

# THE EXPOSURE ON KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, AND INTENTION TO VISIT ASIAN CITIES OF THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study attempts to understand how exposure to a city or region via various types of media or interactions affects self-perceived knowledge and attitudes about that location and, ultimately, the desire to visit that location. Cross-national online opinion polls on Exposure on Knowledge, Attitude, and Intention to Visit a City were carried out in Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Seoul, Phuket, Pattaya, Manila, Cebu, Chennai, Mumbai, Bali, Labuan Bajo and Penang between September and October of 2023.

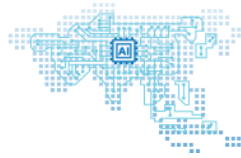
This article restricts the findings to a preliminary comparative description and analysis of 809 Thai university students. More solid and deep comparisons will be carried out by local polling leaders of 14 Asian cities. Three key threads stand out from these preliminary comparisons. First, social media is an informative channel that shapes knowledge and attitudes toward a city. Second, factors that did not appear relevant to their opinion of the cities' image as tourist destinations are safety, economic center, and technological center. Thirdly, cities that are generally well-known, Hong Kong, Seoul, and Phuket, are also thought to be more important in the future.

Keywords: social media, tourist destination image, cross-national survey, Asian cities

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<sup>1</sup> This research paper is a part of the Asian Youth Survey Project on City Image, 2023 of Asian Network for Public Opinion Research

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## Introduction

Destination image is a concept that includes the sum of all the beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a tourist has about a destination. Previous studies argued that it plays a crucial role in the configuration of tourist preferences and opinions regarding visiting tourist destinations. It's important to note that the relationship between media and the construction of reality or 'city destination images' is complex and multifaceted. While media can shape perceptions, individuals also bring their own experiences, beliefs, and perspectives to interpret media messages. Additionally, the media itself is diverse, encompassing various platforms, genres, and sources, each with its own potential impact on the construction of reality. Gen Z is the generation to have grown up with the internet, social media, and smartphones as part of their everyday lives. In the online world era, they may choose media outlets, TV channels, websites, or social media that align with their worldview. They may also listen to people they know. Understanding selective exposure is crucial when examining how media consumption and information dissemination contribute to forming individual and collective beliefs.

## Literature Review

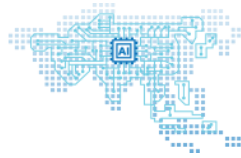
### 1. Media effect on the construction of reality

Media effects on the construction of reality are rooted in the idea that media, through its various forms and channels, plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions, beliefs, and understanding of the world around them. This influence can be observed through several theories, for example, Agenda Setting, Frame Analysis, Cultivation Theory, Selective Exposure, and Social Media Influence. The research team will review three media effect theories in this paper: Selective Exposure, Frame Analysis, and Social Media Influence.

#### *1.1 Selective exposure*

Selective exposure is a psychology theory often used in media and communication research. Historically, it refers to an individual's tendency to prefer information that reinforces existing views while avoiding conflicting information (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). Selective exposure is a theory that explains 'compatibility bias' or 'confirmation bias.' The main idea is that individuals tend to seek out and pay attention to information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs, attitudes, and values while avoiding or ignoring information that contradicts their views. This selective exposure process can occur in various contexts, for example, during media consumption, face-to-face communication, or information-seeking.

From the theory point of view, people tend to open up to information closely related to their confirmation bias, which is the tendency to favor information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs or values. People are often more receptive to information that validates what they already think, and they may actively avoid information that challenges their existing perspectives.



In the online world era, people may choose media outlets, TV channels, websites, or social media accounts that align with their worldview. In addition to actively seeking out confirming information, individuals may avoid it by steering clear of content that challenges their beliefs. This avoidance can happen consciously or unconsciously. This behavior can result in limited exposure to diverse perspectives and contribute to the reinforcement of existing beliefs. This is because social media algorithms filter personalized online content people are predominantly exposed to. In other words, social media acts as filter bubbles and echo chambers (Cinell et al., 2021; Diaz Ruiz & Nilsson, 2023).

### ***1.2 Frame analysis***

Frame analysis is often used in communication studies, sociology, and media studies to understand how individuals interpret and make sense of information. It focuses on how information is presented or framed and influences how people perceive and understand it (Matthes, 2009). The concept of framing suggests that the presentation of information can shape how an audience interprets events, issues, or topics. Frames are often disseminated through media channels. Media outlets play a crucial role in framing issues for the public, and the frames they choose can significantly impact the public's understanding of events.

This study will focus on frame setting as media channels play a crucial role in framing issues. The medium (e.g., news articles, television reports, social media posts) and the broader social and cultural context play a role in shaping the frames through which individuals perceive information. This point of discussion relates to the use and gratification theory, which attempts to understand why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy particular needs. (West and Lynn, 2010). By analyzing frames, the researchers can gain insights into the social construction of reality and the influence of media on individuals' perceptions and interpretations of the world.

### ***1.3 Social media Influence***

With the rise of social media, individuals are not only passive consumers of information but also active participants in the construction of reality; in other words, consumers in the Internet age become 'Prosumer,' the combination of producer and consumer (Toffler, 1979 cited in Shaw, 2017). User-generated content, online communities, and sharing news stories can contribute to forming collective perceptions and beliefs. Social media profoundly influences individuals, societies, and various aspects of contemporary life. Social media platforms serve as conduits for the rapid dissemination of information. News, trends, and opinions can spread quickly, shaping public discourse on various issues. They also act as filter bubbles and echo chambers through their Algorithms. Social media plays a significant role in shaping cultural trends and disseminating internet memes. Trends can spread rapidly across platforms, influencing fashion, language, and



behaviors. This can result in public opinion and brand perception, leading to a country's image and tourism destination.

## 2. City Image and Tourism Destination

### *2.1 Thailand destination*

Over the past decade, tourism has emerged as a prominent sector contributing significantly to Thailand's economic revenue. The expansion of the tourism sector facilitates the growth of interconnected industries, contributes to the development of the national economy, and fosters societal progress (Nuchruedee, 2022). The tourism industry in Thailand, as well as globally, is exhibiting signs of recovery following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important to note that certain limitations are still imposed on overseas travel. In the context of Thailand, there has been an ongoing effort to formulate and implement marketing communication strategies aimed at specific segments of the tourist population. Conventional and contemporary media advertising can be used to foster self-assurance and promote the inclination of tourists to engage in travel activities. Furthermore, the government places significance on the perception of Thailand's image, employing data analysis and strategic planning to enhance awareness and foster competition within the tourism sector in the forthcoming years (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2023). Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin signals this plan during the recent visit to Phuket and Phang Nga that the government has a clear commitment to expedite various projects with a budget in trillions of baht, aiming to elevate Phuket into a global city, stimulate tourism, and become a center for spreading prosperity to the Andaman region ([www.nationthailand.com](http://www.nationthailand.com), 2023)

### *2.2 Country Image*

Investigating a country's image has been a central focus of corporate management and political science (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015; Lee & Lockshin, 2012; Lu et al., 2016). In recent years, destination images have become increasingly prevalent in destination research (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Nadeau et al., 2008). According to the research conducted by Martin and Eroglu in 1993, the concept of country image refers to an individual's collection of descriptive, inferential, and informational opinions of a specific country. According to Mossberg and Kleppe (2005), the impact of a country's image extends across various domains, including international business, politics, and culture. They noted that this influence can be witnessed in specific items, events, or persons from a particular country. The concept of country image extends beyond special situations (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005). Within the field of tourism, researchers have conducted further analysis of the idea of nation image, specifically dividing it into two distinct components: country-of-origin image and product image (Lee & Lockshin, 2012). Mossberg and Kleppe (2005) introduced a conceptual framework in the field of consumer behaviors, wherein they posit that product image is encompassed inside the broader construct of country image. This model highlights the expansive



nature of the latter construct. In addition, there exists a complex relationship between the image of a product and the image of the country it originates from, which in turn has an impact on consumer attitudes and behaviors when it comes to purchasing products from different countries (Bertoli & Resciniti, 2013; Kaynak & Kara, 2002).

### ***2.3 Destination Image***

The study of destination images has been a significant area of research for several decades (Duan & Lai, 2022). In contradistinction to the construct of a country's image, the notion of a destination image revolves around the perceptions harbored by prospective visitors regarding a specific location as a potential holiday destination (Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019; Hahm, Tasci, & Terry, 2018). The destination's image holds sway over the subjective viewpoints of prospective tourists, potentially influencing their behavior and decision-making processes pertaining to travel (Chon, 1991). Within tourism, the exploration of destination image is a widely examined subject (Pike, 2002). Nevertheless, a spectrum of definitions for this term exists among scholars specializing in tourism studies. Notably, Crompton (1979) and Gartner (1986) have conceptualized destination image to encapsulate an individual's comprehensive collection of beliefs, notions, and perceptions directed towards a specific destination. Furthermore, numerous studies in the tourism domain have delineated destination image as the vast perception tourists hold about a particular destination (Coshall, 2000). Alternatively, it is a composite of tourists' beliefs, knowledge, impressions, and emotional responses toward a specific destination (Al-Azri & Morrison, 2006; Tasci, Uslu, Styliadis, & Woosnam, 2022). Tourists' perception of destination image may fluctuate across various geographical scales, encompassing distinctions between a country, region, province, state, or city (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005). Consequently, the construct of the destination image is generally perceived as more intricate and multifaceted than that of the country image (Yang, Isa, & Ramayah, 2022).

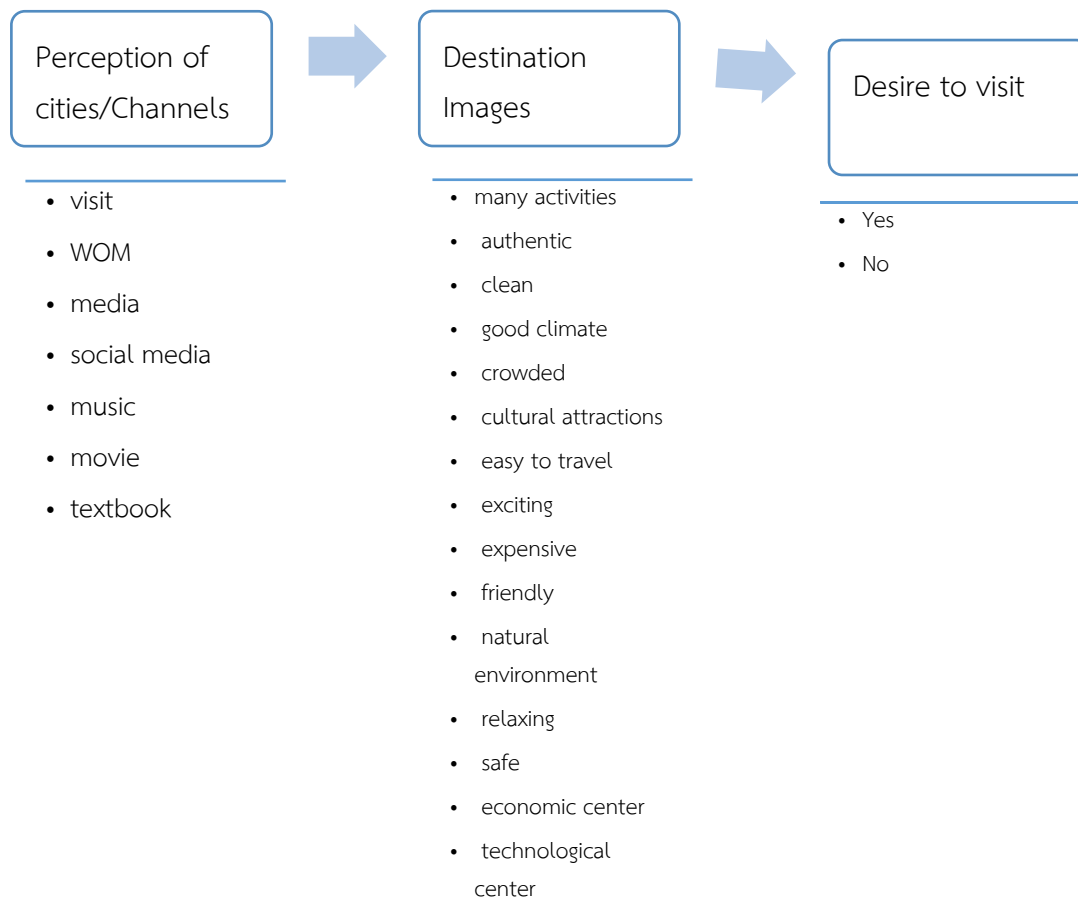
### **3. Generation Z and media use**

Generation Z (Gen Z), born between 1997 and 2012, is the generation to have grown up with the internet, social media, and smartphones as part of their everyday lives. A 2022 survey by Morning Consult (Briggs, 2022) found that 54% of Gen Zers said they spend at least four hours daily on social media, and 38% spend even more time than that. This generation is still growing into its own, and yet it has an abundance of names ranging from the Google Generation to the Millennials, The New Silent Generation, Digital Natives, Generation M, and The Net Generation (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014: 116). Gen Z currently comprises 19% or one-fourth of the Thai population (KASIKORN Research Center, 2022). Statistics show that entertainment content gets the most interest at 66%, followed by personally beneficial content at 26% and lifestyle content at 24%. In terms of content format, Gen Z likes video clips, followed by photos and text (Brandbuffet, 2019).



Research on Gen Z and their media use are abundant (Alves, 2023; Curtis et al, 2019; Atay and Ashlock, 2022). Key characteristics of Gen Z and their media use can be summed up as follows. Gen Z is often considered digital natives, having grown up in a world where digital technology is ubiquitous. They are comfortable with smartphones, social media, and various digital platforms from an early age. Gen Z tends to be highly mobile-oriented in their media consumption. Smartphones play a central role in their lives, serving as a primary device for communication, social networking, content consumption, and even online shopping. They value authenticity in media content. They appreciate personalized and relatable content that reflects diverse perspectives. User-generated content, influencer marketing, and peer recommendations are influential factors.

### Conceptual framework



### Research Method and Analysis

Cross-national online opinion polls on Exposure to Knowledge, Attitude, and Intention to Visit a City were carried out in Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Seoul, Phuket,



Pattaya, Manila, Cebu, Chennai, and Mumbai between September and October of 2023. In this paper, 809 Thai university students attended the survey. Six questions were asked as follows;

- 1) Rate familiarity with the following cities on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1. = Never heard of it and 6. = Know it very well.
- 2) How participants have heard of the cities which multiple responses are (1) Visited it myself, (2) Someone I know visited/lives there, (3) Social media, (4) Traditional media (newspaper, TV news, Radio, etc.), (5) TV/movie that takes place or references this city, (6) Music, and (7) Learned about it in a class/academic text.
- 3) Image of destination cities, which multiple responses are (1) Offers many activities for tourists, (2) Authentic, (3) Clean, (4) Has good climate, (5) Crowded, (6) Has cultural attractions, (7) Easy to travel within the city, (8) Exciting, (9) Expensive, (10) Friendly, (11) Has beautiful natural environment, (12) Relaxing, (13) Safe, (14) Economic center, and (15) Technological Center
- 4) Participants desire to visit the cities, and
- 5) Participants' perception of the cities in the future.

This paper is intended to describe the characteristics of each study variable, the way of presenting the data into a frequency distribution table, calculating the concentration and dispersion values, and interpreting them.

## Results

Descriptions of the characteristics of respondents to be presented below include gender, current place of study, and the use of social media. Descriptive results indicate that most respondents are women, as many as 511 people or 63.2%, and most respondents currently study in Thailand as many as 798 or 98.6%. Most respondents, as many as /people or 89.7%, use social media multiple times daily.

More than 50% of respondents did not know the five cities in question. They are Guangzhou, China (79%), Shenzhen, China (70%), Cebu, Philippines (52.3), Chennai, India (55.0%), and Labuan Bajo, Indonesia (60.6%).

Most respondents knew all cities through social media, traditional media, and TV or movies. However, respondents knew about Seoul, South Korea, from social media, TV or movies, and music. In contrast, respondents learned about Manila, Cebu, Chennai, and Labuan Bajo from social media, traditional media, and Textbook in class. Only Pattaya respondents heard about the city from social media and visited the city by themselves and traditional media.



When asked about the perceived images of the destination cities, respondents gave images of 'Offers many activities for tourists' as many as 45.61%, followed by 'Crowded' at 31.05% and 'Has good climate' at 30.79%.

The first three cities respondents desired to visit in the future are Seoul, Phuket, and Hong Kong at 45.4%, 14.3%, and 12.5%, respectively. Respondents also stated that these cities, as well as Macao, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Pattaya, and Bali, will be important in the future.

It is noticeable that Seoul is the only city respondents had the best knowledge about. They had heard about the city through social media, as high as 78.4%. It is the city that respondents knew from music at 42.0%. It scored high on all 15-item perceived qualities and is ranked first as the city respondents want to visit in the future.

## **Discussion**

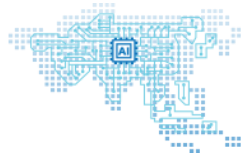
This study shows that social media significantly affects the destination's image and its impact on visiting decisions. Social media is an informative channel that shapes knowledge and attitudes toward a city. This is in line with much research on the effect of social media on tourist destinations, for example, the works of Song (2016) and Mauladi, Rahayu, and Wibowo (2022). Overall, those studies showed that social media influences the interest of visiting tourists. Social media also plays an important role in the pre-purchase stage of the service process that supports customer purchasing decisions. However, as stated earlier, this study aimed to report the findings of a preliminary comparative description and analysis of 809 Thai university students. More solid and deep comparisons will be carried out by local polling leaders of 14 Asian cities. Whether social media and other channels directly influence destination images and visiting decisions, which cities' attributes appear on respondents' frames will be deeply analyzed.

Nevertheless, the study found that textbooks in class played an important role in representing destination images, as in the cases of Manila, Cebu, Chennai, and Labuan Bajo. This finding is similar to the study by Włodarczyk, B. and Duda, M. (2019). They concluded that many studies have demonstrated that novels whose action is set in natural, specific places have a considerable influence on shaping the image of these places. Still, it is not always a desired (positive) image, which might result in readers visiting the city.

## **Conclusion**

- a. The analysis showed that social media significantly affects the destination's image in tourist destinations in all cities studied.
- b. The analysis shows that there were other channels, apart from social media, where respondents constructed the destination's image (construction of reality).



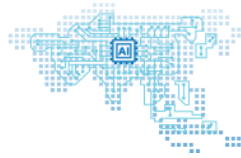


c. The analysis showed that respondents tended to construct cities' images as 'Offers many activities for tourists,' 'Crowded,' and 'Has good climate' and factors that did not appear to have any relevance to their opinion of the cities' image as a tourist destination are a safety, economic center, and technological center.

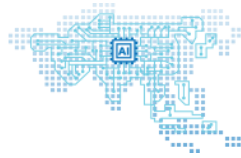
e. The analysis shows that the destination image significantly affects decisions to visit tourist destinations such as Seoul.

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