

TRAVELERS' BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TOURISM

by

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ABSTRACT

Social media are internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content (text, pictures, and video clips) typically informed by relevant experience and shared online with other consumers. It is fundamentally reshaping the way tourism-related information is distributed and the way people make plans to travel. The aim of this paper is to investigate travelers' behaviors and attitudes towards using social media to search for information to plan their travel in Thailand. The study was drawn from quantitative collected data in questionnaires (400 samples) and from qualitative data in interviews. The analysis of the results found that travelers searched for information from mostly business websites and social media. The travelers sought information about prices, quality of services and variety of choices of the tourism destination, accommodation, restaurants, tours, souvenirs and spas. The top five social media websites that the travelers used included Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Hi5 and Trip Advisor. Travelers tended to believe information from their friends in social media rather than information provided by tourism business websites. Finally, the travelers always used social media to recommend tourism experiences and to share information about their travels with friends.

KEYWORDS

Behavior, Attitude, Tourism, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has fundamentally reshaped the ways travelers plan and consume travel (Bahalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The advantages of obtaining tourism information from the internet include low cost of transaction, ease of product comparison, interactivity, virtual community formation and ease of access (Wang, Head, & Arthur, 2002; Ho, Lin, & Chen, 2012). Moreover, the Internet provided a rich of information and resources the travelers needs for their tourism via by browse information from Web page, online booking, online reservation, send e-mail, chat, post information on the online forums, and send message for communication. The application on the Internet is becoming fashionable called 'social media'.

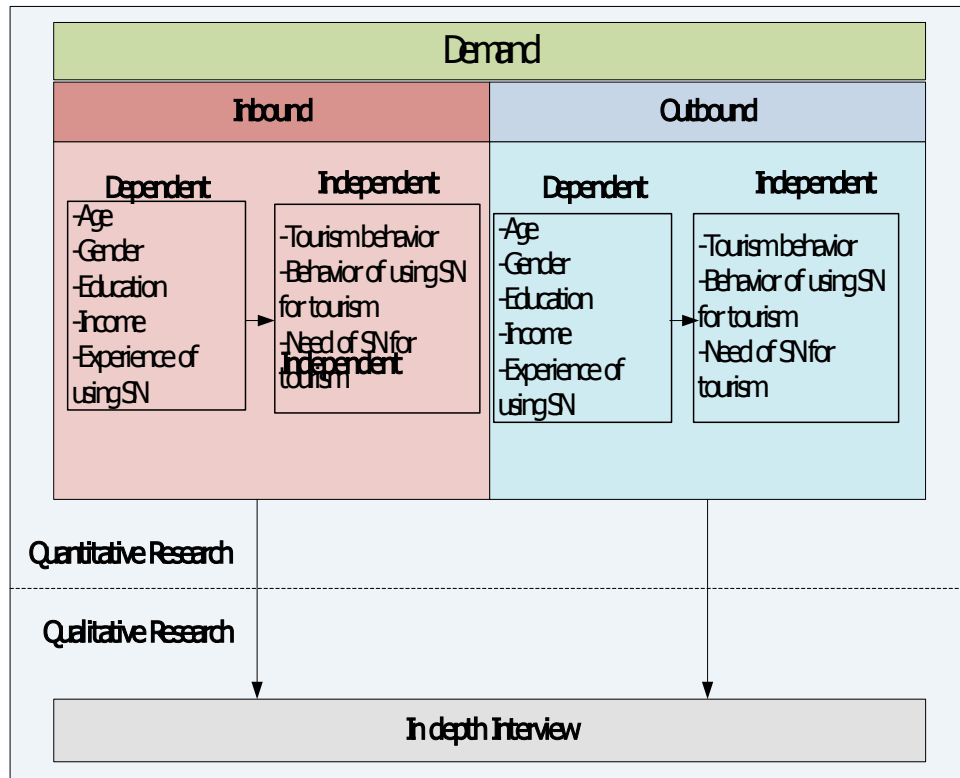
Social media are internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content (text, pictures, and video clips) typically informed by relevant experience and shared online with other consumers. Social media consists of applications such as blogs, virtual communities, wikis, social media, collaborative tagging, and media shared on websites (Youtube, Flickr) that have gained popularity with online travelers (Gretzel, 2006; Pan, MacLaurin & Crott, 2007; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The capabilities of social media have fundamentally reshaped the way tourism-related information is distributed and how people make plans to travel.

The aim of this paper is to investigate travelers' behaviors and attitudes towards using social media to search for information to plan their travel in Thailand.

METHODOLOGY

This study used mix methodology by integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Figure 1 shows the research framework.

**FIGURE 1
RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**



*Note: SN=Social Network

Quantitative approach

Population and sample

This study collected data from 1,000 samples by using questionnaires. The population of travelers includes those who were both in-bound to and out-bound from Thailand as shown in table 1.

**TABLE 1
POPULATION AND SAMPLE OF TRAVELER**

Traveler	Population	Sample**
Inbound	91,548,294	400
Outbound	15,841,683	100
Total	107,389,977	500

Note * Taroyame (1973, P 1088) confident level 95%

**Increase number of sample to be more confident

Tool validity

There were two sets of questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of 4 parts: part 1 – demographics, part 2 – tourism behaviors, part 3 – behavior of using social media for tourism, and part 4 –open form.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics.

Qualitative approach

Data was collected from in-depth interviews with travelers. Content analysis was used for data analysis.

**FIGURE 2
DATA COLLECTION FROM QUALITATIVE STUDY**



RESULTS

1) The results of inbound traveler’s social media behavior is shown in table 2-4

**TABLE 2
INBOUND TRAVELER’S BEHAVIOR OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA**

		Level of Using social media	
		M	S.D.
1.	Facebook	3.79	1.52
2.	Twitter	1.42	0.98
3.	Hi5	1.22	0.68
4.	Youtube	3.11	1.53
5.	Trip Advisor	1.17	0.71

Results from table 2 found that inbound travelers’ use of social media for communication and searching tourism information ranked Facebook ($M = 3.79$), Youtube ($M = 3.12$), Twitter ($M = 1.42$), and Trip Advisor ($M = 1.17$).

Here are some comments to illustrate the inbound traveler’s behavior use of social media as follows:

“I addicted to Facebook. I use it for upload my picture when I travels to the interesting place and also I always click “like” of my friend page as well and always give them some comments such as where to stay, where to eat, where to shopping.”

“I like Youtube because it can help me to view information about the hotel with video. Also I can read the comments of other people when they comments about those video”.

“I got useful information from the Tripadvisor especially from other people review. I trends to believe those review more than information from hotel web site”.

TABLE 3
OBJECTIVES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SEARCHING TOURISM INFORMATION

Objectives	Frequency	Percentage
Tourism information search for:		
1. Tourism attraction	324	79.02
2. Accommodation	182	44.39
3. Booking tour	74	18.05
3. Booking restaurant	74	18.05

Results from table 3 found that inbound travelers had the objective of using social media to search for information about tourism attractions, accommodations, booking tours and booking restaurants respectively.

Here are some comments to illustrate the inbound travelers' objectives of using social media as follows:

"I use social media for search information of tourism attraction by posting where to stay and where to eat on my Facebook. I got a good recommendation from FB friends."

"I use Facebook for searching information about hotel and accommodation for my holiday. I found it very effective way to find information because my friends in FB always give me a good comments and I believe them".

TABLE 4
OBJECTIVES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TOURISM

objective	Frequency	Percentage
Objectives of using social media		
1. Price comparison	183	44.63
2. Viewing pictures/ VDO	156	38.05
3. Share information with friends	138	33.66

Results from table 4 found that inbound travelers used social media based on the objectives of price comparison, viewing pictures/VDO and sharing information with friends respectively.

Here are some comments to illustrate the inbound travelers' objectives of using social media as follows:

"I always get coupon from Facebook. Sometimes I got 50% discount for the hotel, it is very good deal."

"I like to upload my picture especially foods to share with my friends and make them get jealous."

2) The result of outbound traveler's behavior of social media shown in table 5-6.

TABLE 5
OUTBOUND TRAVELER'S SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BEHAVIOR

	Level of using social media	
	M	S.D.
1. Facebook	3.26	2.10
2. Twitter	2.03	2.23
3. Youtube	3.25	1.95
4. Tripadvisor	1.09	1.68

Results from table 5 show that outbound travelers' behaviors regarding social media usage ranked Facebook ($M= 3.26$), Youtube ($M= 3.25$), Twitter ($M= 2.03$) and Tripadvisor ($M= 1.09$) as the five most used social media websites.

Here are some comments to illustrate the inbound travelers' objectives of using social media as follows:

“I use Tripadvisor for planning my trip in Hua-Hin because I never been there before. I don’t know about the price of the hotel. I found many interesting hotel and many activities such as swimming at the beach, walking in the mountain, dinning at Kao-Ta-Keap, shopping Thai handicraft. It is very useful and information from the review is quite accurate.”

**TABLE 6
OUTBOUND TRAVELER’S SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BEHAVIOR
REGARDING THE SEARCH FOR INFORMATION AND THEIR OBJECTIVES**

Objective	Frequency	Percentage
Searching information about:		
1. Tourism attractions	92	83.64
2. Transportation	25	22.73
3. Accommodations	16	14.55
Objectives of using social media for		
1. Viewing pictures/ VDO	29	26.36
2. Read review/comments	27	24.55
3. Compare prices	26	23.64

Results from table 6 show that outbound travelers’ social media usage behavior included searching for information about tourism attractions, transportation, and accommodations respectively. The objectives of using social media were for viewing pictures/ VDO, reading reviews and comments and comparing prices.

Here are some comments to illustrate the inbound traveler’s objective of using social media as follows:

“I come to Thailand because of my friends send picture and write the comment how beautiful of Phuket is. That why, I decide to come to Phuket and stay where my friends used to stay.”

“I believe the review on the Tripadvisor because those blogger didn’t get benefit from the tourism business. They always put their true experiences without any business be hide.”

“I always read information from social media because my friends always tell the true. Those information is affected my decision making for my travel planning to Thailand.”

“I think tourism business should use social media for sharing information to the traveler but not indirect marketing but should provide knowledge and sharing travel experience with the tourist.”

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the results found that travelers searched for information mostly from social media. They sought information about prices, quality of services and variety of choices of tourism destinations, accommodations, restaurants, tours, souvenirs and spas. The top five social media websites that the traveler’s used included Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Hi5 and Trip Advisor. Travelers tended to believe information from their friends in social media rather than information provided by tourism business websites. Finally, the travelers always used social media to recommend tourism experiences and to share information about their travels with friends.

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