THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POTENTIAL CHINESE TOURISTS' MOTIVATION, EXPOSURE TO eWOM AND INTENTION TO TRAVEL TO THAILAND
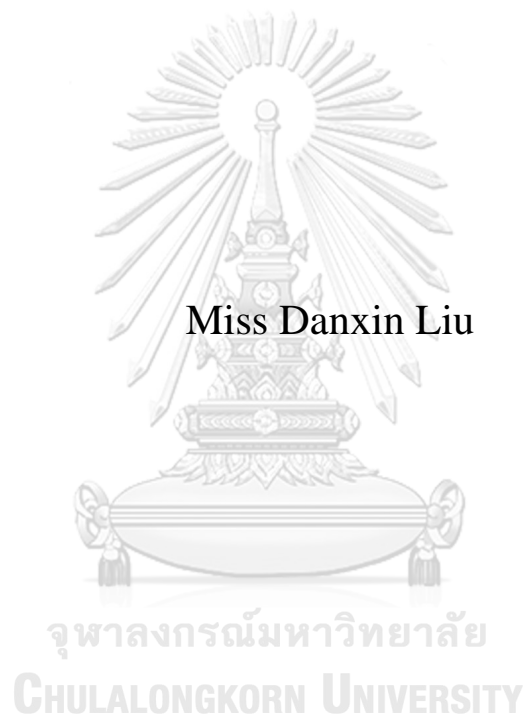
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ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างแรงจูงใจของนักท่องเที่ยวจีน การเปิดรับการสื่อสารแบบบอกต่อผ่านสื่อ
อิเล็กทรอนิกส์และความตั้งใจเดินทางมาประเทศไทย

น.ส.ดานซิน หลิว

Independent Study Title	THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POTENTIAL CHINESE TOURISTS' MOTIVATION, EXPOSURE TO eWOM AND INTENTION TO TRAVEL TO THAILAND
By	Miss Danxin Liu
Field of Study	Strategic Communication Management
Thesis Advisor	Associate Professor WORAWAN ONGKRUTRAKSA, Ph.D.

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ดานซิน หลิว : ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างแรงจูงใจของนักท่องเที่ยวจีน การเปิดรับการสื่อสารแบบบอกต่อผ่านสื่อ อิเล็กทรอนิกส์และความตั้งใจเดินทางมาประเทศไทย. (THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POTENTIAL CHINESE TOURISTS' MOTIVATION, EXPOSURE TO eWOM AND INTENTION TO TRAVEL TO THAILAND) อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : วรวรรณ องค์ครุฑรักษา

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างแรงจูงใจของนักท่องเที่ยวจีนในการเดินทางมาประเทศ ไทย การเปิดรับการสื่อสารแบบบอกต่อผ่านสื่ออิเล็กทรอนิกส์ และความตั้งใจเดินทางมาประเทศไทย รวมถึงความสัมพันธ์ ระหว่างแรงจูงใจของนักท่องเที่ยวจีนกับการเปิดรับการสื่อสารแบบบอกต่อผ่านสื่ออิเล็กทรอนิกส์ และความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการ เปิดรับการสื่อสารแบบบอกต่อผ่านสื่ออิเล็กทรอนิกส์กับความตั้งใจเดินทาง ซึ่งการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณในครั้งนี้นั้นดำเนินการผ่านการ จัดทำแบบสอบถามออนไลน์โดยการเก็บข้อมูลรวม 200 ชุดจากกลุ่มตัวอย่างชายและหญิงชาวจีนอายุระหว่าง 18 ถึง 70 ปี และไม่เคยเดินทางไปยังประเทศไทยแต่มีความตั้งใจที่จะเดินทาง

ผลของการวิจัยนำเสนอให้เห็นว่า แรงจูงใจภายในที่ทำให้สนใจเดินทางไปประเทศไทยคือ การได้รับความรู้ ส่วน แรงจูงใจภายนอกคือ โปรโมชั่น นอกจากนี้กลุ่มตัวอย่างเปิดรับสื่อแบบบอกต่อผ่านสื่ออิเล็กทรอนิกส์มากที่สุดจากผู้ที่ไม่ได้มี ความใกล้ชิด และกลุ่มตัวอย่างมีความตั้งใจเดินทางไปประเทศไทยด้วยทัศนคติที่ดีต่อการเดินทางไปประเทศไทย ทั้งนี้ การวิจัย บ่งบอกว่ามีความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างแรงจูงใจของนักท่องเที่ยวจีนกับการเปิดรับการสื่อสารแบบบอกต่อผ่านสื่ออิเล็กทรอนิกส์ ($r = 0.721$) และมีความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการเปิดรับการสื่อสารแบบบอกต่อผ่านสื่ออิเล็กทรอนิกส์กับความตั้งใจเดินทาง ($r = 0.720$)

สาขาวิชา	การจัดการการสื่อสารเชิงกล ยุทธ์	ลายมือชื่อนิสิต ....
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The objectives of this research are to examine the potential Chinese tourists' internal and external motivation to travel to Thailand, exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand, and intention to travel to Thailand, as well as the relationship between tourists' motivation and exposure to eWOM, and the relationship between exposure to eWOM and travel intention. The quantitative research was conducted by an online survey, collecting data from 218 Chinese male and female respondents aged between 18 and 70 years old who have not visited Thailand before but have the intention to travel there.

The results show that (1) the sample's strongest internal motivation to travel to Thailand is gaining knowledge while the strongest external motivation is current decision factors such as promotions; (2) the respondents are exposed to eWOM more from weak-tie information sources; and (3) they intend to travel to Thailand with a favorable attitude toward traveling to Thailand. Moreover, the research results demonstrate exposure to eWOM is highly related to tourists' motivation ($r = 0.721$) and their travel intention ($r = 0.720$).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Significance of the Study

Nowadays, traveling abroad is not a privilege for the happy few anymore, but a common and trendy lifestyle for global citizens. Tourism has become a major industry and a dominant sector in many economies, especially for developing countries. (World Tourism Organization, n.d.) Meanwhile, China remains the world's biggest outbound tourism market with nearly 150 million outbound visitors (including tourists from mainland China traveling to Taiwan, Hongkong and Macau) and an estimated consumption abroad of 120 billion US dollars in 2018, according to a recent report by China Tourism Academy and Ctrip Travel Big Data (Cheng, 2019). The report also indicates the most popular destinations for Chinese outbound tourists are Thailand and Japan, while countries including Vietnam, Serbia, and Turkey are also hot destinations competing for the market share.

As the most popular outbound destination for Chinese tourists (China Tourist Academy, 2018), Thailand has witnessed an enormous growth of inbound visitors and tourism revenue over the past ten years. The revenue from travel and tourism contributed to 12.3% of Thailand's GDP in 2018 (Adulwattana & Pitakard, 2019). Among that, the number of Chinese visitors has increased even more dramatically from only 0.8 million to 10.5 million over the past decade (as shown in Figure 1.1), now accounting for 27.5% of total visitors (Adulwattana & Pitakard, 2019).

Figure 1.1 Statistics of Tourism in Thailand

Chart 3: Number of Chinese Tourists in Thailand

Persons mn

Year	Persons mn
2008	0.8
2009	0.8
2010	1.1
2011	1.7
2012	2.8
2013	4.6
2014	4.6
2015	7.9
2016	8.8
2017	9.8
2018	10.5
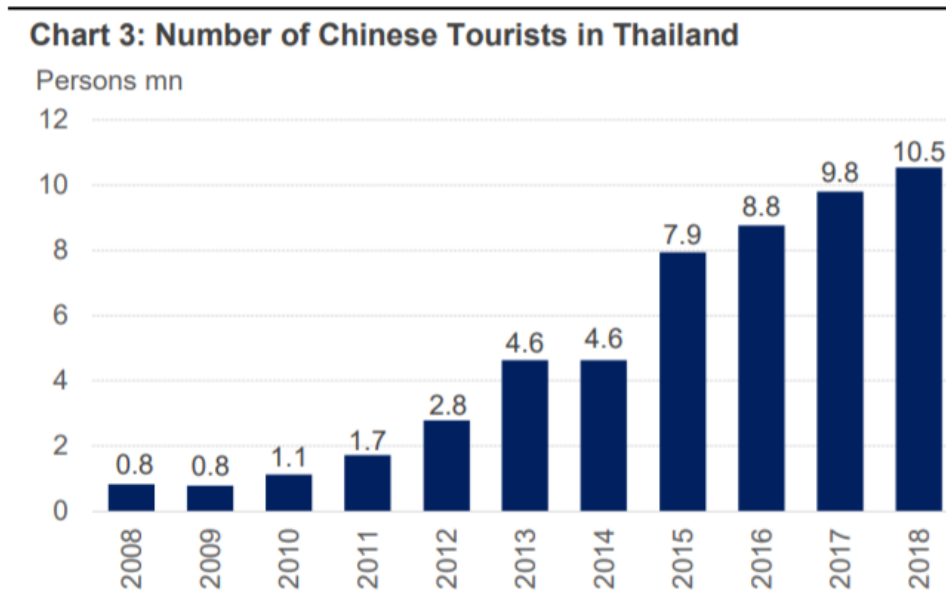
Source: Adulwattana, B. & Pitakard, B. (2019). *Tourism: Still a reliable driver of growth?* Retrieved September 24, 2019, from https://www.bangkokbank.com/th-TH/International-Banking/-/media/dc98bd4dd875455299b0c207bf16f2ac.ashx

Hence, this research intends to study about Chinese traveling to Thailand, combining the biggest outbound market with the most popular destination in terms of the following perspectives.

Firstly, why Chinese tourists choose Thailand as the top destination? Tourists are faced with numerous destination choices, while traveling abroad is still a low-frequency behavior. Thus, where they decide to go is vital for tourism marketers. Since the cost and risk of traveling abroad is comparatively higher than the daily consumption, consumers usually take a complicated decision-making process (Hanlan

& Kelly, 2004). Decision-makers are influenced by interacted factors of personality, learning process, motivation, perception, and attitudes, among which, motivation plays the role of triggering tourism behaviors (Moutinho, 1987). Thus, marketers must analyze what motivations influence the individual's travel decisions for further actions in the area of tourism marketing (Moutinho, 1987).

Secondly, what can tourism marketers do to promote destinations more effectively? Because of the increasing competitiveness in the field of tourism, the role of marketing communications is a primary tool to attract more potential tourists and build up a good destination image (Švajdová, 2018). Marketing communications used to be practiced mainly by traditional tools like advertising, exhibition, etc., but now in the digital era of Web 2.0, which enables internet users to both create and distribute content (Sigala, Christou, & Gretzel, 2012), social media are gaining prominence as a key element of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) marketing strategy. Social media offers DMOs with a tool to reach a global audience with limited budget and resources (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013), but the way to communicate via social media might be very different from the traditional methods. One of the major differences exists in the fact that Web 2.0 is now turning travelers into co-marketers and co-consumers of travel experiences, as the applications of Web 2.0 enable travelers to co-produce and share a huge amount of information namely User-Generated Content (UGC) (Sigala et al., 2012). UGC has been found to have a great impact on consumers' decision-making process and has been exploited for effective communication and business operation (Švajdová, 2018).

User-Generated Content can be various. One specific type of UGC strongly related to marketing strategy about product or company is electronic word-of-mouth

(eWOM) (Rodgers & Wang, 2011). The concept of eWOM marketing develops from WOM marketing, which is focused on the effect of the oral spread of advertising between customers to create marketing buzz (Švajdová, 2018). Indeed, eWOM is an essential way to spread a brand's message on the internet and turn a product into a hit product or a place into a hot destination (Solomon, 2017). For example, a stall where a beautiful Thai lady selling fruit shake in Train Night Market Ratchada became a famous spot for Chinese tourists after her videos were posted on the platform TikTok, which has got millions of views, likes, and comments (see Firgure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 "Thailand Fruit Beauty" Becomes Famous Online

Source: Fengzheng. (2019). *Goody25*. Retrieved November 20, 2019, from https://www.goody25.com/mind765107

Therefore, this research attempts to analyze eWOM and its relationship with Chinese tourists' motivation and travel intention to Thailand, as it might be a promising marketing communications tool to promote the destination image and

stimulate more consumer purchases in the new digital era.

Recently, eWOM has attracted the attention of researchers, and there is a considerable amount of research about eWOM in tourism. These studies can be mainly classified into two streams: one stream focuses on exploring the factors determining eWOM behavior, the other stream centers around the impacts of eWOM on consumers' behavior (Wang, 2015). However, research on the relationship between eWOM and travel motivation can barely be found. Furthermore, although there are some studies that pay attention to the influence of eWOM on travel intention (Miao, 2015; Wang, 2015), previous studies did not make a clear line between the potential visitors and the tourists who have visited the destination before, whereas the information processing can be very different. Considering that the 71.25 million Chinese tourists who traveled to foreign countries in 2018 only took up less than 5% of the population (Cheng, 2019), the stakeholders need to focus more on drawing the potential Chinese tourists to visit the target destination.

For these reasons, this study aims to gain knowledge about the relationship between the potential Chinese tourists' travel motivation, exposure to eWOM, and travel intention, which will provide further guidelines on Chinese tourists and tourism in Thailand for practical and academic purposes.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To analyze the potential Chinese tourists' internal and external motivation to travel to Thailand, exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand, and the intention to travel to Thailand.

2. To study the relationship between the potential Chinese tourists' motivation to

travel to Thailand and exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand.

3. To study the relationship between the potential Chinese tourists' exposure to eWOM and intention to travel to Thailand.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the potential Chinese tourists' internal and external motivation to travel to Thailand, exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand, and the intention to travel to Thailand?

2. What is the relationship between the potential Chinese tourists' motivation to travel to Thailand and exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand?

3. What is the relationship between the potential Chinese tourists' exposure to eWOM and intention to travel to Thailand?

1.4 Scope of the Study

The research object was focused on the Chinese residents who have never visited Thailand before and have the intention to travel for leisure in the future as the potential Chinese tourists. A survey was conducted in October 2019, to draw the opinions from 200 Chinese male and female respondents about tourism in Thailand concerning travel motivation, exposure to eWOM and travel intention, with the aim of understanding the three variables and the relationship between them in the background of tourism behavior, and providing suggestion for further study and marketing communications practice, especially in terms of eWOM marketing.

1.5 Operational Definitions

Travel Motivation refers to the reason why people travel. In the scope of leisure tourism, people travel for complex sets of internal and external motivators, which can be described with a "push-and-pull" framework (Lubbe, 1998).

Push factors come from the needs inside the tourists, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs of physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, as well as knowledge and aesthetics (Lubbe, 1998).

Pull factors exist in the destination character, including static, dynamic, and current decision factors. Static factors are intrinsic and stable elements such as landscape, climate, and local culture; dynamic factors include elements such as accommodation, catering, service, and political conditions; current decision factors are the marketing and prices in both the region of destination and origin (Lubbe, 1998).

Exposure to eWOM about traveling to Thailand is conceptualized by person-specific accessibility to online consumer reviews (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012) as how often the respondents read or consult other tourists' online travel reviews (1) to know what destinations make good impression on others, (2) to make sure choosing right destinations, (3) to help choose an attractive destination (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

Since consumers usually have a wide range of relationship tie on online media, this research applies tie strength theory to divide eWOM into strong-tie information, as eWOM from people known each other on social networking platforms, and weak-tie information, as eWOM from online strangers on other platforms such as shopping websites, consumer review websites, and blogs (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Both types of eWOM are assessed by the same conceptualization of

exposure to eWOM.

Intention to Travel to Thailand concerns an individual's intention to travel by his or her motivational disposition, which is facilitated by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model. According to TPB, an individual's travel intention involves three factors: (1) Attitude toward the behavior (i.e., evaluating the behavior as good, worthwhile, valuable, etc.), (2) Subjective norms (i.e., believing that significant others will approve of conducting this behavior), and (3) Perceived behavioral control (i.e., considering it possible for them to carry out the behavior) (Ajzen, 1991).

1.6 Benefit of the Study

1. Generate a general idea of tourists' motivation, behavior intention, and their relationship with eWOM as a prototype, for a better understanding and prediction of consumer behavior in tourism.

2. Provide practical suggestions for the stakeholders with strategic use of eWOM marketing that can drive more potential visitors to choose the suggested place as a top destination.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter gives an overview of key concepts in this research, involving travel motivation, eWOM, and the Theory of Planned Behavior. Related research will also be presented to shed light on the study framework. The final part of this chapter concludes the research hypotheses and illustrates the research framework.

For travel motivation, it will first give the definition and suggest the push-and-pull orientation, then clarifies the push factors and pull factors respectively. The next part will first briefly introduce the development of eWOM, then demonstrate the possible role of eWOM in travelers' decision-making process. Tie strength will also be reviewed to identify different types of eWOM. Lastly, the Theory of Planned Behavior will be analyzed to suggest travel intention in this study.

2.1 Travel Motivation

Motivation is the answer to why people travel (Mill & Morrison, 1985). In our scope of the study, we want to know why potential tourists choose a certain destination before they take the trip. Researchers have defined travel-related motivation as an individual becomes aware of certain needs or desires and perceives that certain destination can satisfy their needs (Lubbe, 1998). At the point when an individual is motivated to travel, a primary image of the destination is formed (Lubbe, 1998).

Hudman (1980) argues that leisure travel motivation is subject to a push-pull

tendency. Push force comes from inside the individual, relating to their own needs and desires, while pull force derives from the destination character, which attracts the individual to move toward a certain direction. Chon (1989) also contends that push and full factors are operating together, constructing the overall travel motivation.

2.1.1 Push Factors and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model

Push factors are usually seen as dominant motivations. Dann (1977) argues that while a certain resort may hold some attractions for the potential tourists, their actual decision to visit is consequent on their prior need for travel. Thus, push factors can be logically and temporally regarded as antecedent to that of push factors.

Push factors are intangible (Plookraksa, 2018), and usually been analyzed from a socio-psychological perspective (Dann, 1977). Crompton (1979) suggests that the answer to "What makes tourists travel" lies primarily in the socio-psychological needs for love and communication, as well as the requirement to enhance ego. Then, a holiday is undertaken in response to the motivation, serving as opportunities for ego enhancement, personal enrichment, or refreshment.

As we talk about human needs as motivations for behavior, Maslow's hierarchy of needs model, shown in Figure 2.1, is a classic framework as it provides comprehensive coverage of human needs organized into a hierarchy model (Chon, 1989). Dann (1977) and Hudman (1980) further suggests that Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a basis for push factors. Compared with Crompton (1979)'s framework, Maslow's hierarchy of needs model is more general and inclusive, as it starts from the basic physical survival needs such as food, sleep, and rest. It is reasonable because a pleasurable vacation should first satisfy fundamental

needs like food and good rest. The other major difference exists in the hierarchy of needs from lower to higher levels, demonstrating that more basic needs must be satisfied before moving up to higher-level needs. However, as a human is motivated by a complex set of factors, Maslow (1943) further points out that most of our behavior is multi-motivated.

Figure 2.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model
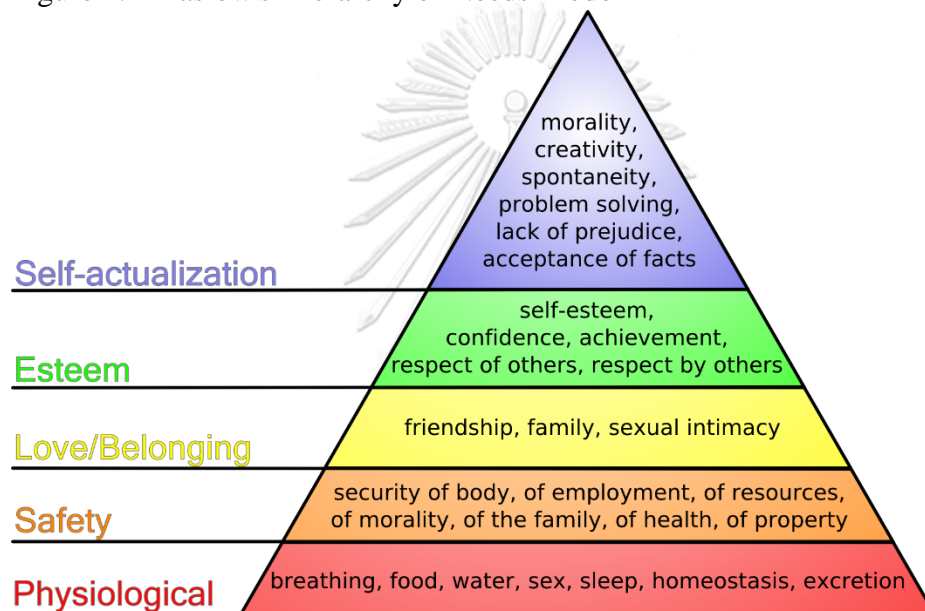
Source: Jayson. (2012). *Har-mo-ny*. Retrieved September 27, 2019, from http://har-mo-ny.com/wordpress/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs/

.

As we apply the five levels of needs to tourist motivation, we can link each level with different tourism-related behaviors. The Five levels are: (1) physiological needs, including food, clothing, shelter, air, sex and other necessities of life (Maslow, 1943), which can be related with destination restaurant, hotel, sex appeal and the forth; (2) safety or security needs (Maslow, 1943), which can be associated with the local safety facilities and security administration; (3) belonging and love needs

(Maslow, 1943), which can be satisfied by social interaction with local people, or enhancement of relationship among friends or families; (4) esteem, including self-confidence, competence, prestige and status (Maslow, 1943), which can be gained by accomplishment of some important tasks, receive of respect from others, enhancement of self-image and the like; (5) self-actualization, including morality, creativity, problem solving, etc. (Maslow, 1943), which can be achieved with some challenging project, culmination of a long-held dream (Hudman, 1980), desire for contact with nature and strong emotional peak experience (Chon, 1989).

Other than the five levels of physical and psychological needs from Maslow's model, Mill and Morrison (1985) add two intellectual needs to push factors in tourist motivation, which are knowledge and aesthetics. The need for acquiring knowledge means people travel to learn others' cultures. The need for aesthetic is seen in those who travel to view the scenery or art. The five items from Maslow's hierarchy of needs model plus these two additional needs are used to generate the questionnaire for the push factors in this study's survey.

2.1.2 Pull Factors

Pull factors are considered as the external force of a destination and its attributes (Cha, McCleary, & Uysal, 1995). While the push factors are traditionally thought to be useful for explaining the desire to go on a vacation, pull motives are usually considered as useful for explaining the choice of a certain destination over the other alternatives (Crompton, 1979). Chon (1989) and Dann (1981) notes that pull factors of the destination both respond to and reinforce push factors in the course of weighing up the pre-trip decision.

Even though we place importance on both push and pull factors in this research, pull factors do receive many more challenges in past studies.

Tangible or intangible? When researches use attractiveness or attribute to describe pull factors, the elements are usually tangible (Amonhaemanon & Amornhaymanon, 2015; Chon, 1989; Lubbe, 1998; Plookraksa, 2018). Those factors include beaches or scenic resources, historical and cultural attractions, tourist activities, events, cost of tourism products, and quality of services (Amonhaemanon & Amornhaymanon, 2015). However, Crompton (1979) discovers in his interview that consumers motivated by socio-psychological motives are not looking for the uniqueness of a certain destination. Thus, he proposes the pull factors as cultural motives including novelty and education, instead of tangible attributes.

Independent or correlated? Although push and pull factors have been viewed as relating to two distinct perspectives, several pieces of research have argued that they cannot be considered as operating entirely independent of each other (Klenosky, 2002). The researcher also utilizes the means-end theory to demonstrate that particular pull factors are related to specific push factors.

Necessary or unnecessary? Crompton (1979) argues that push factors may be useful not only in explaining the initial desire to travel but may also be able to direct the tourist toward a certain destination. He further concludes from the interviews that the satisfaction of needs was neither related to nor derived from a particular destination's attribute. Dann (1981) states that potential tourists may take into consideration various pull factors corresponding to their push motivation, but a pull factor is not a necessary component of the desire to travel.

Despite the above disputes on the pull factors, this research still takes into

account the tangible features and attributes of the destination, as we are taking Thailand as the specific destination. The various attractions which are distinct from other destinations and related to the outstanding tourist performance should be examined as an integrated part with push factors, acting together to function as antecedent events for potential tourists' motivation (Plookraksa, 2018).

The pull factors can be organized into three categories, (1) static factors, including the natural and cultivated landscape, climate, transportation to that region and in that region, historical and local cultural attractions; (2) dynamic factors, including accommodation, catering, personal attention and service, entertainment and sport, access to the market, political conditions and current trends in tourism; (3) current decision factors, including that marketing of the destination and price to travel in the region of destination and country of origin (Witt & Moutinho, 1989, as cited in Lubbe, 1998). The attractiveness depends on the qualities associated with the determinants as well as the interactions between them (Lubbe, 1998). These three categories are used to measure the push factors in this survey.

2.2 Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

2.2.1 From WOM to eWOM

Word-of-mouth generally refers to information exchange behavior among customers and has been found a powerful force in influencing consumer behavior (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Historically, tourism researchers have found that WOM as the advice from friends and relatives is the most frequently obtained and influential source of information used by travelers in their decision-making process (Crotts, 2000; Perdue, 1993; Dey & Sarma, 2010). The information communicated by friends

and relatives is believed to be more credible, honest, and trustworthy than that generated by marketers, such as advertisements or editorial recommendations, since consumers perceive that the WOM communicators are not compensated for the referral (Pan & Crotts, 2012).

While WOM communication initially refers to the interpersonal conversation in a face-to-face manner, the worldwide spread of the internet and the Web 2.0 technologies (e.g., online discussion forums, consumer review sites, weblogs, social network sites, etc.) brought up the upgraded version of WOM communication, the so-called electronic WOM communication. It is a powerful combination of the significant role of traditional WOM and the prevailing strength of internet-based communication. This new form of WOM communication has become an important source for consumer opinions (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011), and it is assumed to be more effective than traditional WOM due to its greater accessibility, rich forms of content, and timeliness (Chatterjee, 2001; Volo, 2012). Nevertheless, the interpersonal influence of WOM now encompasses advice from circles of friends and relatives as well as strangers in various eWOM online platforms, such as travel blogs or consumer review websites (Volo, 2012; Pan & Crotts, 2012). Later we will explain the tie strength with eWOM.

2.2.2 Exposure to eWOM in Travel Decision-making Process

As we recognized previously that WOM or eWOM is a dominant source of information in tourists' decision making (Crotts, 2000; Perdue 1993, Dey & Sarma, 2010), it is helpful to check the travel decision-making process and the role of eWOM in it.

Firstly, WOM or eWOM is essential in information search. Researchers consider a three stages process for information search: the need for travel, information search for a tourism destination and alternatives, and the evaluation of selective options (Hamidizadeh, Cheh, Moghadam, & Salimipour, 2016). Figure 2.2 is composed to help illustrate the process. From this process, we might refer that motivation as a need for travel would navigate information search behavior, and the information search would influence the final evaluation and decision. The stage of information search can be divided into the internal search of prior knowledge and the external search from media or WOM/eWOM. People who have not been satisfied with prior knowledge, which is mainly from previous experience, seek external information. Thus, we can suggest that the information search of eWOM might comprise a larger proportion of the information processing for first-time visitors.

Figure 2.2 Three Stages of Information Search Process
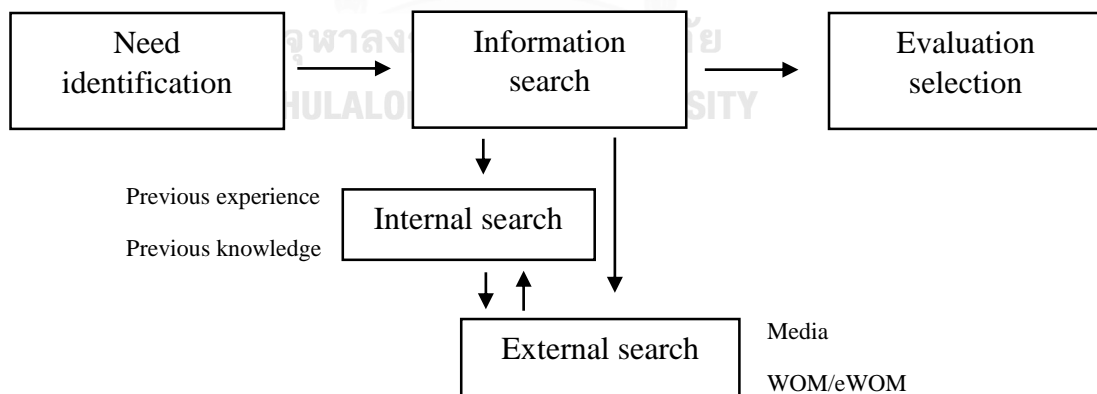
Compared to retailing products, tourism products are intangible and high in uncertainty due to the difficulty of pre-consumption evaluation (Hanlan & Kelly, 2004). Moreover, tourism products have a high degree of involvement, as they are

usually expensive and risky (Hanlan & Kelly, 2004). Therefore, most travelers would undertake extensive information searches and look for advice from peers to gain recommendations actively (Hanlan & Kelly, 2004).

Secondly, eWOM might also be considered as an emerging travel stimulus that can arouse people's desires or needs to travel. Traditionally, travel stimuli are comprised of advertising and promotion, travel literature, travel reports, travel trade recommendations, etc. (Moutinho, 1987), while WOM offline has few reaches compared with the advertising in the old time. However, with the revolution of social media, people are building online communities, where people in social networks feel the need to check the posts constantly on Facebook, Twitter and the forth (Solomon, 2017). The compulsion is referred to as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). One report about "Millennial Travel Trends" (2016) points 87% of millennials are looking at Facebook for travel inspiration. On the other hand, people love to share their traveling experiences on social media. A survey by Chase Card Services revealed that while on a trip, 60% of travelers, and 97% of Millennial travelers, share their travel photos ("Millennials most likely," 2014). In China, people share their travel photos on WeChat Moments (see Figure 2.3), and it is concluded that Chinese people can "travel around the world" by browsing WeChat Moments in holidays (GQ, 2019). Hence, this study hypothesizes online users' exposure to the eWOM about different destinations may also lead to stimulating travel motivation.

Figure 2.3 WeChat Moments Travel Posts Examples

Source: GQ. (2019). *WeChat Moment traveling around the world report.* Retrieved November 18, 2019, from https://user.guancha.cn/main/content?id=182000

For these reasons above, this research proposes the hypothesis that the exposure to eWOM is correlated to potential travelers' motivation in both ways and is related to travel intention.

2.2.3 Tie Strength and eWOM

Tie strength can refer to the level of intensity of the social relationship between consumers or the degree of overlap of two individuals' friendship (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Since WOM is characterized as interpersonal communication, interpersonal relationship strength could have some impact on WOM communication, although there are limited research and less-developed result about their relationship. With the advance of various online social media, nowadays consumers generally have a wide range of relationship ties online ranging from strong ties such as with close

friends and family members to weak ties such as those with acquaintances barely know each other or strangers (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Some researchers point out the difference between social networking platforms such as Facebook, Lines, WeChat and other online platforms such as discussion forums, consumer review sites, blogs and shopping websites (Erkan & Evans, 2016). The former enables online users to communicate with people whom they already know, while the latter allows eWOM to occur between anonymous users (Dellarocas, 2003).

Some researches consider the anonymity, or weak tie, as an advantage for eWOM since it leads consumers to share their opinions more comfortably (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). On the contrary, some other researchers argue that eWOM from strong-tie sources holds more credibility (Chu & Choi, 2011; Gillin, 2007). Therefore, this research will separate the eWOM from strong-tie sources and platforms to weak-tie sources and platforms to gain more insight for further study.

As to measure exposure to eWOM from both strong and weak tie sources, this research uses three items from the six-item measurement for "susceptibility to online product reviews" (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Since this study focuses on the potential tourists who have not yet decided the destination, we only select the three items that are not concerned with "before/when I travel to a certain destination".

2.3 Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is considered a general framework in which to explain and predict consumer behavior, based on a person's motivational choices and intention (Ajzen, 1991; Hartmann, 2009). The TPB is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), by adding an extra independent determinant,

perceived behavioral control, to together explain and predict behavioral intention (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Kim and Noh (2015) test these two consumer behavior theories and indicate that the TPB provides a means for a better prediction of travel abroad behavior.

According to the TPB (see Figure 2.4), consumer behavior is determined by the integration of an intention and the degree of an individual's control over the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, behavior that is at least to a certain degree under volitional control will be performed if people want to perform it and they have resources and abilities to do so (Hartmann, 2009). The TPB hypothesizes that behavior is driven by behavioral intentions, which is influenced and explained by three factors: (1) a favorable attitude toward the behavior (i.e., evaluating the behavior as good, worthwhile, valuable, etc.), (2) subjective norms (i.e., believing that important others will approve of conducting this behavior), and (3) a perceived behavioral control over the behavior (i.e., considering it possible for them to carry out the behavior) (Ajzen, 1991; Hartmann, 2009).

Figure 2.4 Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior
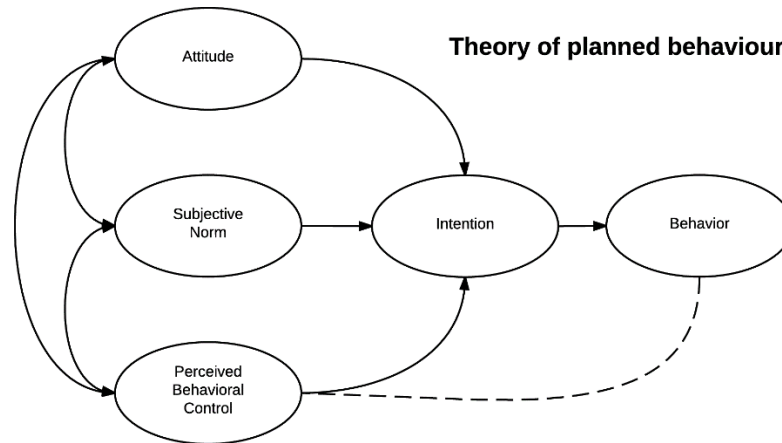
Source: Theory of Planned Behavior. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved September 27, 2019, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_planned_behavior.

These three factors and behavioral intention help generate the questionnaire in this study's survey, with the questions adapted from Plookraksa (2018), concerning attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and intention.

2.4 Related Research

Plookraksa (2018) conducts a study about traveling to Japan, a popular destination among Thai tourists. She notices that the number of Thai visitors to Japan has been increasing significantly every year, and Japan is also a top destination that meets the demands of Asia Pacific travelers who prioritize familiarity and accessibility. She utilizes the concept of exposure to integrated marketing communications, which includes online media, traditional media and people as the key variable that correlates with travelers' motivation and travel intention. The result indicates that online media would be the main channel for exposure to information

about tourism in Japan. Moreover, there is a positive relationship between motivation and exposure to IMC, as well as a positive relationship between exposure to IMC and intention to travel.

Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) point out the fact that in the tourism industry, there has been a reduction in consumer trust of both organizations and advertising, while eWOM offers a way to obtain a significant competitive advantage. Therefore, they investigate the impact of eWOM on a tourism destination choice, applying the Theory of Planned Behavior. They first adapt the measurement of susceptibility to online product reviews from Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) to tourism behavior, to predict the impact of eWOM about tourism information on travelers' behavior. The finding reveals that online WOM communications have a significant impact on attitudes toward visiting behavior, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and intention to travel. Besides, travel experience does have a considerable impact on using eWOM and behavioral intention.

Erkan and Evans (2016) test and compare the influence of eWOM of friends' recommendations on social networking platforms and that of anonymous reviews on shopping websites. Information Adoption Model (IAM) is utilized to analyze the impacts of these two platforms. Their empirical study finds anonymous reviews as more influential on consumers' online purchase intention, which is contrary to their expectations. They then conduct another study through in-depth interviews to enlighten the results they have found. They conclude that information quality, information readiness, detailed information, and dedicated information are the factors which make anonymous reviews on shopping websites superior to friends' recommendation on social networking platforms.

2.5 Research Hypotheses and Research Framework (Figure 2.5)

From the literature review above, we draw two hypotheses below.

H1: There is a correlation between the potential Chinese tourists' motivation to travel to Thailand and exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand.

H2: There is a correlation between the potential Chinese tourists' exposure to eWOM and intention to travel to Thailand.

Figure 2.5 Research Framework

RQ1	RQ1	RQ1
Potential Tourists' Motivation -Internal motivation -External motivation	**Exposure to eWOM** -eWOM from strong-tie sources/platforms -eWOM from weak-tie sources/platforms	**Travel Intention** -Attitude -Subjective norm -Perceived behavioral control

RQ2 H1 (between box 1 and box 2)

RQ3 H2 (between box 2 and box 3)
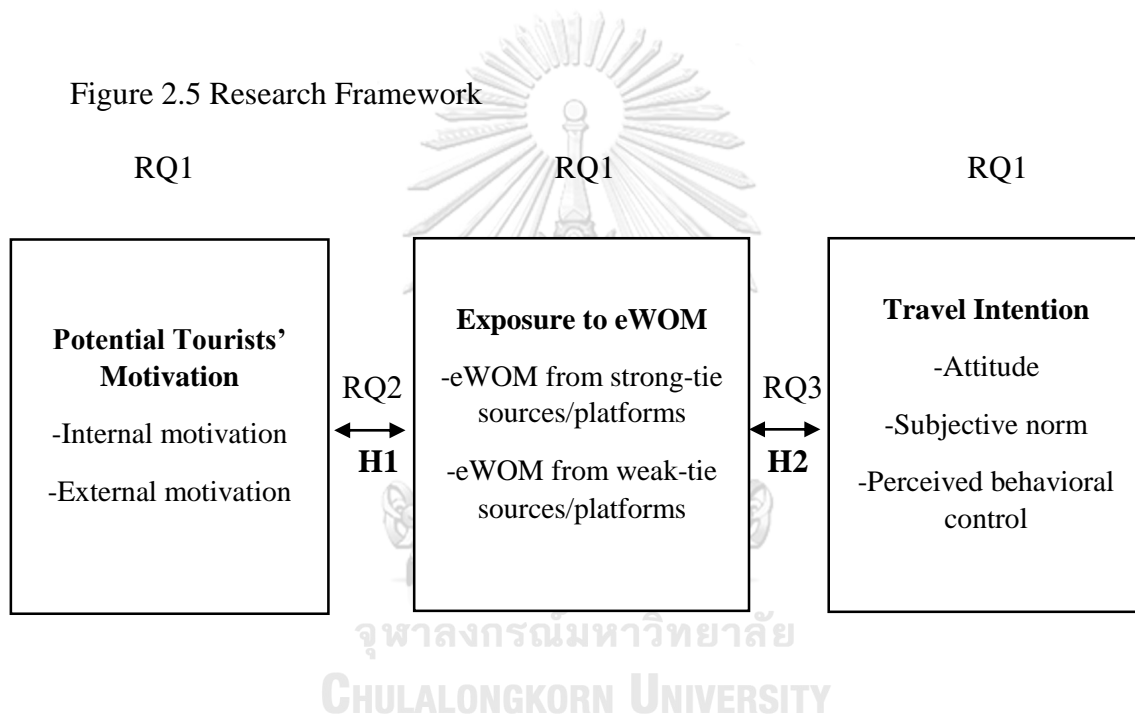
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter clarifies the methodology of this study, including research methodology, population and sample, sampling technique, research instruments, measurement of the samples, procedures of analyzing data and data presentation, and data analysis. The details are as follows.

3.1 Research Methodology

Quantitative research was conducted by using online surveys through WeChat and other popular Chinese social media including Weibo and QQ, targeting 200 potential Chinese tourists with age 18 to 70, because 18 is the legal age in China and people over 70 seldom go traveling abroad. Respondents who had been to Thailand or had no interest in traveling to Thailand were not asked to continue the survey since we focus on the potential Chinese first-time visitors' primary motivation to travel, exposure to eWOM and, intention to travel to Thailand.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised Chinese males and females aged 18 to 70, who had the interest or planned to travel to Thailand in the future, without previous visiting experience. The aimed total number of samples was at least 200 as it is the right amount of number for this project.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was employed to collect the data through Chinese major social media platforms including WeChat, QQ, and Weibo to target the potential respondents. The link of the questionnaire was published on WeChat Moment, QQ Space and Weibo post with the caption that asked the target audience to help complete the survey. Also, the link of the survey was distributed directly to the target WeChat friends and WeChat groups. Some of the respondents helped to distribute the survey on their WeChat Moments and to their online friends too.

3.4 Research Instruments

The online questionnaire was facilitated by "wjx", a Chinese online survey service platform. The survey questions contained six parts, including screening questions, travel motivation, exposure to eWOM, intention to travel, open-ended question, and demographics. Parts 2 to 4 were rated by five-degree Likert scales from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) to mark the answers that best matched respondents' opinions and behaviors.

Part *1: Screening questions.* This part set three questions about qualified age, previous traveling experience, and general travel intention to select our target respondents.

Part 2: Motivation *to travel to Thailand.* This part contained three questions about their external motivation to travel to Thailand and seven questions about internal motivation to travel to Thailand, borrowed from Lubbe (1998).

Part 3: Intention to travel to Thailand. In this part, the respondents were asked about their opinions of intention to travel to Thailand by using four questions from the Theory of Planned Behavior model, adapted from Plookraksa (2018).

Part 4: Exposure to eWOM about Thailand tourism. This part elicited the answers about the respondents' exposure to eWOM about Thailand tourism from strong-tie sources on social networking platforms and weak-tie sources on other online platforms, both by three questions selected from Jalilvand & Samiei (2012).

Part 5: Open-ended question. The respondents were asked for their opinion about what kind of eWOM (e.g., online posts or recommendations from friends and families, online traveling reviews, online tourism comments, travelers' vlog, etc.) that would most likely persuade them to travel to Thailand.

Part 6: Demographics. In this part, the respondents were asked to answer the questions about gender, age, the highest level of education, and occupation.

3.5 Measurement of Variables

There were three variables in this study. The measurements of each were as below.

Variable 1: Motivation

The measurement of motivation was borrowed from Lubbe (1998) in the construction of primary image as travel motivation, which combined Maslow's hierarchy of needs and two additional needs for internal motivations and three categories of attractiveness for external motivations.

Variable 2: Exposure to eWOM

The measurement of exposure to eWOM was adapted from that of "susceptibility to online product reviews" by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012). This survey selected the first three items from the original six items because the last three items were conditioned with "before/when I travel to a certain destination", which meant the destination might have been decided. Besides, the three items were put into two situations as "for the information shared by friends and families on social networking websites" and "for the information shared by online acquaintances or strangers on other social media platforms", as adapted from Erkan and Evans (2016).

Variable 3: Travel Intention

The measurement of travel intention comprised four items as adapted from Plookraksa (2018), which was related to the three predictors of behavioral intention and one confirmation of intention to travel.

Checks for Reliability

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to test the internal consistency. 30 samples were first collected for the pretest data. The reliability score for external and internal motivation, travel intention and exposure to eWOM were 0.995, 0.996, and 0.995 respectively, which implied that all variables were consistent by meeting the general level of acceptance of 0.7 (Tanner, 2012).

Since the original measurement questions had to be translated into Chinese, a think-aloud protocol was utilized on ten respondents in the pretest samples to test

respondents' understanding of the survey questions. All the ten respondents answered that they understood the questionnaire, or they thought the questionnaire was clear.

3.6 Procedures for Analyzing Data and Data Presentation

The survey finally collected 218 qualified samples. The data were analyzed by SPSS (Statistic Package for Social Sciences) to provide answers to our research questions. Descriptive statistics were generated including frequency, mean and standard deviation of each question to know the demographic and general opinions of the samples. Inferential statistics were calculated to draw inferences about the association between the variables in line with the research hypotheses.

3.7 Data Analysis

The results were rendered by SPSS to present our findings of the potential Chinese tourists' opinions and behaviors, thus offering effective suggestions for stakeholders to communicate with the target audience.

For descriptive statistics analysis, the results showed the distribution of frequency, mean, and standard deviation of each question. A five-point Likert scale was utilized to generalize the overall ideas of the respondents' motivation to travel to Thailand, exposure to eWOM and travel intention.

Table 3.1

Likert Scale Calculation

Five-Point Likert Scale		Scoring Scale with Interval for Inferential	
Level of Agreement	**Score**	**Definition**	**Scoring Range**
Strongly agree	5.0	Strongly agree	5.00-4.21
Agree	4.0	Agree	4.20-3.41
Somewhat agree	3.0	Somewhat agree	3.40-2.61
Disagree	2.0	Disagree	2.60-1.81
Strongly disagree	1.0	Strongly disagree	1.80-1.00

For inferential statistics analysis, the correlations between the variables were suggested by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Measurement to reveal the positive or negative associations as shown below.

Table 3.2

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Measurement (r)

Scoring Scale	Meaning
1.00-0.80	Very high association
0.79-0.60	Hight association
0.59-0.40	Normal association
0.39-0.20	Low association
0.19-0.00	Very low association

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the data collected from the questionnaire completed by a sample of 218 respondents meeting our targeting requirement. The data were collected in October 2019. The finding is divided into descriptive analysis and inferential analysis.

4.1 Findings from Descriptive Analysis

Part 1: Demographics

Part 2: Travel motivation

Part 3: Travel intention

Part 4: Exposure to eWOM

Part 5: Findings from open-ended question

Part 1: Demographics

This part shows the demographic data of samples, including (1) gender, as shown in table 4.1, (2) age, as shown in Table 4.2, (3) level of education, as shown in table 4.3, and (4) occupation, as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.1

Gender of the Samples

Gender	*N*	*%*
Male	98	45
Female	120	55
Total	**218**	**100**

The 218 samples comprised 98 male respondents, taking up 45% of the total, and 120 female respondents, or 55% of the total samples.

Table 4.2

Age Range of the Samples

Age	*N*	*%*
18-28	82	37.6
29-38	85	39.0
39-48	20	9.2
49-58	27	12.4
59-70	4	1.8
Total	**218**	**100**

Table 4.2 shows the age range of the samples, which has been divided into 5 groups. The majority of the respondents were 18-28 years old (37.6%) and 29-38 years old (39.0%), together taking up 76.6% of the total samples. They were followed

by the range of 49-59 years old (12.4%) and 39-48 years old (9.2%). Only 4 respondents fell into the range of age 59-70, which took up 1.8% of the total samples.

Table 4.3

Highest Level of Education of the Samples

Education	*N*	%
Lower than secondary school	6	2.8
Secondary school or equivalent	26	11.9
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	149	68.3
Higher than bachelor's degree	37	17.0
Total	**218**	**100**

As for the samples' education background, the majority was with a bachelor's degree or equivalent, taking up 68.3% of the samples. 37 persons were with a degree higher than bachelor's, consisting of 17% of the total. There were 26 persons, or 11.9% with secondary school or equivalent education, and 6 persons, or 2.8% with an education lower than secondary school.

Table 4.4

Occupation of the Samples

Occupation	*N*	*%*
Student	21	9.6
Work in a government service/state enterprise	102	46.8
Business owner	9	4.1
Employee of private company	68	31.2
Retired	11	5.1
Unemployed	7	3.2
Total	**218**	**100**

Table 4.4 shows the occupation of the samples. Almost half (46.8%) of the respondents were government workers or state enterprise workers, followed by employees of private companies (31.2%), students (9.6%), retired (5.1%), business owners (4.1%) and unemployed (3.2%).

Part 2: Travel Motivation

This part reveals the respondents' external and internal motivation to travel to Thailand respectively, exploring the potential Chinese tourists' pull factors and push factors for travel motivation.

Table 4.5

Samples' External Motivation to Travel to Thailand

External Motivation to Travel to Thailand	*M*	*SD*
You think that Thailand has a good landscape, fascinating culture, and a perfect climate.	3.98	0.90
You think that Thailand has good accommodations, food, service.	3.98	0.93
You think that Thailand has nice travel deals and promotions (e.g., inexpensive air tickets and discounted tour packages).	4.03	0.96
Total	**4.00**	**0.83**

Table 4.5 shows that the respondents agreed that Thailand had nice travel deals and promotions (*M* = 4.03), followed by that Thailand had a good landscape, fascinating culture, and a perfect climate (*M* = 3.98) and that Thailand had good accommodations, food, service (*M* = 3.98).

Table 4.6

Samples' Internal Motivation to Travel to Thailand

Internal Motivation to Travel to Thailand	*M*	*SD*
You think that traveling to Thailand will meet your basic needs (e.g., good rest, food, air, sex).	4.02	0.84
You think that Thailand is safe to travel to.	3.47	1.05
You think that Thailand is a good place to gain or enhance relationships.	3.67	1.00
You think that traveling to Thailand can make you feel respected or look cool.	3.37	1.05
You think that traveling to Thailand can help you to accomplish yourself.	3.36	1.06
You think that traveling to Thailand can gain your knowledge of Thailand.	4.07	0.84
You think that Thailand can satisfy your sense of aesthetics (e.g., scenery and design).	3.94	0.80
Total	**3.70**	**0.77**

Table 4.6 lists respondents' opinions toward the 7 statements about tourism in Thailand. Generally, the respondents agreed that traveling to Thailand could gain their knowledge of the destination (*M* = 4.07), would satisfy their basic needs (*M* = 4.02), and could satisfy their sense of aesthetics (*M* = 3.94). They also agreed that Thailand was a good place to gain relationships (*M* = 3.67) and safe to travel to (*M* = 3.47). The

respondents partially agreed that traveling to Thailand could make them look cool (M = 3.37) and help them to accomplish themselves (M = 3.36).

Part 3: Travel Intention

The next part reveals the samples' opinion about their intention to travel to Thailand.

Table 4.7

Samples' Intention to Travel to Thailand

Intention to Travel to Thailand	M	SD
You like the idea of going to Thailand.	4.09	0.74
You believe that your friends and family will agree if you go to Thailand.	4.07	0.80
You think that you can easily travel to Thailand (e.g., affordable air tickets and exemption of visa).	4.06	0.83
You intend to go to Thailand.	4.07	0.83
Total	**4.07**	**0.71**

Table 4.7 shows that the respondents mostly agreed that they liked the idea of going to Thailand (M = 4.09). They agreed that they believed that their friends and family would agree if they go to Thailand (M = 4.07) and they intended to go to Thailand (M = 4.07). They also thought that they could easily travel to Thailand (M = 4.06).

Part 4: Exposure to eWOM

The third part presents the respondents' opinions about exposure to eWOM from friends or families in social networking and that from acquaintances or strangers in other social media.

Table 4.8
Samples' Exposure to Strong-Tie eWOM

Exposure to eWOM from Friends/Families in Social Networking	M	SD
You often read your friends' and families' travel reviews about Thailand to know whether it makes good impressions on others.	3.79	0.90
To make sure you choose the right destination, you often read your friends' and families' travel reviews about Thailand.	3.75	0.90
You often consult your friends and families online about traveling to Thailand to help choose the right destination.	3.85	0.86
Total	**3.80**	**0.81**

Table 4.8 shows that for the travel information shared by the respondents' friends or families in social networking (strong tie), they mostly agreed that they often consulted their friends and families online about traveling to Thailand to help choose the right destination ($M = 3.85$). They also agreed that they often read the reviews about Thailand to know whether it made good impressions on others ($M = 3.79$), and they often read the travel reviews to ensure they chose the right destination ($M = 3.75$).

Table 4.9

Samples' Exposure to Weak-Tie eWOM

Exposure to eWOM from Acquaintances/Strangers in other Social Media	*M*	*SD*
You often read other consumers' travel reviews about Thailand to know whether it makes good impressions on others.	3.86	0.88
To make sure you choose the right destination, you often read other consumers' travel reviews about Thailand.	3.88	0.87
You often consult other tourists' online travel reviews about Thailand to help choose the right destination.	3.88	0.88
Total	**3.87**	**0.84**

Table 4.9 shows that for the travel information shared by online acquaintances or strangers in other social media (weak tie), they agreed that they often read the travel reviews to ensure they chose the right destination (*M* = 3.88), they often consulted their friends and families online about traveling to Thailand to help choose the right destination (*M* = 3.88), and they often read the travel reviews about Thailand to know whether it made good impressions on others (*M* = 3.86).

Part 5: Findings from the Open-ended Question

60 out of 218 respondents replied about the open-ended questions. The answers could fall into three categories: sources, formats, and content.

Many respondents answered the question by pointing out the sources of eWOM. 29 of them presented that eWOM about Thailand tourism from "WeChat Moments" posted by friends and families would most likely persuade them to travel

to Thailand, while 12 of them referred to the detailed online traveling review on traveling website would most likely influence them to travel. 2 of them answered that the online tourism product comments would most likely to persuade them to travel to Thailand.

Some respondents replied about the formats of eWOM. 4 of them mentioned the videos and pictures introducing the destination would most effectively influence their traveling decisions.

Other than that, 7 respondents did not mention about the sources or media, but specified the destination attractions, including leisure feeling, safety, city culture, security administration, mature tourism routes, reasonable price, diversity and inclusiveness, sense of freedom, and local culture, as the most persuasive message that eWOM might deliver, which would most likely influenc their traveling choices.

4.2 Findings from Inferential Analysis – Hypothesis Testing

As stated in chapter 1, this project aimed to study the relationship between tourists' motivation to travel and exposure to eWOM, as well as the relationship between exposure to eWOM and travel intention. The data was processed by inferential analysis with Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Measurement to test the hypotheses.

H1: There is a correlation between the potential Chinese tourists' motivation to travel to Thailand and exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand.

Table 4.10

Pearson's Correlation between Tourists' Motivation and Exposure to eWOM

	Exposure to eWOM
Tourists' Motivation	**0.721****
Internal Motivation	**0.707****
External Motivation	**0.559****

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to Pearson's correlation measurement, the result in Table 4.10 reveals that there was a high association between tourists' motivation and exposure to eWOM ($r = 0.721$) at a significance level of 0.01. This implies that the more the potential tourists are motivated to travel to Thailand, the more they are exposed to eWOM about tourism in Thailand, or the other way around. Additionally, if divided into internal motivation or push factors and external motivation or pull factors, the result shows that the relationship between the former and exposure to eWOM is in a high level ($r = 0.707$), while that between the latter and exposure to eWOM is in a normal level ($r = 0.559$).

H2: There is a correlation between the Potential Chinese tourists' exposure to eWOM and intention to travel to Thailand.

Table 4.11

Pearson's Correlation between Tourists' Exposure to eWOM and Travel Intention

	Travel Intention
Exposure to eWOM	**0.720****

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result in Table 4.11 reveals that there was also a high association between tourists' exposure to eWOM and travel intention ($r = 0.720$) at a significance level of 0.01. This suggests that the more the potential tourists are exposed to eWOM about tourism in Thailand, the more they intend to travel to Thailand, or inversely related.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Following the findings of this research, this chapter will further provide a summary of the data analysis and discussion. Practical implications will be formed based on data analysis. At last, the limitations of the research and directions for further research will be presented.

5.1 Summary

As demonstrated in chapter 1, the objectives of this research are to examine the potential Chinese tourists' internal and external motivation to travel to Thailand, exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand, and intention to travel to Thailand, as well as the relationship between tourists' motivation and exposure to eWOM, and the relationship between exposure to eWOM and intention to travel. Following the objectives, the study aims to answer the research questions:

1. What are the potential Chinese tourists' internal and external motivation to travel to Thailand, exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand, and the intention to travel to Thailand?

2. What is the relationship between the potential Chinese tourists' motivation to travel to Thailand and exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand?

3. What is the relationship between the potential Chinese tourists' exposure to eWOM and intention to travel to Thailand?

The research was conducted with a quantitative methodology. An online survey was distributed through WeChat, QQ, and Weibo, to reach 281 respondents in total, but the respondents who were not 18 to 70 years old, who had traveled to Thailand, and who had no interest in traveling to Thailand were filtered out, as they were not the target audience. Besides the screening questions, the survey contained five parts including travel motivation, exposure to eWOM, intention to travel, open-ended question, and demographics.

218 qualified samples were finally collected and then calculated by using SPSS. First, Cronbach Alpha of each variable was tested to ensure the data's reliability, then descriptive and inferential statistics were generated to provide answers to the research questions. Pearson's correlation was used to test the two hypotheses:

H1: There is a correlation between the potential Chinese tourists' motivation to travel to Thailand and exposure to eWOM about tourism in Thailand.

H2: There is a correlation between the Potential Chinese tourists' exposure to eWOM and intention to travel to Thailand.

The research findings are summarized as follows:

Demographics

Of the 218 samples, 45% were male and 55% female. The majority of them were 18-38 years old, taking up 76.6% of the total. As for the education background, 68.3% were bachelor's degree or equivalent. In terms of the occupation, about half (46.8%) were government workers or state enterprise workers.

Motivation to Travel to Thailand

As far as push factors that motivated the respondents to travel to Thailand, the respondents agreed that knowledge ($M = 4.07$), physiological needs ($M = 4.02$), and aesthetics ($M = 3.94$) were the most potent motivators. While in the pull factors, current decision factors that Thailand had good travel deals or promotions got the highest average score of agreement ($M = 4.03$).

Exposure to eWOM

Concerning exposure to eWOM, the respondents agreed that they often read or consult eWOM both from friends or families in social networking (strong-tie sources) and from acquaintances or strangers in other social media (weak-tie sources). The average score for the weak-tie sources ($M = 3.87$) was slightly higher than the strong-tie sources ($M = 3.80$).

Intention to Travel to Thailand

For travel intention, the respondents mostly agreed that they liked the idea of going to Thailand (mean = 4.09). They also confirmed that they intended to go to Thailand (mean = 4.07).

Findings from the Open-ended Question about Persuasive eWOM

About half of the respondents mentioned eWOM from "WeChat Moments" posted by their WeChat friends would most likely influence them to travel to Thailand. The respondents also suggested eWOM delivering the message about local culture, diversity, sense of freedom, leisure feeling, safety, and low price would most

likely persuade them to go to Thailand. Some respondents also proposed that video would be a suitable format for persuasive traveling eWOM.

Inferential Statistics Analysis

The calculation of Pearson's correlation revealed that there was a high association between tourists' motivation and exposure to eWOM ($r = 0.721$), as well as a high association between tourists' exposure to eWOM and travel intention ($r = 0.720$) at a significance level of 0.01. In addition, if we separated tourists' motivation into push and pull factors, the association between push-factor motivation and exposure to eWOM was at a high level ($r = 0.707$) while the association between pull-factor motivation and eWOM was at a normal level ($r = 0.559$).

5.2 Discussion

The discussion section of this research consists of 5 main points, which are based on the results from the data collection and analysis. This section first discusses the potential Chinese tourists' travel motivation, exposure to eWOM, and travel intention. Then, it discussed the relationship between travel motivation and exposure to eWOM, as well as the relationship between exposure to eWOM and travel intention.

5.2.1 Motivation to Travel to Thailand

Among the seven push factors to travel to Thailand, this research found that the top one internal motivator for Chinese tourists to travel to Thailand was gaining knowledge of the destination. This concept has also been expressed as a motivation

for education, wanderlust, and interest in foreign regions. Many people travel to learn of others' cultures, as well as to discover one's own culture from the other perspective (Mill & Morrison, 1985).

Among the three pull factors to travel to Thailand, this research found that current decision factors, saying good travel deals and promotions, were the top one external motivation for Chinese tourists to travel to Thailand. This is in line with the research result yielded by Amonhaemanon and Amornhaymanon (2015), showing that one of the top three factors that motivate Chinese high-value tourists to visit Thailand is good value for money.

5.2.2 Exposure to eWOM

As stated in previous chapters, eWOM comes from various sources and platforms, outranging the circle of friends or family in social networking and reaching to the online acquaintances or strangers in all kinds of social media. Thus, we divide the eWOM into strong-tie sources and weak-tie sources to see if there is a difference.

From the descriptive statistics of the data, the respondents agreed that they were exposed to eWOM both from strong-tie sources and weak-tie sources, but the mean of weak-tie eWOM was slightly higher than the strong-tie eWOM. This result is in line with the research by Erkan and Evans (2016), who finds anonymous reviews as more influential than friends' recommendations on consumers' online purchase intention, and that might be contributed to the online anonymous reviews' information quality and detailed information.

5.2.3 Intention to Travel to Thailand

By applying Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this survey asked questions about the three factors determining behavioral intention, namely, (1) attitude toward the behavior, (2) subjective norm, and (3) perceived behavioral control, and asked for the confirmation of intention to travel. The results showed that respondents mostly agreed that they had a favorable attitude toward traveling to Thailand, and they confirmed that they intended to travel to Thailand. This finding confirms the research by Kim and Noh (2015), which concludes that the TPB provides an accurate approach of explaining and indicating the travel behavior, and among the three factors, the strongest predictor of intention was attitude.

5.2.4 Relationship between Travel Motivation and Exposure to eWOM

The results of the survey confirmed that there was a high association between tourists' motivation and exposure to eWOM. This verifies samples are motivated to travel to Thailand, may search for more information about Thailand's tourism from eWOM. This can be supported by Kerstetter and Cho (2004), which proposes a three-stage information searching process, where the need for a vocational journey navigates the next stage of information search, and eWOM is one of the critical sources for information acquisition.

On the other hand, the results also verify that the more the samples are exposed to eWOM about tourism in Thailand, the more they are motivated to travel to Thailand. This is in line with the research by Plookraksa (2018), suggesting that people are motivated to travel by eWOM and UGC that portray the attractiveness of a certain destination. It is explained by Mill and Morrison (1985), stating that people

are motivated to satisfy needs that can be learned through social information. Thus, potential tourists can read the online post about traveling to Thailand to see whether the experience satisfies their friends' needs to perceive whether it would fulfill their own needs.

Furthermore, the results showed that Pearson's correlation between internal motivation and exposure to eWOM was considerably higher than the correlation between external motivation and exposure to eWOM. This might be because push factors, or internal motivations are usually seen as dominant motivations, which can be logically regarded as antecedent to that of push factors (Dann, 1977). Thus, internal motivation might have a more profound relationship with further information-processing behavior.

5.2.5 Relationship between Exposure to eWOM and Travel Intention

This survey concluded that there was a high association between exposure to eWOM and intention to travel to Thailand. It infers that people who are exposed to eWOM about traveling to Thailand, form a better attitude about the traveling behavior, and gain more positive subjective norms from their friends and family, as well as be more confident about traveling to Thailand. This confirms Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), which indicates eWOM has a significant impact on attitude toward visiting, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intention to travel.

The conclusion also implies that people who intend to travel are more likely to be exposed to eWOM about traveling information. This is explained by Mill and Morrison (1985) that the more we feel inclined towards taking a vacation, the more

we will readily be open to information regarding vacations because the information is perceived to be more relevant and useful.

5.3 Practical Implications

Positioning the destination image as a unique-culture region with a reasonable price

As the survey shows that the top two motivators for Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand are gaining knowledge of the destination as the top push factor and good travel deals as the top pull factor, destination marketing strategy should encompass these two factors to attract more Chinese tourists.

Firstly, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) should portray the cultural uniqueness of the place, such as some unique cultural festivals and events, and present the audience an opportunity in a lifetime to see the particular cultural phenomena, to stimulate the potential visitors' motivation for education, wanderlust, and interest in foreign regions.

Meanwhile, travel price is still a significant factor that motivates Chinese tourists to travel. Therefore, it is recommended that DMOs can use some promotional strategies to attract potential tourists. Current decision factors including good deals and promotions of accommodation, catering, air tickets, visa application, favorable currency exchange rate can enhance the competitiveness of a certain destination. For example, in 2019, Thailand Authority proposed a visa-free entry for Chinese visitors after an unusual decline in the number of Chinese visitors. This policy has helped bolster the number of Chinese tourists, and without which, tourism arrival growth might not reach their target (The Thaiger, 2019).

Strategic use of eWOM marketing should have the right contents and adopt the right media

As from the findings of this study, eWOM is a significant information source for potential travelers both in terms of motivation and travel intention. Destination Marketing Organizations should exploit eWOM marketing communication to try to cater to and stimulate prospective tourists' motivation, as well as increase their intention to travel.

First, for the content of eWOM, as revealed by the respondents from the open-ended questions, it should be navigated to communicate more about the assurance of safety, the feeling of leisure, the experience of distinctive culture and inclusiveness, and reasonable price of the tourism product. Some of the factors, such as safety and price, are concerned with perceived risk, while eWOM, taken as an informal information source, can effectively reduce the risk perceived by the consumers (Stokes & Lomax, 2002). The other factors, like the feeling of leisure and cultural experience, might be the information that intensifies potential tourists' motivation to choose the place to satisfy their need for good rest and gaining knowledge.

Additionally, the content of eWOM should be more related to internal motivation factors. As the results show that exposure to eWOM has a stronger relationship with internal travel motivation, effective eWOM communication should be more related to the drive factors from inside an individual, especially concerning the satisfaction of acquiring knowledge, basic needs, and appreciation of beauty.

Second, in terms of the media of eWOM, DMOs should encourage eWOM to be spread more on weak-tie sources and platforms. As found in this research, both the recommendation from friends and families in social networking and other travelers'

review in other social media are important eWOM sources, while weak-tie eWOM is somewhat more influential. Therefore, adopting social media platforms including travel review websites such as TripAdvisor, blogs such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu, online travel agencies such as Ctrip, etc. for a better spread of eWOM could result in a broader range of the audience and a better influence on the potential tourists.

Also, as mentioned by the respondents in the open-ended questions, the formats of videos and pictures can be more effective in presenting the persuasive eWOM. DMOs should encourage and facilitate travelers to use more visual content to record and share their travel vlogs on video-sharing platforms such as TikTok.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

In this research, travel intention is operationally defined by the Theory of Planned Behavior's three factors that determine the behavioral intention. Although the TPB has been proved to predict the travel behavior well, the measurement for the variable "travel intention" in this research has its limitation. The survey of this research measured travel intention by (1) attitude toward the behavior, (2) subjective norm, and (3) perceived behavioral control, which in fact based on the theory, are the antecedents of behavioral intention. Thus, this scale is not appropriate for measuring travel intention. Therefore, it is suggested to utilize more direct measurement for tourists' travel intention in the future study.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

One of the objectives of this research is to find out the motivations behind potential Chinese Tourists to choose Thailand as their travel destination, with the aim

of providing suggestions for DMOs to drive more tourists to a certain destination. As a matter of fact, motivations can always be changing, and different groups of people with different gender, ages, educational, social, or geographical backgrounds might vary considerably in their motivation to travel. As targeting a specific consumer segmentation is significant to the success of marketing strategy, future research might consider studying the motivation of one of the prospective tourist groups, such as millennials, single travelers, or retired persons, to elicit more tailormade information and suggestions.

In the field of eWOM, there is an uprising phenomenon known as digital opinion leaders or online influencers, who are frequently able to influence others' attitudes or behaviors by spreading eWOM (Solomon, 2017). In this study, we apply tie strength to eWOM sources without discovering a significant difference in terms of information sources, while digital opinion leaders cannot be identified in this dimension. Therefore, future research should investigate more in eWOM with digital opinion leaders to provide a comprehensive understanding and further practical implications to harness eWOM communication.

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APPENDIX A

A survey on potential Chinese tourists' motivation, exposure to eWOM, and intention to travel to Thailand

Note: *This survey is a part of a research **for educational purpose only***

Part 1: Screening questions

Are you above 18 and below 70?

　　　Yes　　No (If not, please do not answer the survey questions below.)

Have you traveled to Thailand for leisure before?

　　　Yes　　No (If yes, please do not answer the survey questions below.)

Do you want to or plan to travel to Thailand for leisure in the future?

　　　Yes　　No (If not, please do not answer the survey questions below.)

Part 2 to 4: External and internal motivation, intention to travel, and exposure to eWOM

Please mark "X" at a choice that matches your opinion most.

External motivation to travel to Thailand	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
1. You think that Thailand has a good landscape, fascinating culture, and a perfect climate.					
2. You think that Thailand has good accommodations, food, service.					
3. You think that Thailand has nice travel deals and promotions (e.g., inexpensive air tickets and discounted tour packages).					
Internal motivation to travel to Thailand					
4. You think that traveling to Thailand will meet your basic needs (e.g., good rest, food, air, sex).					
5. You think that Thailand is safe to travel to.					
6. You think that Thailand is a good place to gain or enhance relationships.					
7. You think that traveling to Thailand can make you feel respected or look cool.					
8. You think that traveling to Thailand can help you to accomplish yourself.					
9. You think that traveling to Thailand can gain your knowledge of Thailand.					
10. You think that Thailand can satisfy your sense of aesthetics (e.g., scenery and design).					

Intention to travel to Thailand					
11. You like the idea of going to Thailand.					
12. You believe that your friends and family will agree if you go to Thailand.					
13. You think that you can easily travel to Thailand. (e.g., affordable air tickets and exemption of visa)					
14. You intend to go to Thailand.					
Exposure to eWOM about Thailand tourism					
For the travel information which is shared by your friends or families in social networking (e.g., WeChat, QQ)…					
15. You often read your friends' and families' travel reviews about Thailand to know whether it makes good impressions on others.					
16. To make sure you choose the right destination, you often read your friends' and families' travel reviews about Thailand.					
17. You often consult your friends and families online about traveling to Thailand to help choose the right destination.					
For the travel information which is shared by online acquaintances or strangers in other social media (e.g., Weibo, Zhihu, Xiaohongshu, Mafengwo…)					
18. You often read other consumers' travel reviews about Thailand to know whether it makes good impressions on others.					
19. To make sure you choose the right destination, you often read other consumers' travel reviews about Thailand.					
20. You often consult other tourists' online travel reviews about Thailand to help choose the right destination.					

Part 5: Open-ended question

21. What kind of eWOM (e.g., online posts or recommendations from friends

and families, online traveling reviews, online tourism comments, travelers' vlog,

etc.) will most likely persuade you to travel to Thailand?

……………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………

Part 6: General demographic information

22. Gender

☐Male ☐Female

23. Age

☐ 18-28 years old ☐ 29-38 years old ☐ 39-48 years old ☐ 49-58 years old

☐59-70 years old

24. Highest level of education attained

☐Lower than secondary school ☐Secondary school or equivalent

☐Bachelor's degree or equivalent ☐Higher than bachelor's degree

25. Occupation

☐Student ☐Work in the government service/state enterprise

☐Business owner ☐Private company employee ☐Retired ☐Unemployed

.... Thank you for your time and participation in this survey…………...

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

APPENDIX B

关于潜在中国游客选择泰国旅游的旅游动机、受网络口碑影响以及旅游意向的联系的问卷调查

注：此项问卷为研究调查项目，仅供教育用途

第一部分：滤型问题

你的年龄是18到70岁之间吗?

  是 否 (若否，则停止答题，直接提交问卷)

你是否曾经去泰国旅游过?

  是 否 (若是，则停止答题，直接提交问卷)

你是否考虑或者计划去泰国旅游?

  是 否 (若否，则停止答题，直接提交问卷)

第二至第四部分：外在及内在旅游动机、旅游意向以及受网络口碑影响

请选择最符合你的意见的描述项:

外在旅游动机	强烈同意	同意	有点同意	不同意	强烈不同意
1. 你觉得泰国景观不错，文化迷人，气候怡人。					
2. 你觉得泰国有不错的酒店住宿，美食和服务。					
3. 你觉得去泰国旅游便宜，机票或旅游产品的折扣很多。					
内在旅游动机					
4. 你觉得去泰国旅游可以满足我的基本需求（如好的休息、食物、空气、生理需求等）。					
5. 你觉得泰国旅游很安全。					
6. 你觉得去泰国旅游可以有机会认识新朋友，或者促进家庭、朋友、爱人关系。					
7. 你觉得去泰国旅游可以让你感到被尊重，或者看起来很酷。					
8. 你觉得去泰国旅游可以帮助你实现自我（如挑战项目、体悟人生、完成梦想）。					
9. 你觉得去泰国旅游可以让你了解泰国，了解泰国文化。					
10. 你觉得去泰国旅游可以让你感受美感（如美					

景或艺术设计）。					
去泰国的旅游意向					
11. 你觉得去泰国旅游的主意不错。					
12. 你觉得你的朋友家人会同意你去泰国旅游。					
13. 你觉得去泰国旅游对你来说容易和方便 (如买机票、办签证) 。					
14. 你想要去泰国旅游。					
受网络口碑的影响					
对于那些在微信、QQ 等社交网络软件上你的朋友或家分享的旅游信息：					
15. 你经常读到朋友或家人发布的关于泰国旅游的分享或评价，来了解泰国是否给他们留下好印象。					
16. 为了确认选择对的目的地，你经常阅读朋友和家人发布的对泰国旅游的分享和评价。					
17. 你经常参考或咨询平台上家人朋友对泰国旅游的评价，来帮助你选择一个好的目的地。					
对于那些在微博、知乎、小红书、马蜂窝、抖音等其他社交媒体软件上那些不熟知的陌生网友发布的旅游信息：					
18. 你经常读到其他旅游者发布的关于泰国旅游的分享或评价，来了解泰国是否给他们留下好印象。					
19. 为了确认选择对的目的地，你经常阅读这些平台上其他旅游者发布的对泰国旅游的分享和评价。					
20. 你经常参考或咨询这些平台上其他旅游者对泰国旅游的评价，来帮助你选择一个好的目的地。					

第五部分：开放式问题

21. 你觉得怎么样的网络口碑，如朋友家人发的朋友圈、网上详细旅游攻略、网上旅游产品评价、网红的旅游视频等，最有可能说服你去泰国旅游？

．．．

．．．

．．．

第六部分：个人背景问题

22. 你的性别是

□ 男 □ 女

23. 你的年龄是

□ 18-28岁 □ 29-38岁 □ 39-48岁 □ 49-58岁 □ 59-70岁

24. 你最高的学历是

□ 中学以下 □ 中学或同等学历

□ 大学或同等学历 □ 研究生学历以上

25. 你的职业是

□ 学生 □ 政府或国有企业单位职员

□ 企业主 □ 私有企业员工 □ 退休 □ 无业或待业

....感谢您的参与..

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