมและเศรษฐกิจ ลักษณะนิสัยและประสบการณ์ และปัจจัยภายนอก 2 ประการคือ สื่อมวลชนและค่านิยมทางวัฒนธรรม โดยปัจจัยภายนอกมีส่วนสำคัญในการสร้างจิตนทัศน์ทางสังคมมากกว่าปัจจัยภายใน

**คำสำคัญ :** การพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยว ตัวแทนทางสังคม ผลกระทบของการท่องเที่ยว

## **Abstract**

This study examines the social representations of Thailand's tourism development and related social impact, as perceived by respondents from Bangkok, Thailand. Employing social representations theory (SRT) and social exchange theory (SET), this study adopts qualitative methods to obtain respondents' representations of tourism development in Bangkok. For the study, 40 in-depth interviews and 4 focus-group interviews were conducted with respondents who were either involved or not involved in the tourism industry. The two main issues considered were, firstly, the determination of the concepts used to perceive tourism development and its social impact among Thai people and, secondly, how social exchanges affect these perceptions. This study found six factors that affect individuals' social representations of tourism development and social impact: personal benefits, socio-economic background, cultural values, personal traits, socially derived and direct experiences. Of these, four were intrinsic factors—personal traits, direct experiences, individual benefits, and socio-economic backgrounds. The remaining two - socially derived and cultural values - were extrinsic factors. This study found that extrinsic factors were the main sources of individual representations and lead to hegemonic social representations.

**Keywords** : Tourism Development, social representations, tourism impacts, Thailand.

## **Introduction**

As in other developing countries, many Thai residents perceive tourism as a fast track to economic growth, considering that tourism to be an effective means of creating job opportunities and increasing local income, and contribute to national pride, cultural learning and cultural exchange experiences. Indeed, Thailand is one of the fastest growing countries in terms of tourism development in Southeast Asia. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) stated that Thailand's travel and tourism sector generated US\$37.2 billion, which constituted 14.7% of the capital GDP in 2009 (WTTC, 2009).

This research considered two main issues: firstly, how social representations of tourism development and its social impact are perceived among Thai residents, and, the second issue is: how do the social representations of tourism development and its social impact differ between those who benefit from tourism and those who do not. The aim here is to discover how the effects of benefits from tourism become incorporated into the social representations of tourism development.

### **Developing the theoretical framework**

The concept of social representations theory (SRT) was advanced in France in the 1960s by Moscovici. Moscovici defined "social representations as a multifaceted concept, which focuses on systems of values, ideas, images, and practices that have a 'two-fold function': 1) establishing 'an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it', and 2); facilitating communication 'amongst members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history" (Moscovici, 1973, p.251). According to Wagner et al. (1999, p.96), social representations are "the ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and explicit behaviour by the actors, which constitutes an object for a social group". They also note that it is a precondition that representations are always related to some social phenomenon or object in a way: that an object is not social by any of its characteristics, but by the way people relate to it (Wagner et al., 1999).

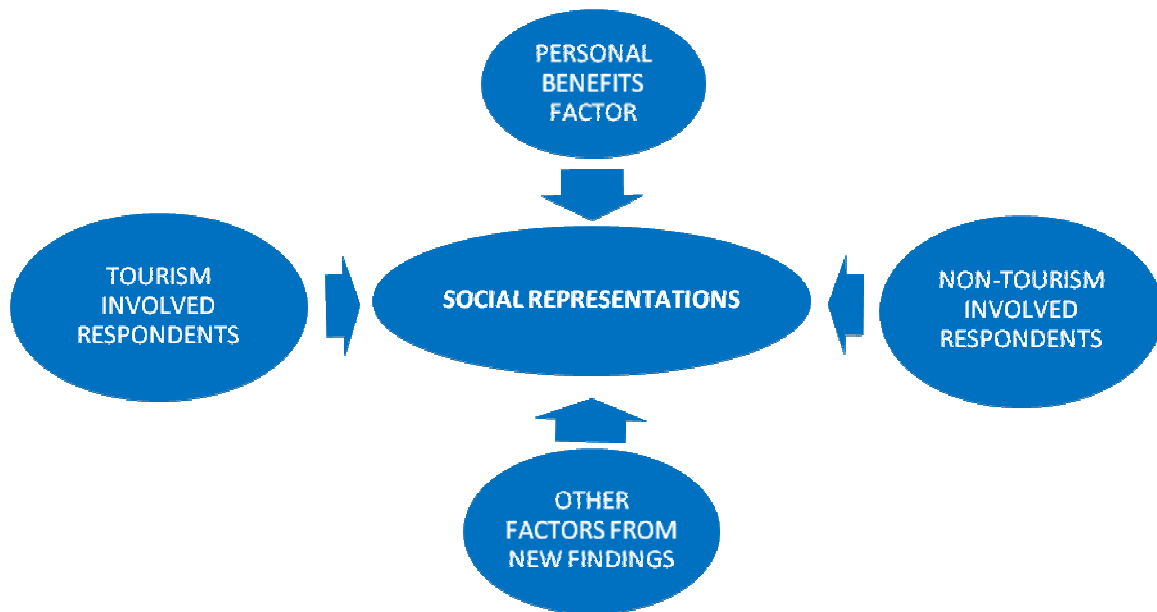
Several tourism studies have employed social representations theory to examine residents' perceptions towards tourism and its impact. Pearce et al. (1996) were the scholars who pioneered the extensive introduction of the concept of social representation as a means to understand community relationships within tourism. This study contends that SRT is appropriate to understand how certain Thai residents perceive their country's tourism development and its related social impact, and the relationships between their social-benefits exchange and their social representations. The indicator of the existence of social representations in the tourism field lies in identifying a central cluster of core images that communicate or portray social representations.

The second main theory is social exchange theory (SET), which is a social-psychological and sociological perspective which views social exchange as a process of negotiated exchanges between people in society (Homans, 1961). SET posits that all human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. A principal socio-psychological or behavioural-motivational assumption of exchange theory is that of human behavior as a function of reward and punishment, pleasure and pain, cost and benefit, gain and loss, pay-off, and the like (Homans, 1961, p. 12).

SET is adopted to explain the relationship between individuals' benefits and perceptions of tourism development and its impact. Homans (1958, 1961) introduced the concept of social exchange, which is conceptualised as a joint activity of two or more actors where each actor has something the other values. SET is variously employed in tourism studies (e.g. Ap 1990, 1992), which stipulate that residents seek the benefits of tourism in exchange for something estimated to equal the benefits they offer in return, such as resources provided to the tourism industry. In turn, residents offer support for appropriate development and tolerance for tourism-caused inconveniences.

In tourism studies, SET has been used to explain the relationship between residents' perception and tourism development which relies on a trade-off between the benefits and costs perceived by residents. "SET suggests that individuals will engage in exchanges if the resulting rewards are valued, and the exchange is likely to produce appreciated rewards, if perceived costs do not exceed perceived reward" (Skidmore, 1975 quoted in Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004, p.296.).

As can be seen, most tourism studies which have applied SET are based on economic benefits as the key factors and they postulated that residents who are involved in the tourism industry may have positive perceptions towards tourism and all that is related to it. Thus the basic precepts of the SET are implied in the research since SET assumes that individuals select exchanges after having assessed the costs and benefits involved (Homans, 1961).



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

This study applied the suggestion from Pearce et al (1996, pp.32-33) who stated that the use of SET to explain resident perceptions has three problems. Firstly it is based on an assumption that humans are 'systematic information processors' whereas psychological research suggests that in some cases it is more likely that they are 'cognitive misers'. Secondly, much of an individual's knowledge is socially derived, rather than the result of direct experience. Thirdly, people's perceptions are formed within a societal and historical context. Thus, the integration of SRT and SET is appropriate to explain individual perceptions and group representations by examining two groups: the tourism-involved group who have direct individual benefits from tourism industry, and the group not involved in tourism to compare and examine how individual benefits affect their representations. This research also finds other relevant factors which may shape respondents' representations.

## **Methodology**

This study employs qualitative research because it intends to generate a deep understanding of people's knowledge and experiences. Bangkok is an appropriate area for this research, as is a theoretical framework that adopts purposive sampling and snowballing as sampling strategies. Overall, 58 participants participated in this study. There were 40 in-depth interview interviewees and 18 informants in four group interviews. All participants were selected as part of a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sample of a specific population, and were asked to focus on a given topic. The participants in the group shared similar characteristics, including gender, age-range, ethnic, and/or social class background. The focus-group interview sessions were semi-structured with participants recruited by purposive and snowball techniques. Each focus group comprised a mix of 4–5 people made up from tourism and non-tourism backgrounds. During the focus groups, open-ended, pre-determined reflective questions were used, with a focus on the impact of tourism from a social perspective. Participant groups were categorised as follows: Group A: Five participants who work in tourism in managerial positions or as business owners. Group B: Four participants who work in tourism in operational positions. Group C: Four participants who work at the managerial level or as business owners in any fields other than tourism. Group D: Five participants who work at the operational levels in any field but tourism.

In the in-depth interviews sessions, respondents were asked opening questions regarding their perceptions of tourism in Thailand and of the meaning of tourism. In order to allow respondents to elicit and narrate their perceptions of tourism and its impacts, probing follow-up questions were asked. Further questions were asked to about each issue to clarify the respondents' perceptions. Respondents were free to narrate their experiences of tourism and of each its economic, cultural and environmental impacts. For the focus group interview sessions, the researcher encouraged all group participants to share their opinions about tourism, tourism development and its impacts. The researcher opened the

discussion on each of the issues concerning the impact of tourism development in Thailand. The questions in the interview guide were developed to reflect the theory discussed in the literature review.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data were categorised into six themes: tourism, tourism development, overall impact, economic impact, cultural impact, and environmental impact. The analysis consisted of considering responses to each topic as a group and drawing interpretive conclusions about commonly held beliefs, attitudes, or opinions. Implications for interventions were always considered. Data sheets were used to organize the data. A data sheet lists the major topics and sub-topics of the interview guide in order to record responses in a logical manner.

The data were then categorised in five key process stages: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation. The thematic approach develops from research questions and the narratives of research participants (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The data were verified by checking the credibility and validity of the information gathered by the following triangulation procedure, namely, by comparing and cross checking the data between everyday note-taking, diary entries, and taped transcripts of focus-group interviews and in-depth interviews.

### **Results**

Regarding research issue 1; the result shows that initial social representations of tourism relate to everyday meaning, ideas, and experiences. Respondents classified their meaning of tourism based on social experiences generated by their system of beliefs and values, such as the belief in the need for an enjoyable life and success.

This study found that the representation of tourism development is associated with the modernisation of infrastructure development, such as structurally impressive buildings and well-organised tourist places. It can be concluded that the notion of development in respondents related to the effectiveness of infrastructure as the way to modernize the country. It is evident that the impacts of

tourism development were perceived more positively than not, particularly in terms of economic development, and social and cultural exchange. Economic contribution is the benefit most perceived by respondents. Nevertheless, variations of attitudes did exist among respondents even within clusters. Respondents in the tourism industry were more concerned about and had negative opinions regarding the management authority, while non-tourism-involved respondents were less concerned with what tourism development meant to them. Respondents in the tourism industry were keen to see further tourism development in Thailand but they were concerned about the TAT's long-term plans. Respondents not involved in tourism had neutral attitudes, from which it may be concluded that they may have little knowledge about, or interest in, tourism development.

Overall, the perceptions of tourism development's impact were positive, there were some negative aspects perceived—for example, unplanned management, marketing orientation, and double standards between local and international tourists—which must be appropriately managed. As a result, it is important to understand residents' perceptions of these effects, because their representations reflect the reality of Thailand's tourism situation.

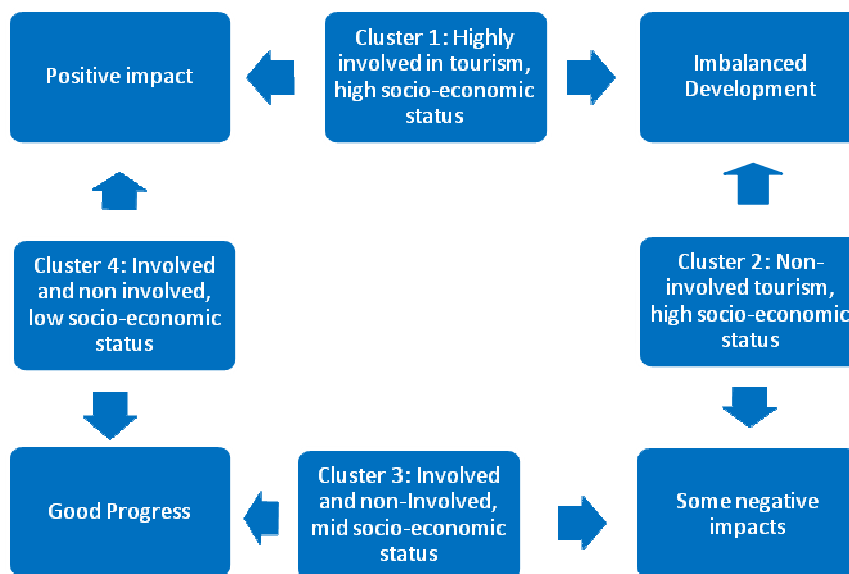
The representations of tourism development and social impact in respondents were reflected in social ways of thinking about tourism. As Wagner et al. (1999) stated, it is the way that a society builds customs and thinking. Respondents anchored information so that most unfamiliar developments were absorbed within familiar frameworks provided by existing social representations. For respondents who represented tourism as leisure, the most commonly used words and phrases are 'enjoyment', 'relaxation', and 'escape from work'. Respondents also remarked on revenue, so revenue was the peripheral representations of tourism. Perceptions of tourism development had in common the theme that tourism was the most important industry in Thailand. Respondents anchored and objectified this knowledge by employing their own experiences forming group norms. The study agreed with Fredline and Faulkner (2000) who pointed out that members of a community do not need to have the same representation. From the core social representations above, which were shared by both involved and non-tourism-



involved respondents, it can be said that the source of their knowledge comes from socially derived experiences, such as social interactions and the media, rather than their direct experiences. Their social representations transit between individual and collective representations. The initial knowledge of the word 'impact' caused them to think that there were problems or negative effects associated with the word. Then, when asked about economic impact, respondents automatically replied that the impact can be seen from both a positive and negative perspective. The source of information for their knowledge on social impact issues was mainly derived from social knowledge. Direct experiences helped them to make their social representations familiar.

Regarding research issue 2 is how the social representations of tourism development and its social impact differ between those who benefit from tourism and those who do not. The researcher utilised SET as a lens through which to consider this issue. This theory suggested that individuals would engage in exchanges if the resulting rewards were valued, the exchange was likely to produce appreciated rewards and perceived costs did not exceed perceived rewards (Homans, 1961; Skidmore, 1975). Several studies in the tourism context found that SET views community attitudes towards tourism development as a trade-off between the benefits and costs perceived by community members (e.g. Ap 1990; Gursoy, Jurowski & Uysal 2002).

The study found four clusters of respondents. Respondents in each cluster shared some common core representations as well as socio-economic status. These findings show that respondents who shared similar socio-economic status were likely to have the same social representations because they had similar value norms and experiences, but there were still intrinsic factors, such as personal traits that may affect their perceptions.

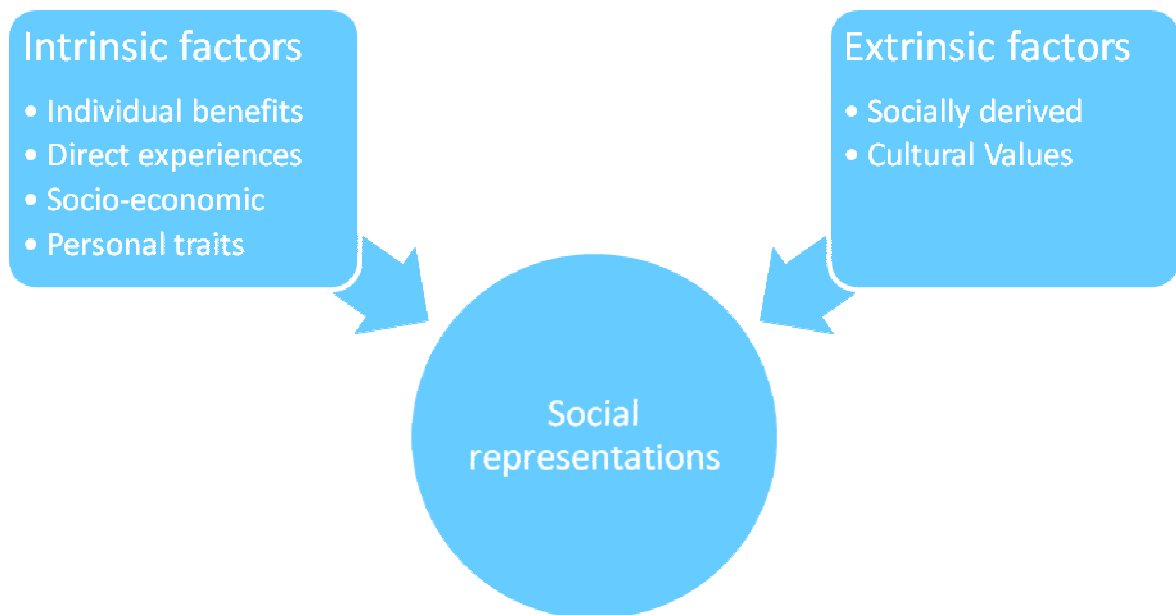


**Figure 2: Four clusters sharing common social representations**

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the four clusters and their social representations of tourism development and social impact. It is concluded that personal benefits partly played role in developing some social representations themes, especially social impact. Personal benefits were a significant factor in Clusters 1 and 2, which had either a high level of tourism involvement or a high socio-economic background. For example, Cluster 2 members commented on the negative impacts of many aspects, such as the economic impact of the higher cost of living, economic- centric development, cultural impact via cultural assimilation and environmental impact, such as 'land invaders' (overly tall buildings), which were part of tourism development anywhere in the world. By contrast, Cluster 1 members avoided comments regarding negative impact as they considered this to be a common phenomenon anywhere in the world. The comparison of social representation between Clusters 1 and 2 confirmed that personal benefits were associated with social representations of social impact, especially for respondents who had a high involvement in tourism, generally for those who had a high socio-economic status. They tended to give strong positive feedback on economic impact and saw cultural impact from a positive perspective.

Clusters 3 and 4 comprised respondents with middle to low socio-economic backgrounds. In middle socio-economic levels, benefits were partly important, but some respondents who were in tourism had negative opinions regarding social impact while some respondents who were not involved in tourism shared more positive thoughts regarding social impact. For those with low socio - economic levels, benefits were not a key factor and both those involved and not involved in tourism shared most of their social representations—relating positive comments regarding tourism developments and social impact. Thus, personal benefits do not play meaningful roles in these two clusters. The results showed that those highly involved in tourism shared social representations of tourism as contributing to national revenue, and of Thailand's tourism development as progressing slowly, hampered by red-tape management problems. Their statements were associated with government management and political problems because their business was partly in the tourism industry. Moreover, they perceived economic impact more positively, seeing its benefits as filtering through to the whole country, while cultural impact was represented as the products of tourism development. This group viewed environmental impact as a common problem and they mostly thought that the tourism industry had a social responsibility to reduce the causes of pollution. On the other hand, tourism-involved and non-tourism-involved respondents in mid-level management positions perceived tourism development in both positive and negative terms. They used more positive expressions about gradual development in terms of infrastructure. They favoured positive economic impact and see Thai culture as a tourism product. Some respondents in this cluster expressed concern regarding environmental impact.

This research found that the representations of tourism, tourism development, and social impact were related to intrinsic and extrinsic factors, which can be divided into six groups: personal benefits, socio-economic backgrounds, cultural values, personal traits, socially derived, and direct experiences. Of these, four were intrinsic factors—individual benefits, direct experiences, socio-economic backgrounds, and personal individual traits.



**Figure 3: Factors relates with social representations**

It is evident that in socio-economic backgrounds, cultural values, personal traits, and direct experience factors affect social representations of tourism development and its social impact. The study found that personal benefit was initial factor associated with social representations of tourism development, with the degrees of association relying on other factors, such as education, socio-economic background, and personal traits. As can be seen from the findings, respondents who had a shared educational, social, and work background were likely to have common representations; for example respondents who had high-level management positions in tourism shared many common social representations as they had a more positive view of social impact.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

This study concludes that social representations of tourism, tourism development and social impact are embodied both in communication and in individual minds. This is consistent with one of the features of social representations which is the distinction drawn between the reified and consensual universes. The consensual universe is the everyday commonsense explanation of phenomena and

objects whereas the reified universe is the knowledge assumed to be guided by systematic rules and procedures (Magioglou, 2003; Moscardo, 2009; Moscovici, 2000).

It is evident that there were several factors as discussed previously; personal benefits, personal traits, socio economic, social derived, cultural values and direct experience which formulated people's perceptions. It can be seen that the extrinsic factors such as media and cultural values had influenced the formulation of hegemonic representations shared by Thai people. For example, there are common notions: tourism contributes economically to Thailand; Thailand is the land of smiles; we are proud of our Thai culture. Then, the intrinsic factors such as direct experiences, personal benefits, personal traits and socio-economic background are the factors that lead to each individual having different representations towards tourism development and its impact. These factors formulate respondents' peripheral representations from core representations.

From the theoretical angle, this research makes a number of contributions to the body of knowledge on social representation and social exchange. This study confirms that the integration of SET and SRT provides an alternative research framework in which to identify residents' perceptions towards tourism development and its impact by optimising the benefits and minimising the problems arising from tourism development. By combining the two theories, this study has enabled the finding of shared dimensions by which social representations are organised. This study answers the two research issues as discussed in previous sections, which aim to bring a better understanding of the social representations of tourism development in Thailand. The findings are consistent with Pearce et al. (1996, p. 59), who stated that "SRT is particularly appropriate when the topic of study involves multiple social perspectives, provides challenges, difficulties, and conflicts due to change, and features the communication of ideas in the public arena which is well suited to study in the tourism context."

The practical contribution of this thesis is very significant as these results can assist the Thai government to review tourism development issues and provide more effective management. It can be

concluded that this thesis will raise the attention of the government and Tourism Authority of Thailand to evaluate their performance and to communicate and efficiently collaborate with other tourism stakeholders and residents. Regarding the practical significance and contribution, it is believed that the findings can raise the attention of government as the policy planner and the tourism authority of Thailand as the managerial organisation to diffuse legitimate knowledge regarding the concept of tourism development and its social impact through media. It can be noted that the social representations of tourism development and social impact are still new issues, and so far, in Thailand, not much thought has been given to residents or those not directly involved in the tourism industry.

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