

## The Influence of Exposure to Online Narratives Regarding Transnational Crime on Chinese Tourists' Intention to Visit Thailand

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### Abstract

This study examines the influence of exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime on Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. In recent years, crime-related narratives connected to Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia have spread widely across Chinese social media platforms such as Douyin, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu. These narratives may increase perceived risk and negatively affect Thailand's destination image. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between exposure to online crime narratives and Chinese tourists' travel intention toward Thailand. A quantitative research approach was employed using a questionnaire survey, with 400 valid responses collected from Chinese social media users. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis through SPSS. The study is supported by the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF), Narrative Persuasion Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior.

The findings reveal a significant negative relationship between exposure to online crime narratives and Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. Higher exposure levels were associated with stronger perceptions of risk and lower travel intention. However, Thailand remains a popular destination among Chinese tourists due to its geographical proximity, affordable travel costs, and diverse tourism attractions. This study contributes to understanding how digital media narratives influence tourism behavior and offers recommendations for improving destination communication and rebuilding tourists' confidence.

**Keywords:** *online narratives, transnational crime, Chinese tourists, Thailand tourism, travel intention*

### 1. Introduction

Thailand has long occupied an important position in the travel preferences of Chinese tourists. Its geographical proximity to China, relatively affordable travel costs, rich cultural resources, beaches, cuisine, shopping, and established tourism infrastructure have made it one of the most attractive destinations in Southeast Asia. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese travelers formed Thailand's largest inbound tourism market and contributed significantly to the recovery and sustainability of the tourism economy. Therefore, maintaining the confidence of Chinese tourists is important not only for tourism businesses, but also for Thailand's broader economic recovery and international destination image.

In the post-pandemic period, however, Chinese tourists' attitudes toward Thailand have been influenced by a digital communication environment in which safety-related narratives circulate rapidly. Since around 2021, Chinese social media platforms such as Douyin, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, WeChat, and Bilibili have carried increasing content related to kidnapping, telecommunications fraud, human trafficking, online scam compounds, illegal detention, and forced labor connected to Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Some posts are based on real incidents, while others are incomplete, dramatized, or mixed with speculation. Regardless of factual accuracy, repeated exposure to such content can make danger appear more visible and psychologically closer to potential tourists.

A key issue is that many online narratives do not clearly separate Thailand from neighboring countries. Crime-related stories that originally concern border regions in Myanmar or Cambodia are often circulated under broad labels such as Southeast Asia. For audiences who lack detailed geographic or political knowledge of the region, this broad framing may produce a spillover effect. In other words, fear associated with one country may extend to nearby destinations, including Thailand. This is especially important because Thailand's tourism image has traditionally been based on hospitality, accessibility, enjoyment, and safety; however, these positive associations may be weakened when online discussions repeatedly connect the broader region with transnational crime.

This phenomenon can be explained through the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (Kasperson et al., 2003). SARF argues that risks are not understood only through objective facts, but are also shaped by communication channels, media framing, interpersonal sharing, and cultural interpretation. In digital platforms, risk signals can be amplified through repetition, emotional language, algorithmic recommendation, and peer discussion (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Kasperson et al., 2003). As a result, a safety concern that is geographically limited may become a broader public perception. In this study, exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime is treated as a risk signal that may intensify Chinese tourists' concerns about visiting Thailand.

Narrative persuasion also helps explain the influence of online crime stories (Green & Brock, 2000; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Compared with official announcements or statistical information, personal stories, short videos, screenshots, and first-person accounts often feel more vivid and believable. When audiences identify with the people in these narratives, they may imagine themselves or family members facing similar danger. This emotional involvement can increase perceived risk and reduce confidence in travel decisions. In the context of Chinese outbound tourism, stories about ordinary Chinese citizens being deceived, trapped, or harmed abroad may be particularly persuasive because they activate concerns about personal safety and family protection.

Perceived risk and destination image are closely connected in tourism decision-making (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Gartner, 1994). Tourists do not choose destinations only based on objective conditions; they also rely on subjective impressions formed through media exposure, social influence, and emotional reactions (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Once a destination or region is associated with crime, uncertainty, or lack of control, tourists may delay travel plans, choose alternative destinations, or seek more reassurance before making a decision. Therefore, even if Thailand remains attractive in terms of tourism resources, negative online narratives may still reduce travel intention by weakening perceived safety.

The Theory of Planned Behavior further suggests that behavioral intention is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Online crime narratives may influence attitudes by making travel to Thailand seem less safe. They may influence subjective norms when family members, friends, or online communities share warnings and discourage travel. They may also reduce perceived behavioral control if tourists feel that safety risks are unpredictable or difficult to manage. These psychological mechanisms are directly relevant to understanding whether Chinese tourists still intend to visit Thailand after being exposed to crime-related digital content (Lam & Hsu, 2004).

Despite the increasing importance of online narratives, limited empirical research has examined how exposure to transnational crime narratives influences Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. Existing studies on tourism risk often focus on disease outbreaks, terrorism, political instability, or direct destination crises. Fewer studies have examined how narratives about regional crime can spill over and affect the image of a neighboring destination. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the level of exposure among Chinese tourists, the relationship between exposure and travel intention, and the influence of exposure on intention to visit Thailand. By doing so, the study contributes to digital risk communication, tourism behavior, and destination image research.

## 2. Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- 1) To examine the level of exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime among Chinese tourists.
- 2) To analyze the relationship between exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime and Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.
- 3) To investigate the influence of exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime on Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.

To support these objectives, this study integrates the Social Amplification of Risk Framework, Narrative Persuasion Theory, perceived risk and destination image concepts, and the Theory of Planned Behavior. These theoretical perspectives are connected because they all explain how information exposure can shape perception, emotion, and intention (Ajzen, 1991; Green & Brock, 2000; Kasperson et al., 2003). SARF explains the amplification of risk through digital platforms; narrative persuasion explains why emotional stories can shape beliefs; perceived risk and destination image explain how safety judgments affect destination evaluation; and TPB explains how attitudes, social pressure, and perceived control influence behavioral intention.

Based on the conceptual reasoning above, the study proposed three hypotheses.

H1: There is a significant negative relationship between exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime and Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.

H2: Higher levels of exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime negatively influence Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.

H3: Exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime significantly predicts Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.

These hypotheses allow the study to test both the existence and the direction of the relationship between digital narrative exposure and tourism intention. The theoretical foundation of this study is especially important because the research problem is not limited to whether crime actually occurs in a destination. Instead, the core issue is how tourists interpret, share, and emotionally respond to online information. In social media environments, information about safety can move across platforms very quickly. A single story may be reposted, commented on, summarized, and transformed into a broader warning. Through this process, the meaning of the original event may expand beyond its original location or context. Therefore, the study treats online narratives as communication objects that shape public perception, not merely as factual reports. The Social Amplification of Risk Framework provides the first layer of explanation. When a risk signal enters media and social networks, it may be amplified by repeated exposure, dramatic framing, and discussion among peers. In the case of Chinese tourists, narratives about scams, kidnapping, or forced labor in Southeast Asia are often presented with emotional titles, short video clips, screenshots, and user comments. These features may increase the salience of the risk and make the danger feel more immediate. The stronger the amplification process becomes, the more likely potential tourists are to connect the narratives with their own travel plans (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Kaspersen et al., 2003).

Narrative Persuasion Theory provides the second layer of explanation. Online users often respond strongly to stories because stories provide characters, settings, emotions, and consequences. A personal account about a traveler being deceived or trapped abroad may be easier to remember than an official statement about general safety conditions. Even when readers understand that one story may not represent the whole destination, the emotional impression can remain. This is why narrative exposure may influence attitudes toward Thailand even when the narratives are partly connected to Myanmar or Cambodia rather than Thailand itself (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Green & Brock, 2000).

The concept of perceived risk connects these communication processes to tourism decision-making. Perceived risk refers to tourists' subjective judgment of possible danger, uncertainty, or negative outcomes (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Floyd et al., 2004). In travel decisions, perceived risk can include physical risk, financial risk, psychological risk, and social risk. Online narratives about transnational crime can activate several of these dimensions at the same time: physical risk through fears of kidnapping, financial risk through fears of scams, psychological risk through anxiety, and social risk through family or peer disapproval.

Destination image is also central to the study (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Gartner, 1994). Thailand's image among Chinese tourists has traditionally been shaped by beaches, food, shopping, temples, entertainment, hospitality, and affordability (Cohen & Neal, 2010). However, destination image is not fixed. It can be reshaped by digital conversations, news cycles, user-generated content, and interpersonal sharing (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1994). When crime-related narratives become visible on Chinese vsocial media, the affective image of Thailand may shift from relaxing and enjoyable to uncertain or risky. This change does not mean that tourists completely reject Thailand, but it can reduce confidence and increase hesitation.

The Theory of Planned Behavior helps link these perceptions to behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991; Lam & Hsu, 2004). If exposure to online narratives creates negative attitudes toward travel, strengthens social warnings from family or online communities, and reduces tourists' sense of control over safety, then intention to visit Thailand may decline. This framework is useful because it explains why tourists may change their intention even before taking any actual travel action. In this way, the study focuses on behavioral intention as an early indicator of possible future travel behavior.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative survey research design to examine how exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime influences Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. A quantitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to measure the level of exposure, assess relationships among variables, and test hypotheses using statistical methods. The design followed the structure of survey-based communication and tourism research, in which standardized questionnaire items are used to collect comparable responses from a relatively large sample.

The main variables of the study were exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime, psychological responses and risk perception, social influence and perceived behavioral control, and intention to visit Thailand. The independent variable was exposure to online crime narratives, while the dependent variable was Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. Risk perception and social influence were included to better explain how exposure may translate into lower travel intention. This design allowed the study to examine both direct and indirect pathways between digital media exposure and behavioral intention.

The research focused on online narratives circulating on Chinese social media platforms, particularly Douyin, Weibo, Xiaohongshu, WeChat, and Bilibili. These platforms were selected because they are common sources of travel information, public discussion, short videos, personal stories, and safety-related warnings among Chinese users. The study did not investigate the actual criminal cases themselves, but rather examined how exposure to narratives about such cases influenced tourists' perceptions and intentions.

#### 3.2 Population and Sample

The population consisted of Chinese social media users who had previous outbound travel experience or who expressed interest in outbound travel. The study focused on potential Chinese tourists because they represent an important market for Thailand and are likely to encounter online content related to Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Respondents were required to be familiar with Chinese social media platforms and capable of evaluating tourism-related information encountered online.

The sample consisted of 400 valid responses. This sample size was considered appropriate for descriptive analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, mediation analysis, and regression analysis. The demographic profile indicated that the sample included both male and female respondents, different age groups, and different education and employment backgrounds. The largest age group was 18-24 years old, followed by 25-34 years old, suggesting that many respondents belonged to age groups that are highly active on social media and are likely to encounter travel-related online narratives.

The sample also included respondents with different travel backgrounds. A majority had traveled abroad before, while a smaller proportion had already visited Thailand. This distinction is important because previous travel experience may influence how tourists interpret risk information. Respondents who had visited Thailand may rely on personal experience when evaluating destination safety, whereas those who had never visited may depend more heavily on online narratives and social influence.

#### 3.3 Sampling

A voluntary response sampling method was employed through online distribution. This non-probability sampling approach was suitable because the study targeted respondents who were active in digital environments and could report their exposure to online narratives. The questionnaire was distributed through online channels where Chinese social media users were likely to encounter or discuss travel-related content.

Screening criteria were applied to ensure that respondents were relevant to the research objectives. Participants needed to be Chinese social media users, at least 18 years old, and potential outbound tourists. They also needed to have encountered or had the possibility of encountering online content related to travel safety, Southeast Asia, or transnational crime. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were informed that the data would be used only for academic research.

Although voluntary sampling may include limitations such as self-selection bias, it was appropriate for this topic because the research examined online exposure and digital narrative influence. Respondents who actively use social media are also the individuals most likely to encounter the narratives under investigation. The use of screening questions helped reduce irrelevant responses and improved the alignment between the sample and the study's target population.

### 3.4 Research Instrument

The questionnaire was developed to measure the major constructs of the study. It included demographic questions, items measuring exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime, items measuring psychological responses and perceived risk, items measuring social influence and perceived behavioral control, and items measuring intention to visit Thailand. The instrument was structured to ensure that each construct could be analyzed separately and then examined in relation to the others.

The exposure section asked respondents about how frequently they encountered online content related to kidnapping, scams, human trafficking, forced labor, and other transnational crime issues connected to Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia. The psychological response section measured anxiety, uncertainty, concern about personal safety, and perceived risk. The social influence and perceived behavioral control section measured the role of family, friends, online communities, personal control, and planning confidence in travel decisions. The travel intention section measured willingness to visit Thailand, recommend Thailand, choose Thailand over other destinations, and include Thailand in future travel plans.

Items were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale. Mean values from 4.21 to 5.00 represented the highest level, 3.41 to 4.20 represented a high level, 2.61 to 3.40 represented a medium level, 1.81 to 2.60 represented a low level, and 1.00 to 1.80 represented the lowest level. These criteria were applied consistently when interpreting descriptive statistics.

### 3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through an online self-administered questionnaire. Online data collection was appropriate because the research topic itself concerns digital media exposure and Chinese social media use. The questionnaire format allowed respondents to answer anonymously, which may have encouraged more honest responses about fear, hesitation, and safety concerns.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and the average levels of exposure, psychological response, social influence, and travel intention. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Mediation analysis was used to assess whether risk perception acted as an explanatory pathway between exposure and travel intention. Specifically, the mediation effect was tested using a bootstrapping approach with 5,000 resamples to generate 95% bootstrap confidence intervals. Regression analysis was used to determine the predictive influence of exposure and related factors on intention to visit Thailand.

Together, these methods provided a comprehensive basis for answering the research questions. Descriptive statistics addressed the level of exposure. Correlation analysis addressed whether significant relationships existed between exposure and travel intention. Mediation and regression analyses addressed whether exposure had a direct and indirect influence on intention to visit Thailand. This combination of analytical methods is consistent with the structure of the study objectives and hypotheses.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

The results are presented according to the objectives of the study. The analysis includes descriptive findings on respondents' demographic characteristics and social media use, descriptive findings on the major study variables, Pearson correlation results, mediation findings, regression findings, and hypothesis testing outcomes.

The demographic results showed that the study obtained 400 valid responses. Female respondents represented the largest group at 55.0%, and male respondents accounted for 37.5%, while the remaining 7.5% of participants opted not to disclose their gender. Regarding age distribution, the largest group was 18-24 years old at 40.0%, followed by 25-34 years old at 35.0%. In terms of education, the majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree, accounting for 65.0% of the sample, while those with a master's degree accounted for 20.0%. The employment results indicated that the largest group consisted of full-time employees at 47.5%, followed by students at 35.0%.

The sample was also highly relevant to the research topic because many respondents were active social media users. A majority reported using Chinese social media platforms several times a day. WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili were identified as important platforms through which respondents encountered travel-related information and public discussion. Regarding travel background, 57.5% of respondents had traveled



abroad before, while 37.5% had previously visited Thailand. These results suggest that the sample included both experienced and potential tourists.

Table 1 Summary of Respondent Profile

| Category            | Major finding                                         | Percentage |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Gender              | Female respondents formed the largest group           | 55.0%      |
| Age                 | 18-24 was the largest age group                       | 40.0%      |
| Education           | Bachelor's degree was the most common education level | 65.0%      |
| Employment          | Full-time employment was the largest employment group | 47.5%      |
| Outbound travel     | Respondents who had traveled abroad before            | 57.5%      |
| Thailand experience | Respondents who had previously visited Thailand       | 37.5%      |
| Social media use    | Used Chinese social media several times a day         | 55.0%      |

Objective 1: To examine the level of exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime among Chinese tourists.

The descriptive results showed that respondents had a high level of exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime. The overall mean score for exposure was 3.62, indicating that crime-related narratives about Southeast Asia were commonly encountered among Chinese social media users. Respondents most frequently reported seeing news, videos, or posts discussing kidnapping, online scams, and human trafficking associated with Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia. This item received a mean score of 3.73, the highest within the exposure construct.

Respondents also indicated that online narratives related to transnational crime were easily accessible and repeatedly appeared on their social media feeds. This suggests that the issue is not limited to intentional searching, but also involves passive algorithmic exposure. Users may encounter safety-related content while browsing entertainment, travel, or news posts. The frequent appearance of these narratives may increase familiarity with crime-related themes and make such risks feel more socially prominent.

Psychological responses to online crime narratives were also high, with an overall mean score of 3.58. Respondents reported feeling that traveling in Southeast Asia was risky after exposure to online narratives, and many felt more cautious or hesitant about overseas travel decisions. They also expressed concern that traveling to Thailand might involve greater risks because of information shared on social media. These findings show that exposure was not only informational, but also emotional and cognitive in its impact.

The results for social influence and perceived behavioral control showed a high overall mean of 3.82. Respondents believed that careful planning could reduce travel risks, and many felt that the decision to travel to Thailand remained within their personal control. At the same time, family opinions, friends' attitudes, and warnings shared on social media influenced their views of travel safety. This suggests that Chinese tourists' travel decisions are shaped by both personal confidence and social pressure.

Travel intention toward Thailand remained high overall, with a mean score of 3.73. Respondents still showed interest in choosing Thailand over other Southeast Asian destinations and recommending Thailand to others. However, some short-term travel intention items, such as intention to visit Thailand within the next two years, received relatively lower scores. This indicates that Thailand's tourism appeal remains strong, but negative digital narratives may increase hesitation or delay travel decisions.

Table 2 Descriptive Summary of Main Variables

| Construct                                         | Mean | Level | Interpretation                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|------|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exposure to online crime narratives               | 3.62 | High  | Respondents were frequently exposed to transnational crime narratives.               |
| Psychological response and risk perception        | 3.58 | High  | Respondents reported caution, anxiety, and uncertainty.                              |
| Social influence and perceived behavioral control | 3.82 | High  | Respondents were influenced by others but also believed planning could reduce risks. |

| Construct                   | Mean | Level | Interpretation                                              |
|-----------------------------|------|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Intention to visit Thailand | 3.73 | High  | Thailand remained attractive despite risk-related concerns. |

Objective 2: To analyze the relationship between exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime and Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the study variables. The results showed a significant negative relationship between exposure to online crime narratives and travel intention ( $r = -0.635$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This means that respondents with higher exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime tended to report lower intention to visit Thailand. The result supports the argument that digital exposure can influence destination confidence and travel decision-making.

Risk perception was also negatively correlated with travel intention ( $r = -0.630$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that respondents who perceived greater safety risk were less likely to express an intention to visit Thailand. In addition, exposure to online crime narratives was positively correlated with risk perception ( $r = 0.553$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), showing that higher exposure was associated with stronger perceptions of risk. These results suggest that risk perception is an important psychological outcome of repeated exposure to online narratives.

Social influence was negatively correlated with travel intention ( $r = -0.585$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), meaning that warnings or concerns from family, friends, and online communities were associated with reduced willingness to visit Thailand. Social influence was also positively correlated with exposure and risk perception, suggesting that online and interpersonal discussions reinforce each other. Together, the correlation results show that the relationship between exposure and travel intention is embedded in a wider social communication process.

Table 3 Pearson Correlation Summary

| Relationship                          | Correlation Result        | Direction | Meaning                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exposure and travel intention         | $r = -0.635$ , $p < 0.01$ | Negative  | Higher exposure was associated with lower intention to visit Thailand.            |
| Risk perception and travel intention  | $r = -0.630$ , $p < 0.01$ | Negative  | Higher perceived risk was associated with lower travel intention.                 |
| Social influence and travel intention | $r = -0.585$ , $p < 0.01$ | Negative  | Stronger warnings or social pressure were associated with lower travel intention. |
| Exposure and risk perception          | $r = 0.553$ , $p < 0.01$  | Positive  | Higher exposure was associated with stronger perceived risk.                      |
| Exposure and social influence         | $r = 0.481$ , $p < 0.01$  | Positive  | Higher exposure was associated with stronger social influence.                    |

Objective 3: To investigate the influence of exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime on Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.

The mediation analysis confirmed that exposure to online crime narratives influenced travel intention both directly and indirectly through risk perception. The direct effect of exposure on travel intention was negative and statistically significant, with an effect value of -0.440. The indirect effect through risk perception was also negative, with an effect value of -0.145. The total effect was -0.585. These findings show that exposure reduces travel intention not only by directly weakening tourists' confidence, but also by increasing perceived risk.

The regression analysis further showed that the model explained a substantial part of the variance in travel intention. The  $R^2$  value was 0.448, and the adjusted  $R^2$  was 0.441, indicating that approximately 44.8% of the variance in travel intention could be explained by the variables included in the model. The overall model was

statistically significant ( $F = 64.077$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This result confirms that online narrative exposure and related psychological and social variables are meaningful predictors of Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.

The regression results also indicated that social influence had a significant negative effect on travel intention, while prior experience visiting Thailand had a positive effect. This suggests that tourists who had already visited Thailand may rely on their own experience to evaluate destination safety, making them less vulnerable to fear-based narratives. In contrast, tourists who receive discouraging opinions from family, friends, or online communities may become more hesitant, even when they are still interested in Thailand as a destination.

Table 4 Shows Results of the Mediation Analysis (n=400)

|                                             | Y_Travel Intention       |         |         | M_Risk Perception        |        |         | Y_Travel Intention       |        |         |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---------|--------------------------|--------|---------|--------------------------|--------|---------|
|                                             | B                        | t       | $\beta$ | B                        | t      | $\beta$ | B                        | t      | $\beta$ |
| constant                                    | 4.933**                  | 19.513  | -       | 1.732**                  | 7.069  | -       | 5.530**                  | 21.829 | -       |
| Outbound travel experience_is               | -0.108                   | -0.626  | -0.028  | 0.056                    | 0.336  | 0.016   | -0.089                   | -0.544 | -0.023  |
| My experience visiting Thailand             | 0.443**                  | 3.618   | 0.175   | -0.386**                 | -3.258 | -0.168  | 0.310**                  | 2.646  | 0.122   |
| Social media and related content contact_is | -0.319**                 | -4.414  | -0.172  | 0.378**                  | 5.396  | 0.224   | -0.189**                 | -2.672 | -0.102  |
| Social media usage frequency                | -0.092**                 | -3.397  | -0.132  | 0.087**                  | 3.292  | 0.137   | -0.062*                  | -2.402 | -0.089  |
| X1_Exposure to Online Crime Narratives      | -0.585**                 | -11.783 | -0.481  | 0.421**                  | 8.751  | 0.381   | -0.440**                 | -8.592 | -0.361  |
| M_Risk Perception                           |                          |         |         |                          |        |         | -0.344**                 | -7.017 | -0.312  |
| R <sup>2</sup>                              |                          | 0.489   |         |                          | 0.417  |         |                          | 0.546  |         |
| Adjust R <sup>2</sup>                       |                          | 0.482   |         |                          | 0.409  |         |                          | 0.539  |         |
| F value                                     | F(5,394)=75.397, p=0.000 |         |         | F(5,394)=56.291, p=0.000 |        |         | F(6,393)=78.731, p=0.000 |        |         |

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 4 explains the results of the mediation analysis, which examines the relationship between exposure to online narratives about transnational crime, risk perception, and Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. Several variables were included in the analysis, with outbound travel experience, visit to Thailand, exposure to social media content, and frequency of social media usage acting as control variables. Outbound travel experience, visit to Thailand, and exposure to social media content were treated as binary variables, while social media usage frequency was treated as an ordinal variable. The values for the independent variable (X1), mediating variable (M), and dependent variable (Y) were measured on a 5-point scale, where higher values indicated greater exposure to crime narratives, stronger social influence, higher risk perception, and a greater intention to travel to Thailand, respectively.

The mediation analysis uses exposure to transnational crime narratives (X1) as the independent variable, risk perception (M) as the mediating variable, and travel intention to Thailand (Y) as the dependent variable. The goal is to examine whether risk perception mediates the relationship between exposure to online crime narratives and the intention to visit Thailand. The results of the analysis are presented in Table below.



Table 5 Shows Results of Mediation Analysis Testing the Impact of Exposure to Online Crime Narratives on Travel Intention via Risk Perception (n=400)

| path      | symbol | significance     | Effect value | 95% CI      |             | Standard error SE value | z value / t value | p value | in conclusion     | Effect proportion |
|-----------|--------|------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
|           |        |                  |              | lower limit | upper limit |                         |                   |         |                   |                   |
| X1 =>M=>Y | a*b    | Indirect effects | -0.145       | -0.197      | -0.098      | 0.025                   | -5.696            | 0.000   | part intermediary | 24.8%             |
|           | c'     | direct effects   | -0.440       | -0.541      | -0.339      | 0.051                   | -8.592            | 0.000   |                   |                   |
|           | c      | Total effect     | -0.585       | -0.683      | -0.487      | 0.050                   | -11.783           | 0.000   |                   |                   |

Note: 95% bootstrap confidence intervals were generated using 5,000 resamples.

Table 5 presented the results of the mediation analysis conducted to examine the indirect and direct effects of Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) on Travel Intention (Y), with Risk Perception (M) serving as the mediating variable. The purpose of this analysis is to determine if risk perception mediates the relationship between exposure to crime narratives and the intention to visit Thailand, as proposed in the research hypotheses.

According to the key findings and interpretation from table 4.16, it revealed and presented a detailed interpretation of the results from the mediation analysis, which aimed to assess the impact of Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) on Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand (Y), with Risk Perception (M) acting as the mediating variable. The analysis explores both the direct and indirect effects of crime narrative exposure on travel intention, providing insights into how media content influences tourists' perceptions of risk and their resulting travel behaviors. The findings are presented in terms of the indirect effects, direct effects, and total effects, each of which reveals critical information about the pathways through which crime narratives shape travel intentions. The following details provided an in-depth analysis of these key results, linking them to the hypotheses and broader objectives of the study.

1. The indirect effects (a \* b) in the mediation analysis reveal that Risk Perception (M) plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) and Travel Intention (Y). The negative effect value of -0.145 indicates that as exposure to online crime narratives increases, the intention to visit Thailand decreases, with risk perception serving as an intermediary factor. The 95% bootstrap Confidence Interval (CI), ranging from -0.197 to -0.098, does not include zero, confirming that the indirect effect is statistically significant. Moreover, the effect proportion of 24.8% suggests that about a quarter of the total effect of exposure to crime narratives on travel intention is mediated by risk perception, highlighting the importance of perceived risk in shaping travel decisions.

2. The direct effects (c') show the direct influence of Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) on Travel Intention (Y), independent of risk perception. The negative effect value of -0.440 indicates that greater exposure to online crime narratives directly reduces the intention to visit Thailand. This effect is confirmed as statistically significant, with a 95% bootstrap Confidence Interval between -0.541 and -0.339, excluding zero. This finding emphasizes the strong direct impact that exposure to crime-related content has on tourists' travel intentions, supporting the hypothesis that higher levels of exposure to crime narratives negatively influence the intention to visit Thailand (H2).

3. The total effect (c) represents the combined influence of both the direct and indirect effects of Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) on Travel Intention (Y). The negative total effect value of -0.585 shows that overall, exposure to online crime narratives significantly reduces the intention to visit Thailand. The 95% bootstrap Confidence Interval (CI) from -0.683 to -0.487 confirms the statistical significance of the total effect. This finding underscores the overall negative impact of crime-related media content on travel intentions, combining both direct and mediated influences through risk perception.

Table 6 Shows Mediation Analysis Results: Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Exposure to Online Crime Narratives on Travel Intention via Risk Perception (n=400)

| path      | symbol | significance     | Effect value | 95% CI      |             | Standard error SE value | z value / t value | p value | in conclusion     | Effect proportion |
|-----------|--------|------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
|           |        |                  |              | lower limit | upper limit |                         |                   |         |                   |                   |
| X1 =>M=>Y | a*b    | Indirect effects | -0.145       | -0.197      | -0.098      | 0.025                   | -5.696            | 0.000   | part intermediary | 24.8%             |
|           | c'     | direct effects   | -0.440       | -0.541      | -0.339      | 0.051                   | -8.592            | 0.000   |                   |                   |
|           | c      | Total effect     | -0.585       | -0.683      | -0.487      | 0.050                   | -11.783           | 0.000   |                   |                   |

Note: 95% bootstrap confidence intervals were generated using 5,000 resamples.

Table 6 presents the results of the mediation analysis, which examines the relationship between Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) and Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand (Y), with Risk Perception (M) serving as the mediating variable. The table shows three key effects: indirect effects, direct effects, and total effects, each of which is discussed in detail below.

1. The indirect effect represents the mediation pathway through which Risk Perception (M) mediates the relationship between Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) and Travel Intention (Y). The effect value of -0.145 suggests a negative relationship, indicating that as exposure to crime narratives increases, the intention to visit Thailand decreases through the intermediary role of risk perception. The 95% bootstrap Confidence Interval (CI), ranging from -0.197 to -0.098, does not include zero, confirming that this effect is statistically significant. Additionally, the effect proportion of 24.8% indicates that nearly a quarter of the total effect of exposure to crime narratives on travel intention is mediated by risk perception. This suggests that risk perception plays a substantial role in explaining how exposure to crime-related content influences travel intention.

2. The direct effect shows the influence of Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) on Travel Intention (Y), independent of risk perception. The effect value of -0.440 indicates that increased exposure to crime narratives directly decreases the intention to visit Thailand. The 95% bootstrap Confidence Interval ranging from -0.541 to -0.339 confirms that this effect is statistically significant, as it does not include zero. This direct effect emphasizes that the mere exposure to crime narratives, without considering risk perception, already has a significant negative impact on travel intention, supporting the hypothesis that exposure to online crime narratives negatively influences the intention to visit Thailand.

3. The total effect represents the combined influence of both the direct and indirect effects of Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) on Travel Intention (Y). The effect value of -0.585 indicates that overall, exposure to online crime narratives significantly reduces the intention to visit Thailand. The 95% bootstrap Confidence Interval (CI), ranging from -0.683 to -0.487, confirms the statistical significance of the total effect, as it does not include zero. This total effect value shows that the combination of both the direct and indirect effects of crime-related content significantly influences travel intentions, with risk perception mediating part of the relationship.

In conclusion, the results from table 4.17 about mediation analysis demonstrate that Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) negatively impacts Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand (Y), both directly and indirectly, through the mediating effect of Risk Perception (M). The indirect effect, accounting for 24.8% of the total effect, highlights the importance of risk perception in shaping travel decisions, while the direct effect emphasizes the strong influence of crime-related media content on travel intentions. These findings underscore the significant role that online crime narratives play in influencing tourists' perceptions of safety and their subsequent travel behaviors.

Table 7 Shows Results of Linear Regression Analysis on the Factors Influencing Travel Intention (n=400)

|                                             | Unstandardized coefficient |                | Standardized coefficient |                          | t       | p     | Collinearity diagnosis |           |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------|-------|------------------------|-----------|
|                                             | B                          | Standard error | Beta                     |                          |         |       | VIF                    | Tolerance |
| constant                                    | 4.574                      | 0.254          | -                        | 17.974                   | 0.000** | -     | -                      |           |
| X2_Social Influence                         | -0.505                     | 0.051          | -0.420                   | -9.986                   | 0.000** | 1.263 | 0.792                  |           |
| Outbound travel experience_is               | -0.102                     | 0.179          | -0.027                   | -0.570                   | 0.569   | 1.549 | 0.646                  |           |
| My experience visiting Thailand             | 0.516                      | 0.126          | 0.204                    | 4.088                    | 0.000** | 1.784 | 0.560                  |           |
| Social media and related content contact_is | -0.338                     | 0.075          | -0.182                   | -4.498                   | 0.000** | 1.165 | 0.858                  |           |
| Social media usage frequency                | -0.096                     | 0.028          | -0.138                   | -3.413                   | 0.001** | 1.172 | 0.853                  |           |
| R <sup>2</sup>                              |                            |                |                          | 0.448                    |         |       |                        |           |
| Adjust R <sup>2</sup>                       |                            |                |                          | 0.441                    |         |       |                        |           |
| F                                           |                            |                |                          | F(5,394)=64.077, p=0.000 |         |       |                        |           |
| DW value                                    |                            |                |                          | 1.693                    |         |       |                        |           |

Note: Dependent variable = Y\_Travel Intention

\* p<0.05 \*\* p<0.01

Table 7 presented the results of a linear regression analysis conducted to examine the factors influencing Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand (Y). The dependent variable is Travel Intention (Y), and the independent variables include Social Influence (X2), Outbound Travel Experience, My Experience Visiting Thailand, Social Media and Related Content Contact, and Social Media Usage Frequency. The table provides unstandardized coefficients (B), standardized coefficients (Beta), t-values, p-values, collinearity diagnostics (Variance Inflation Factor - VIF, and Tolerance), and model fit statistics.

#### 1. Unstandardized Coefficients (B) and Standardized Coefficients (Beta)

The unstandardized coefficients (B) represent the raw impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable, Travel Intention. These coefficients show the absolute change in the dependent variable for each one-unit change in the independent variable. In contrast, the standardized coefficients (Beta) adjust for differences in measurement scales, allowing for a comparison of the relative strength of each variable's effect. A higher Beta value signifies a stronger influence on travel intention. For instance, Social Influence (X2) has an unstandardized coefficient of -0.505, meaning that for each unit increase in social influence, travel intention decreases by 0.505 units. With a Beta of -0.420, this indicates that social influence has a moderate negative effect on travel intention, supported by a p-value of 0.000, which confirms statistical significance. Similarly, Outbound Travel Experience shows a minimal, statistically insignificant effect, as indicated by the unstandardized coefficient of -0.102 and a p-value of 0.569. On the other hand, My Experience Visiting Thailand has a positive and statistically significant effect, with an unstandardized coefficient of 0.516 and a Beta of 0.204, suggesting a moderate positive impact on travel intention.

#### 2. Collinearity Diagnostics

To assess potential multicollinearity among the independent variables, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance values were calculated. Multicollinearity occurs when independent variables are highly

correlated, which can distort the regression results. In this analysis, the VIF values for all variables are within an acceptable range, with none exceeding 10, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a significant concern. For instance, Social Influence (X2) has a VIF of 1.263, indicating that it is not highly correlated with other predictors. The Tolerance values are also satisfactory, all being greater than 0.1, further confirming the absence of problematic multicollinearity. These diagnostics ensure that the relationships between the independent variables do not adversely affect the validity of the regression model, allowing for a clearer interpretation of each variable's influence on travel intention.

### 3. Model Fit Statistics

The  $R^2$  value of 0.448 indicates that approximately 44.8% of the variance in travel intention is explained by the independent variables in the model. This suggests a moderate level of explanatory power, meaning that the model captures a reasonable portion of the variation in tourists' intention to visit Thailand. The Adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.441 adjusts for the number of predictors in the model, showing that the model is slightly more efficient at explaining the variance in travel intention. The F-value of 64.077 and the p-value of 0.000 indicate that the overall regression model is statistically significant, confirming that the independent variables together significantly predict travel intention. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson (DW) value of 1.693 is close to the ideal value of 2, suggesting that there is no significant autocorrelation in the residuals, which is a positive sign for the validity of the regression model. This further confirms that the model's predictions are reliable and free from serial correlation errors.

In conclusion, the linear regression results show that Social Influence and Social Media Exposure significantly and negatively affect Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. Additionally, My Experience Visiting Thailand has a positive influence, while Outbound Travel Experience and Social Media Usage Frequency have relatively weak effects. The model fits well, explaining approximately 45% of the variance in travel intention, and is statistically significant overall. These findings suggest that both social factors and exposure to social media content play a crucial role in shaping Chinese tourists' travel decisions, with prior experience visiting Thailand serving as a strong positive predictor.

Therefore, the results of the Pearson Correlation Analysis, Mediation Analysis, and Linear Regression Analysis collectively provide compelling evidence in support of research hypotheses and objectives. These analyses demonstrate the significant relationships between exposure to online crime narratives, risk perception, and Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. The findings further validate the theoretical framework and empirical expectations outlined in the study.

The details of the hypothesis testing results are presented below.

#### **H1: There is a significant relationship between exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime and Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.**

The results from the Pearson correlation analysis support H1, as the correlation coefficient of -0.635 with a p-value of 0.000 (significant at  $p < 0.01$ ) indicates a significant relationship between Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) and Travel Intention (Y). The negative value suggests that as exposure to crime-related content increases, the intention to visit Thailand decreases. Therefore, H1 is accepted, as the hypothesis is strongly supported by the data.

#### **H2: Higher levels of exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime negatively influence Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.**

H2 is also supported by the data, with a strong negative correlation ( $r = -0.635$ ) between Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) and Travel Intention (Y). The results indicate that as exposure to crime-related content increases, the intention to visit Thailand decreases, confirming that higher levels of exposure negatively influence travel intention. Thus, H2 is accepted, as it is consistent with the observed relationship between the variables.

Additionally, the below table 7 presented the results of the mediation analysis that examines the effects of Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) on Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand (Y), with Risk Perception (M) serving as the mediating variable.

#### **H3: Exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime significantly predicts Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand.**

For H3, the mediation analysis shows that Exposure to Online Crime Narratives (X1) significantly predicts Travel Intention (Y), both directly and indirectly through Risk Perception (M). The direct effect of -0.440 and the indirect effect of -0.145 confirm that exposure to crime narratives significantly predicts travel intention by influencing tourists' perceptions of risk and their willingness to visit Thailand. Therefore, H3 is accepted, as the analysis clearly demonstrates that exposure to online crime narratives has a predictive impact on travel intention.

In conclusion, the findings from the Pearson Correlation Analysis, Mediation Analysis, and Linear Regression Analysis strongly support the research hypotheses and objectives. The results confirm that exposure to online crime narratives has a significant negative impact on Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand, both directly and indirectly through the mediation of risk perception. Specifically, H1 is validated, indicating a significant relationship between exposure to crime-related narratives and travel intention, while H2 is supported, showing that higher levels of exposure negatively influence travel intention. Furthermore, H3 is affirmed, demonstrating that exposure to online crime narratives significantly predicts travel intention, with risk perception acting as an intermediary. These findings provide valuable insights into the factors shaping tourists' travel decisions, emphasizing the crucial role of media narratives in influencing perceptions of safety and ultimately, travel behavior.

#### 4.2 Discussion

The findings are consistent with the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (Kasperson et al., 2003). Online narratives about kidnapping, scams, human trafficking, and forced labor act as risk signals that become amplified through social media platforms. Repetition, emotional framing, and algorithmic visibility can make these narratives appear common and personally relevant. As a result, Chinese tourists may overestimate the likelihood or proximity of danger when considering travel to Thailand.

The findings also support Narrative Persuasion Theory (Green & Brock, 2000; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Crime-related narratives often use vivid details, personal voices, screenshots, and dramatic storytelling. Such formats are more emotionally engaging than general safety information. When viewers imagine themselves in the situations described, their emotional involvement may increase perceived vulnerability. This explains why exposure to online narratives can reduce travel intention even when the actual incidents are not directly connected to Thailand's major tourism areas.

From the perspective of perceived risk and destination image, the findings show that Thailand's positive image remains present but is challenged by safety concerns (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Floyd et al., 2004; Gartner, 1994). The high mean score for travel intention suggests that Chinese tourists still recognize Thailand's attractiveness. However, the negative correlations show that exposure and risk perception can weaken this attractiveness. Therefore, Thailand's destination image is not eliminated by online narratives, but it becomes more fragile and requires stronger reassurance.

The Theory of Planned Behavior is also supported by the results (Ajzen, 1991; Lam & Hsu, 2004). Exposure to online crime narratives may create negative attitudes toward travel by making Thailand or the wider Southeast Asian region appear unsafe. It may also strengthen subjective norms when family members and online communities share safety warnings. In addition, perceived behavioral control may be affected when tourists feel uncertain about how to avoid possible risks. These mechanisms together shape intention to visit Thailand.

The study further highlights the importance of regional spillover and destination crisis communication (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Many online narratives combine Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia in the same discussion, and audiences may generalize risks across national borders. This spillover can damage Thailand's tourism reputation even when Thailand is not the central location of the incidents. For tourism communication, this means that destination marketers must not only promote attractions, but also clearly differentiate Thailand from broader regional crime narratives.

Another important point is that prior experience may reduce the negative effect of online narratives. Respondents who had visited Thailand before may have personal memories of safety, hospitality, and enjoyment. These experiences can function as counter-evidence against fear-based online content. Therefore, repeat visitors and satisfied past travelers may become valuable voices in rebuilding destination confidence among Chinese audiences.



The findings have practical implications for Thailand's tourism stakeholders. Communication should not simply deny risk or rely only on general promotional slogans (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Instead, tourism authorities and businesses should provide timely, transparent, and specific safety information in Chinese-language digital channels. They should explain safety measures, clarify misinformation, and provide practical travel guidance. Collaboration with credible Chinese travelers, media accounts, and influencers may help rebuild confidence through relatable first-hand experiences.

Overall, the results show that digital media narratives can influence tourism behavior in ways that are emotional, social, and behavioral. Chinese tourists may still want to visit Thailand, but repeated exposure to crime narratives increases hesitation and raises the threshold for confidence. This makes digital risk communication an essential part of destination management in the post-pandemic tourism environment.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of exposure to online narratives regarding transnational crime on Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. Using 400 valid questionnaire responses, the study found that Chinese tourists had a high level of exposure to crime-related narratives on Chinese social media platforms. These narratives mainly involved kidnapping, online scams, human trafficking, forced labor, and safety concerns connected to Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

The results showed that exposure to online crime narratives was significantly and negatively related to intention to visit Thailand. Risk perception was also significantly and negatively related to travel intention, while exposure was positively related to risk perception. These findings confirm that online narratives can increase perceived danger and reduce destination confidence. The mediation results further demonstrate that risk perception is an important pathway through which exposure affects travel intention.

The regression results confirmed that exposure and related variables significantly predicted Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. The model explained approximately 44.8% of the variance in travel intention, suggesting that online narrative exposure, risk perception, social influence, and prior experience are meaningful factors in tourism decision-making. These results provide empirical support for all three hypotheses of the study.

At the same time, the findings indicate that Thailand remains an attractive destination for Chinese tourists. Respondents still showed a generally high intention to visit Thailand, reflecting the country's continued appeal in terms of proximity, affordability, tourism resources, and cultural familiarity. Therefore, the impact of online crime narratives should be understood as creating hesitation and risk concern rather than completely eliminating travel interest.

The study recommends that Thai tourism authorities strengthen Chinese-language digital communication and respond more directly to safety concerns. Communication should clearly distinguish Thailand from incidents occurring in other regional contexts, provide updated safety information, and emphasize practical measures that protect tourists. Tourism businesses should also address safety concerns in promotional materials and customer communication, especially for first-time visitors who may rely heavily on online narratives.

Future research could expand the present study in several ways. Longitudinal research could examine whether exposure and risk perception change over time as online narratives rise or decline. Comparative research could examine whether tourists from other countries respond to these narratives in similar ways. Content analysis of Chinese social media posts could identify which narrative formats, keywords, images, or emotional frames create the strongest influence on perceived risk. Qualitative interviews could also provide deeper insight into how tourists interpret specific stories and decide whether to travel.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that online narratives regarding transnational crime have a measurable influence on Chinese tourists' intention to visit Thailand. In the digital tourism era, destination image is shaped not only by attractions and official campaigns, but also by user-generated stories, emotional sharing, and social media amplification. For Thailand, rebuilding and maintaining Chinese tourists' confidence requires not only tourism promotion, but also effective risk communication, accurate regional differentiation, and trust-building through credible digital engagement.

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