

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHINESE
TOURISTS BUYING BEHAVIOR IN THAILAND**



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entitled
**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHINESE
TOURISTS BUYING BEHAVIOR IN THAILAND**

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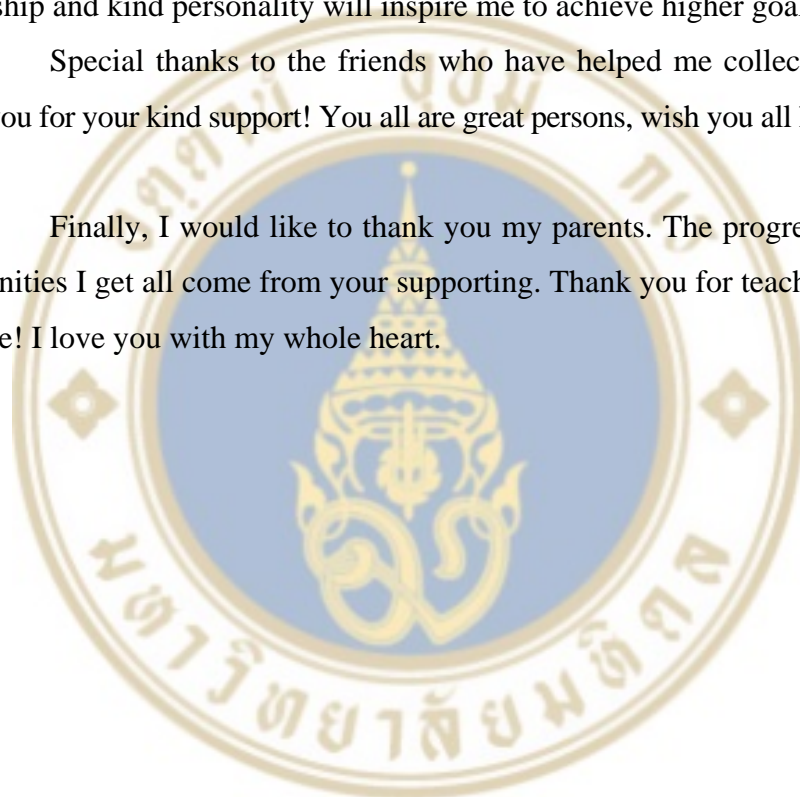
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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHINESE TOURISTS BUYING BEHAVIOR IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors of social media that impact Chinese tourist buying local souvenir products in Thailand. The research responses generated from Chinese tourist who had experience of purchasing Thai local souvenirs in Thailand recently. The total number of response is 100, which 80% of them are self-guided tourists, and 20% of them are package tour tourists.

The findings of this research show that most of Chinese tourists would use social media for searching products information. Display ads on social media have little impact on consumer's purchasing decision. Negative comments are more influencing than positive comments. Contents with picture and text together will generate more interests. Ads are more effective by hiring KOLs.

KEY WORDS: Social Media/ Chinese Tourists/ Self-guided Tourists/ Online Ads

37 pages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Statement and Importance

The research topic of this thematic paper is what factors of social media effectively influence Chinese tourist buying behavior when they travel in Thailand. As we all know, Thailand is one of the world's most popular tourist destinations and tourism is a very important sector that contributes to Thailand's GDP. Tourists from all around the world enjoy travelling in Thailand. In recent years, Thailand is becoming more and more attractive in the Chinese market. In 2015, Chinese tourists numbered 7.9 million or 27 percent of all international tourist arrivals, 29.8 million; 8.8 million more Chinese are expected in 2016. (Bangkok Post. Retrieved 3 March 2016). The average Chinese tourist spends 6,400 baht (US\$180) per day—more than the average visitor's 5,690 baht (US\$160). (The Nation. 2015-07-05. Retrieved 5 July 2015). From those numbers, we can know that the Chinese tourist market is a very vital factor for stimulating the Thai tourism industry's growth.

For Chinese tourists, besides travelling, shopping is their another favorite activity when coming to Thailand. For those who haven't been to Thailand before, Chinese tourists mainly rely on social media for information searching of what they would like to buy in Thailand. So, how to utilize their online search behavior in order to increase more sales in Thailand?

Therefore, this research aims to identify how the marketing tools of social media influence Chinese tourist buying behavior, the factors of social media that effectively determining Chinese buying behavior, and how to properly use social media tool to gain more economic benefits from this target group.

1.2 Research Question

This study would investigate how the social media influence Chinese tourists when they decide to buy a certain product in Thailand. To find the answer, the most important question of this research is: what factors of social media use affect Chinese tourist buying behavior in Thailand?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To observe Chinese buying behavior when they are travelling in Thailand
2. To study the relationship between the social media and purchasing intention of Chinese tourists.
3. To determine the factors that effectively influence Chinese tourists buying behavior when they are shopping in Thailand
4. To make suggestions for Thai sellers on how to popularize their brand among Chinese tourists by using social media

1.4 Research Scope

To reach the objectives of this research, this study will use a quantitative research design with a questionnaire survey. This study would get at least 100 respondents via online channels. All these completed questionnaires would be gained from the Chinese tourists who have experience of shopping in Thailand recently. The findings would ideally be representative of the attitudes of the whole population of Chinese tourists. Through this quantitative study, we can clearly identify the factors that influence Chinese tourist buying behavior in Thailand. This research will be conducted around June 2016.

1.5 Expected Benefits

1. To ascertain the factors of social media that effectively influence the Chinese tourists buying behavior when they travel in Thailand

2. To provide recommendations for Thai sellers on their marketing strategy for attracting attention of Chinese tourists
3. To differentiate the product positioning via social media
4. To stimulate more consumption volume in tourism industry in Thailand
5. To provide useful insights for academic scholars who are interested in consumer behavior of Chinese tourists



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the information of wearesocial.com, in 2015, around 659 million Chinese people use social media, which is more than USA and Europe combined. Social media obtains a high popularity in China like most areas in the world. There are plenty of research of analyzing how social media changes user's thinking system and what the role social media plays in people's daily life, and also how to utilize social media in a commercial way.

2.1 Social Media: The High Hybrid Element of the Promotion Mix

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is a modern marketing concept, which requires all marketing communications such as advertisement, public relations, sales force, and direct sales to integrate in a same direction to represent the company's mission (Boone & Kurtz, 2007, p. 488). As time changes, nowadays people more and more rely on social media to get information towards certain product or service, what's more, consumers are more resistant to the influence of traditional marketing communication tools such as TV advertisements.

As the emergence of social media, it enables consumer to talk directly one another for exchanging opinions about products, which is out of the direct control of marketing teams. But for the traditional IMC strategies, a high degree of control is present. Therefore, company should utilize social media to shape the discussion of customer in a way correctly conveying organization's image.

“Although marketing managers cannot control information disseminated through social media, ignoring the realities of the impact of information transmitted through these forums on consumer behavior is tantamount to surrendering the communications process to the vagaries of the marketplace. By including social media in the promotion mix, these new communication formats are given a home in standard marketing management

practices and theories. This new-found home for social media provides managers with a better understanding of social media and a framework for incorporating it into their IMC strategies, thus more effectively communicating with their target markets” (Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business horizons*, 52(4), 357-365.)

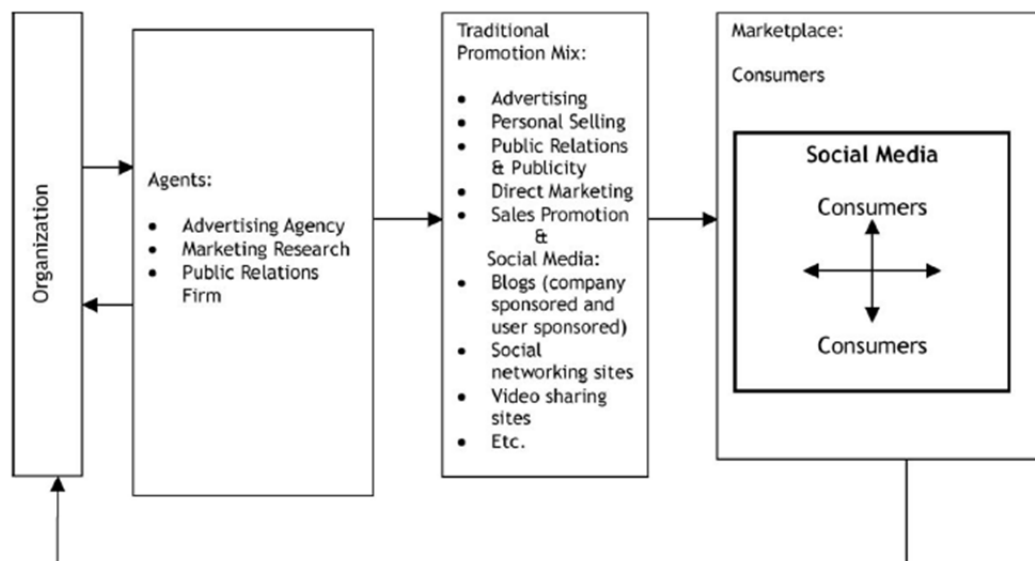


Figure 2.1 New Communications Paradigm

2.2 Role of Social Media in Information Search

Social media plays a very important role in travel information searching, which is a place that mixes experience, opinions and expressions (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006: 4). Consumers are easily influenced by the Word of Mouth from others who have the same experience as themselves, rather than tangible products (S. Senecal and J. Nantel, 2004). Because it's difficult to assess a product before purchasing, joint influential power of a group of users is very important in influencing other users' purchasing decisions and their views on products and brands (Kaiquan X et al, 2012).

So it is significantly important to encourage consumers to give positive comments in order to increase purchase intent. One of the crucial work of manager is to know how electronic recommendation systems work, which is essential for successfully managing Social networking sites (SNS). And they should attract innovative users by

encouraging them to furnish more experiences and treat them as opinion leaders. (Rondán-Cataluña, F. J., Arenas-Gaitán, J., & Ramírez-Correa, P. (2015). Travel buying behavior in social network site users: to buy online vs. offline. *Journal of theoretical and applied electronic commerce research*, 10(1), 49-62.)

2.3 Social Media and Its Impact on Consumers Behavior

In the book “The Decision Behavior of Facebook Users”, an amount of 256 smart phone Facebook users are selected as research sample. The research findings suggested that advertising messages provided by close friends only affect consumer brand attitudes, but advertising messages provided by commercial sources affect both consumer brand attitudes and purchasing intentions (Taining, 2012). Social media can build brand attitudes that affect buying behavior. “The good image of brand or product can lead the consumer to make decision on their purchases. When consumer’s friend on social media shares or recommends services or products on their social media, it affects brand attitude and influences their decision-making” (Sema, P. (2013). *Does Social Media Affect Consumer Decision-Making?*)

So, marketers use social media as a tool to build good brand image, which would potentially influence consumer’s decision making. Besides this, social media is also an inexpensive and effective platform that allows consumers can directly communicate with brand representatives (Sema, 2013). Because it’s much easier for consumers to search information of products or service by using social media. But at the same time, company also needs to carefully deal with those inquiries and feedback from customers, otherwise the consequence of negative comments would go viral on the internet.

2.4 Introduction of Social Media Market in China

Social media has been increasingly growing in China, and it’s also well known that Twitter, Facebook and Youtube are not allowed to be used in China. Here are some data from wearesocial.com to provide you a rough guide about digital market in China.



Figure 2.2 Digital in China

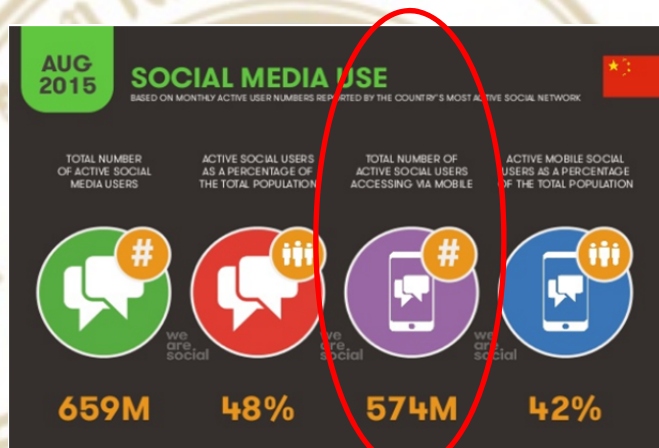


Figure 2.3 Social media use

From those figure we can know that at the end of August 2015, approximately 659 million Chinese are active social media users, and 574 million people use mobile device to access to social media.

From the graph below, we can know that QQ occupies the number one position in terms of user numbers, but WeChat and Sina Weibo have a more frequent using tendency. Due to varied services and functions, WeChat obtains great performance of users signing in, and Sina Weibo comes second.

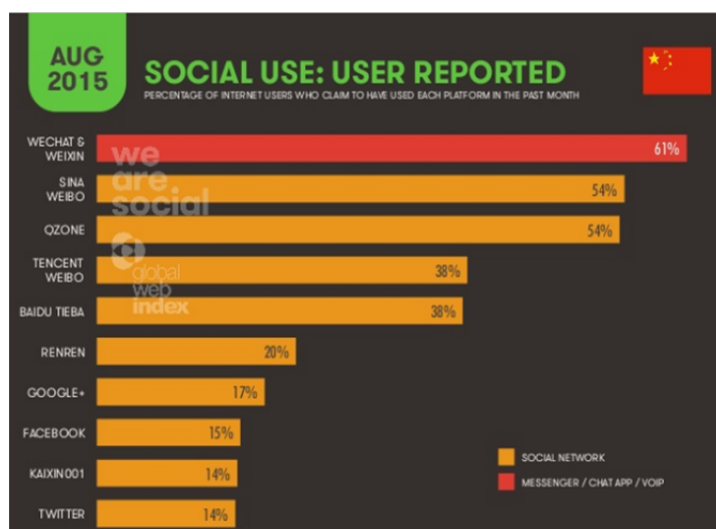


Figure 2.4 Social use: Platform claimed

When compared to global social media such as Facebook and Twitter, Chinese social media is more about jokes, images and funny videos, which is different from Twitter, caring more about currently important world events (Louis Yu, et al. 2011)

“There are vast differences between the content that is shared on Sina Weibo than that of Twitter. People tend to use Sina Weibo to share jokes, images and videos and a significantly large percentage of posts are retweets. The trends that are formed are almost entirely due to the repeated retweets of such media content” (Yu, L., Asur, S., & Huberman, B. A. (2011). What trends in Chinese social media. arXiv preprint arXiv:1107.3522.)

2.5 Factors of Social Media Influencing Consumer’s Buying Behavior

From the research review, most of the previous research of digital marketing and social media are about WOM (word of mouth), and WOM is an important factor of influencing consumer’s decision-making. Second, on-line ads are also significantly changing consumer’s brand preferences. It’s said that nowadays one third of all ads are digital ads. “Tucker found that personalized website ads are more favorably received when consumers have a higher perception of being in control of the personal/private information used for personalization, which directly corresponds to literature on psychological

reactance and suggests a theoretical way forward for research into consumer digital privacy, which is lacking”(Stephen, A. T. (2016). The role of digital and social media marketing in consumer behavior. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 10, 17-21). Third, the integration of on line and off line marketing strategies. Consumers are more and more relying on mobile devices for getting information. How to utilize the digital ads for attracting consumer come to the physical shops is an important issue faced by marketing managers.

Based on the previous researches, all the possible variables mentioned above are also applying for Chinese consumer buying behavior? Are there any other potential factors are also affecting their buying behavior? All those questions can only be answered by conducting a comprehensive research of this topic.



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aims to provide insights on the possible factors of social media that potentially influence Chinese tourists purchasing behavior when they buy local souvenirs in Thailand. Through this study, we can also gain a rough view of the Chinese social media market, what the features of social media can unconsciously affect Chinese consumers' attitudes on products and how those features influence Chinese consumers' decision making.

3.1 Research Design

This study aims to find out Chinese online behavior when it comes to Thai local souvenirs and what triggers their purchase decision-making. Since more and more Chinese tourists come to Thailand, and quite a lot of them rely on social media for searching information, then it's a good opportunity for sellers to utilize this marketing channel for gaining more sales. Therefore, it's fundamentally important to understand the factors of how social media influencing their purchasing decisions. To achieve the objectives of this research, a quantitative research design is applied.

A quantitative research method is used in this study, and questionnaires were administered to the respondents to obtain data. According to the USC Library website, Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or to explain a particular phenomenon. This research method can help identify the factors of social media influencing Chinese buying behavior.

3.2 Sample

In this study, a quantitative approach is used with at least 100 questionnaires are generated. In this case, the population of interests is Chinese tourists who have buying experience when they travelled in Thailand recently. Roughly, tourists can be divided into two groups, one group is the package tour group, who travel guided by a travel agency, the other group consists of self-guided tourists, who travel without joining any agency tour.

Our hypothesis is that the information searching behavior may be different between the tourists in package tour and self-guided groups. So the target samples from package tour and self-guided are 20%, 80% of the total respectively. Besides, social media is used mostly by young generation, therefore, the questionnaires from young generation (age between 15-35 years old) must occupy more than 50% of the total sample.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection is conducted by online questionnaires about respondents' perceptions, attitudes and behavior regarding their experience when searching information via social media.

The questions generally include reasons why to choose social media as information searching tool, what's their preference toward certain social media platforms, and what information they are looking for that probably influence consumer decision making.

As mentioned earlier, the target amount of questionnaires should be at least 100. For the demographic questions, It's doesn't matter which part respondents coming from in China as long as they have purchasing behavior. However, age, income and educational level are important factors affecting the information searching ways they choose, which must be included in the demographic questions.

3.4 Instrument

As mentioned above, this study will use questionnaires to collect data. The questionnaire comprises of the following three parts:

Part 1: Screening questions, gaining data only from the one who have purchasing behavior in Thailand recently

Part 2: The information searching behavior of respondents on social media.

Part 3: Identify the factors of social media that influence Chinese tourist buying behavior in Thailand.

Part 4: The demographic questions, which will help understand consumer's background, and easier to segment and target consumer groups later.

1. Screening questions:

- Have you had experience of buying local souvenirs in Thailand recently?

2. General questions:

- Before you buy Thai local souvenirs, which social media platforms do you prefer to use to search for related information and why?
- Why you choose this social platform?

3. Variables questions:

- Will the online reviews of Thai souvenir products influence your purchasing decision?
- Will the online ads for Thai souvenir products influence your purchasing decision?

4. Demographic questions:

- How old are you?
- What's your personal income?
- What's your educational level?

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic Results

In this analysis, I got 100 responses totally: 20 respondents are from self-guided travel tourists, and 80 respondents are from package tour tourists.

Table 4.1 Age * gender cross tabulation

Age	Gender		Total
	female	male	
less than 20 year sold	2	0	2
20-30 years old	47	14	61
31-40 years old	15	16	31
41-50 years old	3	2	5
51-60 years old	0	1	1
Total	67	33	100

Age and Gender are the basic demographic variables. Through this table we can have a general overview about the respondents of this survey. Among the 100 respondents, 67% are female, 33% are male. And people who around 20-30 years old occupy more than 60% of the whole respondents, which indicates that young generations are more likely to go to Thailand than old people.

For the female group, we can also know that female tourists who are around 20-30 years are more than those who are around 31-40 years old. On the contrary, male tourists who are around 20-30 years old are less than 31-40 years old. In China, at the age of 20s, the typical male is burdened with more responsibility than female. They have to try to find more money for buying car and house, which are important requisites for marriage. So they are more conservative on spending. As for female, at the age of

20s, which is the most beautiful age of a woman, they are eager to show their beauty to others, and travelling abroad is a thing that can make more people admire them also. More than that, there is a saying that: Traveling is not important, what matters are only the photos posting on social media. Female can easily get satisfied from the comments on those travelling photos.

Table 4.2 Income * gender cross tabulation

Income	Gender		Total
	female	male	
less than 3,000rmb	12	1	13
3,000-5,000rmb	23	4	27
5,000-10,000rmb	18	11	29
10,000- 15,000rmb	7	6	13
15,000-20,000rmb	6	4	10
20,000-30,000rmb	0	3	3
40,000-50,000rmb	1	2	3
100,000-500,000rmb	0	2	2
Total	67	33	100

To further understand respondents, let's look at their income level. As you can see, female tourists who earn around 3,000-5,000rmb are more than those who earn around 5,000-10,000rmb. On the contrary, male tourists who earn 5,000-10,000 rmb are more than 3,000-5,000rmb. After this comparison, we can know that Chinese female tourists are different from Chinese male tourists, which female are more likely travelling at a young age, and spend more than they have. As for male tourists, they tend to consume more after building a stable financial status.

Table 4.3 Social media using by tourist type

Tourist Type		FrequencyPercent		Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
self-guided travel	Valid	Yes	60	75.0	75.0
		No	20	25.0	100.0
		Total	80	100.	100.0
package tour	Valid	Yes	14	70.0	70.0
		No	6	30.0	100.0
		Total	20	100.0	100.0

Before doing the analysis plan, I set a hypothesis that package tour would use less social media for searching information than self-guided tourists. After analysis, I found that package tour does use less social media than self-guided travel, but the difference is very small, which is 70% and 75% respectively. But this figure may also be affected by the initial setting, which total self-guided respondents are 80% of total respondents, but package tour are only 20% of the total respondents.

So it indicates that social media has been playing more and more powerful influence on travelling even in the traditional package tour industry. Package tour tourists not only get suggestions from their tour guide, but also use social media as another channel for seeking information. Both self-guided tourists and package tour tourists will use social media for searching information about the travel destination, including tourist spot, local food, local souvenirs and so on.

4.2 Product Information

Table 4.4 Products information

Souvenir Type	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Snack	100	0	1	.93	.256
Hand-made products	100	0	1	.76	.429
Cosmetic	100	0	1	.73	.446

Table 4.4 Products information (cont.)

Souvenir Type	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Clothes and Shoes	100	0	1	.43	.498
Medicines	100	0	1	.72	.451
Artwork	100	0	1	.30	.461
Others	100	0	1	.03	.171
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Among all the Thai local souvenirs that Chinese tourists like to buy, snack is the most popular souvenir (93%). Hand-made products, cosmetics and medicines take 76%, 73% and 72% respectively. Compared to the Chinese tourists who go to European countries like to buy brand name products or jewelries as souvenirs, those Chinese tourists who come to Thailand have a comparative lower income, they tend to buy souvenirs that are both cheap and special for their relatives and friends. At the one hand, they can afford the price, at the other hand, it can satisfy their social relationship needs. For example, the cosmetic Mistine is very popular among Chinese tourists now. The products of Mistine are not expensive, and the packaging is also attractive. Almost every tourist would buy it, especially female tourist.

If a company would like to advertise on social media, advertising those popular product categories can gain more effectiveness.

Table 4.5 Channel of information seeking

Tourist Type	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
self-guided	80	0	1	.15	.359
travel	80	0	1	.67	.471
Tour Guide	80	0	1	.80	.403
Internet	80	0	1	.20	.403
Relatives or friends	80	0	1	.05	.219
Magazine	80				
Others	80				
Valid N (listwise)	80				

Table 4.5 Channel of information seeking (cont.)

	Tourist Type	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
package	Tour Guide	20	0	1	.75	.444
tour	Internet	20	0	1	.35	.489
	Relatives or friends	20	0	1	.90	.308
	Magazine	20	0	1	.20	.410
	Others	20	0	1	.10	.308
	Valid N (listwise)	20				

When it comes to which souvenir they would buy in Thailand, we can interpret from the above table. From this graph we can know that, both self-guided tourists and package tour tourist rely heavily on the advice from their relatives or friends who had gone to Thailand before, which means that they give the highest credits on those suggestions. For this factor, it is difficult for companies to change its influence. But except this factor, Internet comes second in terms of channel for seeking information in self-guided tourists, which indicates that how important the role of the internet is in information searching.

There is an obvious difference between self-guided tourists and package tourists, for package tour tourists, besides seeking advice from relatives or friends, around 75% of them would consider the suggestions of what to buy from tour guide. On the contrary, for self-guided tourists, around 67% would seek information from internet rather than a tour guide. So self-guided tourists are using internet for seeking information more often than package tour tourists. Magazine, which represents a traditional advertisement channel, only 20% of each group would consider reading magazines for seeking information.

4.3 Factors Influencing Chinese Tourists Buying Behavior

4.3.1 Website Preference

Table 4.6 The Preference of Social Media Website

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Weibo	74	0	1	.62	.488
WeChat	74	0	1	.76	.432
Qyer	74	0	1	.36	.485
Mafengwo	74	0	1	.38	.488
Tuniu	74	0	1	.12	.329
Ctrip	74	0	1	.35	.481
Others	74	0	1	.14	.344
Valid N (listwise)	74				

For those respondents who would use social media for searching information about Thai souvenirs, we can see that the most popular websites are WeChat and Weibo, which take 76% and 62% respectively. So advertisements on those two websites can generate high exposure rate, but there is one factor we need to consider also: WeChat and Weibo, which are multi-contents social media platform, its contents covers almost every aspects in our daily life. For Qyer, Mafengwo, Ctrip, even though those three websites are only used around 35% by tourists, these are professional travel-based social media website. Tourists who come to WeChat and Weibo, usually would be abstracted by other aspect contents. But for Qyer, Mafengwo, Ctrip, users can only see information relevant to travel.

So advertisements on WeChat or Weibo would generate high exposure rate, but advertisements on Qyer, Mafengwo, Ctrip would be more effective on targeting on the right readers.

4.3.2 Intention preference

Table 4.7 Intention for using social media

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D
Contents Diversity	74	0	1	.66	.476
More different suggestions	74	0	1	.53	.503
Fun to use	74	0	1	.30	.460
Kill time	74	0	1	.18	.383
Convenient	74	0	1	.61	.492
Decrease the possibility of making mistake	74	0	1	.26	.440
Others	74	0	0	.00	.000
Valid N (listwise)	74				

For tourists who like to use social media to seek information, I found that the most popular reasons are content diversity and convenience, which take 66% and 61% respectively. They also value the different suggestions on social media. As a conclusion of intention to use social media, Chinese tourists can get various information from the contents posting online, because they have never been Thailand before, when it comes to what to buy and where to travel, they would mostly rely on the most convenient and familiar way---social media to get information they needed.

Due to the fact that most Chinese tourists highly value content diversity, a company may take this point as one of strategic planning guide lines. If a company is going to register their own product account, besides the information about products, company can post the contents about the tourist spot, local food, local history, etc. By this method, the product can not only gain the exposure rate, but also attract more followers.

4.3.3 Account type preference

Table 4.8 Preference of account type

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Certified official product account	74	0	1	.84	.371
Travel agency account	74	0	1	.19	.394
Famous people account	74	0	1	.36	.485
Thailand News account	74	0	1	.51	.503
Others	74	0	1	.03	.163
Valid N (listwise)	74				

From this table, we can know that among all the accounts on social media, the account of certified official product is the most reliable account in the mind of Chinese tourists, which 84% of respondents are willing to choose to follow. Not every account can get certified, only the accounts that provide official government documents can get certified. With the symbol of certified official product, it could significantly increase the trust among followers. Beside certified account, the news account (one of the KOLs) also get high credit, around 51% of respondents would choose to follow. KOLs is playing more and more important role in social media, primarily due to their professional status. As for travel agency account, no more than 20% of people would like to take it into consideration. In China, neither travel agency nor tour guide has a positive image because of consistently negative news exposure. So that's why people resist to following travel agency account. In order to influence Chinese tourist's decision making, we can try to cooperate with highly valued accounts for posting products information.

If a company would like to advertise its product on social media, one of the effective ways is to cooperate with KOLs. Contents posted by KOL can significantly increase ads exposure rate, at the same time, followers tend to trust more those contents.

4.3.4 Account feature preference

Table 4.9 Features of social media account

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Certified or not	74	0	1	.61	.492
Historic contents posting	74	0	1	.64	.485
Total amount of numbers	74	0	1	.26	.440
Total number of comments of fans	74	0	1	.39	.492
Total number of likes of fans	74	0	1	.18	.383
The overview of account page	74	0	1	.31	.466
Others	74	0	0	.00	.000
Valid N (listwise)	74				

As mentioned earlier, KOLs have been increasing their influence on social media. From the table above we can know that when people choose certain KOL to follow, certified symbol and historic contents posting are most critical factors in people judging an account.

If one souvenir company would like to invite a KOL to help increase its brand ads exposure rate, company should better use the KOL who is certified and has good historical contents. By doing so, it would potentially increase the credit of its ads on social media. Besides those two factors, the factor of total number of comments is also important in increasing reliability of account, which followers would probably consider other user's comments toward certain product. By investing those qualified KOLs, which would largely increase product awareness.

4.3.5 The influence of display ads on social media

Table 4.10 Does the display ads on social media influence your decision making?

	Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
female	Valid	never	3	6.3	6.3	6.3
		rarely	32	66.7	66.7	72.9
		often	11	22.9	22.9	95.8
		always	2	4.2	4.2	100.0
		Total	48	100.0	100.0	
male	Valid	never	4	15.4	15.4	15.4
		rarely	15	57.7	57.7	73.1
		often	6	23.1	23.1	96.2
		always	1	3.8	3.8	100.0
		Total	26	100.0	100.0	

For the scale options, I took away “Sometimes”, which would force people to show their opinion, because Asian people tend to express their attitude neutrally. From this table we can know that the opinions of male and female tourists are very similar. More than 60% of male and female respondents think that online display ads rarely or never influence their decision making when it comes to what to buy. Around 23% of male and female respondents are often influenced by the online display ads.

But through research reviews and real life experience, I do think online ads are more powerful than those figures itself. I think this result is affected by several factors. First, Chinese people didn't like ads, and they are very sensitive to face-saving. If they answer that they often or always be influenced by ads, it would make them feel that they are stupid. Second, online ads influences people unconsciously, which means that people didn't notice that some decisions making are actually the results of ads' impact. To verify this question, I think in a future study, I need do a qualitative survey to better understand the effects of online display ads. Anyway, from the result of the above table, we should put less effort on display ads on social media.

4.3.6 The influence of online promotion on social media

Table 4.11 Do you like online promotion on social media?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	never	10	13.5	13.5	13.5
	rarely	57	77.0	77.0	90.5
	often	4	5.4	5.4	95.9
	always	3	4.1	4.1	100.0
	Total	74	100.0	100.0	

More than 90% of respondents rarely or never like online promotion. The top reasons why Chinese tourists don't like online promotion are: 1. It's not real (35%); 2. It's wasting time (29%); 3. It's annoying (24%). Nowadays, there are many online promotions on social media, many of them are not real, that's why consumer resists this type of promotion.

As a conclusion, online promotion on social media has little impact on Chinese tourist buying behavior. If a company really wants to use this marketing tool, don't try to be tricky with consumers, otherwise it would decrease the trust of consumers.

4.3.7 Contents type preference

Table 4.12 What type of contents will attract you more?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	with pictures mainly	8	10.8	10.8	10.8
	with text mainly	4	5.4	5.4	16.2
	with the combination of pictures and text	62	83.8	83.8	100.0
	Total	74	100.0	100.0	

From the types of contents, we can know that more than 80% of people like the content with combination of pictures and text. Nowadays people are getting more and more lazy and impatient to read text-only content, photos is the easiest content to consume than other types of contents. According to a research published on eMarketer, photos accounted for 75% of content posted by Facebook pages worldwide. What's more, photos are more engaging type of content. The combination of pictures and text, not only can give reader details of products, but also can attract them at the first sight by posting pictures, as a result, followers would be more impressed by the content of products. So if company would like to post contents of products on social media, it's more effective to post contents with the combination of pictures and text.

4.3.8 The influence of WOM

Table 4.13 Which type of review is more influencing?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Positive review	14	18.9	18.9	18.9
	Negative review	23	31.1	31.1	50.0
	Both	25	33.8	33.8	83.8
	Neither	12	16.2	16.2	100.0
Total		74	100.0	100.0	

When I was doing the literature review, I found that many studies mentioned about the impacts of WOM. To better understand how Chinese tourists react to WOM, I designed this question. According to the table above, we can know that around 33.8% of respondents replied that both positive and negative reviews have the same impact on them. As a conclusion, WOM does have a significant impact on people decision making. For Chinese tourists who use social media for searching product information, they will consider both positive and negative reviews, but the negative review is more influencing overall.

To avoid bad or negative reviews impact people's conviction toward certain products, a company should carefully deal with those comments, especially negative

comments. If no measures to control those negative comments are taken, once they go viral, it would be tough to switch people' attitude toward brand image, which would hugely impact consumers' intention to buy.

4.3.9 Sharing preference

Table 4.14 Do you like sharing your good buying experience on social media?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	never	14	18.9	18.9	18.9
	rarely	40	54.1	54.1	73.0
	often	17	23.0	23.0	95.9
	always	3	4.1	4.1	100.0
	Total	74	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.15 Do you like sharing your bad buying experience on social media?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	never	12	16.2	16.2	16.2
	rarely	45	60.8	60.8	77.0
	often	14	18.9	18.9	95.9
	always	3	4.1	4.1	100.0
	never	12	16.2	16.2	16.2

From the two graphs above, we can find a really interesting phenomenon that around 75% of respondent are rarely or never sharing good or bad buying experience on social media. Actually social media is a place that you can share whatever contents you want, but it turns out among Chinese tourists, the majority of them are just silent followers, or quiet contents readers. From my working experience of doing Chinese social media, nowadays the majority of travelling content is from hired agencies or paid bloggers, which most of them are aiming for gaining profits from contents posting. Most of travelling contents (hotels, tourist spots or souvenirs etc.) that Chinese tourists see from online social media are “deliberately” created, not from the experience of previous

Chinese tourists themselves. Initially, social media is a platform for opinion exchanging, content-sharing etc., but now social media is more used for commercial purposes.

As a conclusion, to better increase the effects of positive WOM, company can give incentives to stimulate consumers to write more good comments or reviews. Besides, company can also hire a social media agency or bloggers to create positive WOM to increase both exposure rate and brand image.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As Chinese tourists like to come to Thailand in large numbers nowadays, a lot of Thai local souvenirs are becoming more and more popular among Chinese tourists. As Chinese tourists tend to use social media for seeking information about souvenirs, this study aims to find the social media factors influencing Chinese tourists' souvenir buying behaviors.

The total number of respondents is 100, with 80% self-guided tourists, and 20% are package tour tourists. Self-guided tourists are using more social media than package tour respondents, but the difference is very small. All the respondents are randomly picked.: 66% are female, 37% are male respondents. Female tourists tend to travel to Thailand at a very young age (20-30 years old), while male tourists tend to travel to Thailand at an older age (31-40 years old). Female tourists are willing to travel even if their financial status is not strong, on the contrary, male tourists are more likely to travel after they have reached a mature financial status. This phenomenon partially results from Chinese social culture, in which young man are burdened more by finance responsibilities.

Among all the respondents, around 74% of them would use social media for searching Thai local souvenir information, which indicates that social media has a really important influence on Chinese tourists product purchasing decisions. Among all the souvenirs Chinese tourists bought, snacks, hand-made products, medicines and cosmetics are favorite souvenir categories. Compared to the Chinese tourists who come to European countries, Chinese tourists who come to Thailand have less buying power, so they tend to buy the souvenirs that are relatively cheap and special, but not beyond their affordable ability.

For the most popular and favorite social media website for searching information about Thai souvenirs, Weibo and WeChat are the top website destinations for Chinese tourists. But Weibo and WeChat are multi-content social media platforms, its contents covers almost every aspects in our daily life. Tourists who come to WeChat and Weibo

would usually be attracted by other content aspects. For Qyer, Mafengwo, Ctrip, even though those 3 websites are only used by around 35% of the tourists, these are professional travel-based social media websites. So for tourists who come to Qyer, Mafengwo, Ctrip, they can only see information relevant to travel. In order to increase the exposure rate, a Thai company can launch ads on WeChat and Weibo, which are the top active social media platforms. If a company is going to increase the effectiveness of ads, it is better to boost the ads on Qyer, Mafengwo, and Ctrip, which are professional travel social media platforms. Since most of social media users will try to get rid of online ads, so it is more effective to launch ads by hiring KOLs. Through the contents or blogs posted by KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders), followers will not clearly be aware of this as another type of ad, which would be easier to have influence on them.

So how should Thai souvenir companies choose the KOLs for launching their product ads? According to the responses, we can know that certified accounts and also the historical account are important factors that Chinese tourist followers are considering. So to make best of your investment on online ads, companies should choose the KOLs that are certified and also have good and interesting contents. A certified account is really important in the social media market, which is a critical metric that determines if follower would trust you or not. If Thai local souvenir companies would like to launch their own social media page, to increase the reliability of an account, it's better to get certified first.

As for the contents, Chinese tourists prefer the contents that have both texts and pictures. If the content is text mainly, followers would not take time to read and think. If the content is picture mainly, it would not cover the details about the product. By combining the texts and contents, it would give the follower product details, at the same time, followers can visualize the products, which can also grab them attention at the first sight.

For the online social media product promotion, more than 90% of respondents are rarely or never respond to online promotion. The main reasons are: consumers don't think it's real and it wastes time. So if souvenir companies would like to launch promotion on social media, don't try to tricky with consumers, provide real discounts or awards to those who join in the promotion. As for the problem that followers thinking wasting

time, try to make the promotion as simple as possible, so they can use less effort to consume what's the promotion about.

For the important factor: WOM, from this study, we can see that the negative comments are more influencing than positive comments. For my personal opinion, I think it's quite difficult to measure this variable. Because when we decide to purchase a certain product, there are a lot of factors impacting our decision making. From this study, the negative comments do have a higher impact, based on this, companies should try to get rid of negative comments. Whenever a bad comment emerges, companies should give a reasonable and quick response. Comments on social media are really powerful, more than we often imagine. Once negative comments go viral, it could turn into a disaster ruining the product image. So a company should be careful to deal with those comments, especially negative comments.

As for the positive comments, company should try to extend its influence. But from the analysis we can know that most of our respondents are not willing to share their good buying experience. Most of those Chinese tourists tend to be a silent reader, which means that they tend to only read the comments or contents on social, but not actively expressing or sharing their experience. To encourage follower sharing more positive comments, companies can give them incentives. The more positive comments are sharing, the better brand image would be.

As summarized in the findings of the literature review, social media is the high hybrid element of the promotion mix. The emergence of social media enables consumers that do know each other to directly exchange opinions about products, which is out of the direct control of marketing teams. So a company should utilize social media to shape the discussion of customers in a way conveying the organization's intended brand and product image in order to attract more customers.

5.1 Suggestions

1. To launch social media ads, the categories of souvenirs should be snacks, hand-made products, medicines and cosmetics, which are the popular Thai local souvenirs among Chinese tourists market.

2. Online campaigns and promotions should be more fashionable, since most social media users are from the young generation.
3. For increasing the brand exposure rate, launching ads on Weibo and WeiChat; For better effectiveness, launching ads on Qyer, Mafengwo, Ctirp.
4. Hire popular KOLs to do online ads posting.
5. If a company would have its own social media page, get certified first.
6. Online content that combines photos and text with product information
7. Carefully deal with negative comments
8. Give incentives to encourage followers to share good buying experiences

5.2 Limitations

For this study, because I only used a quantitative survey, many deeper questions are still not clear. First, the reasons why nowadays followers are not willing to share their good or bad buying experience, it is better to use qualitative research methods, for example focus groups, so we can get a deeper understanding of the Chinese tourists' intentions.

The difference of social media usage rate between self-guided tourists and those package tour tourists is very small in this survey. For a future study, we should try to sample more package tour tourists for analyzing their social media behavior.

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13. Which type of review is more influencing?

Positive review Negative review

Both None

14. What type of contents will attract you to read?

The content with pictures mainly

The content with text mainly

The content with the combination of pictures and text

15. Do you like online promotion on social media?

Strongly likes Somewhat likes

Somewhat dislike Strongly dislike

16. Why do you like it?

Saving money A channel of getting information

Interesting Others, please specify

17. Why you don't like it?

It's not real Waste time

Disturbing Others, please specify

	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
18. Does review of other people will influence your attitudes towards products?				
19. Do the ads of product son social media will influence your decision making on products?				
20. Does the offline activities relevant online campaign will influence your attitudes towards products? (ex. Use e-ticket discounts to purchase physical products)				
21. Does the opinion of KOLs will influence your attitudes towards products?				
22. Will you comment other's contents if you agree with?				
23. Will you comment other's contents if you disagree with?				

	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
24. Do you like sharing your good buying experience on social media?				
25. Do you like sharing your bad buying experience on social media?				

26. How old are you?

- Less than 20 years old 21 to 30 years old
 31 to 40 years old 41 to 50 years old
 51 to 60 years old More than 60 years old

27. Please indicate your gender

- Female Male

28. What's your educational level?

- Primary school Junior school
 High school Junior college
 Bachelor Master
 PHD

29. What's your personal monthly income level (after tax)?

- Less than 3000rmb 3000 to 5000 rmb
 5000 to 10000 rmb 10000- 15000 rmb
 15000-20000 rmb 20000-30000 rmb
 30000-40000 rmb 40000-50000 rmb
 More than 50000, less than 100000 rmb
 More than 100000, less than 500000 rmb
 More than 500000, less than 1000000 rmb
 More than 1000000 rmb