THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENT TRAVEL BEHAVIOR: AN EXTENSION OF THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

Previous tourism studies have applied the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in different contexts including medical, casino and senior travelers. These examinations support the applicability of the TPB and a number of additional predictors have been included in the original model of the TPB to better explain behavioral intentions and actual behavior in respect of travel. However, little attention has been given to explore further factors which influence young tourist behavior. The purpose of this empirical research is to seek further insight into the travel motivations of university students and their travel behavior within ASEAN destinations after the official establishment of the AEC in 2015. The questionnaire was distributed to university students in Thailand during December 2016 and January 2017. A total of 338 responses were obtained, of which 289 cases were deemed usable for the statistical analysis. A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted. Overall, additionally to the elements of the TPB, the findings indicated that travel motivations regarding cultural experiences were a significant predictor for this tourist segment. Social reference had the strongest significant impact on Thai students. Important implications for Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) are suggested.

Keywords: university student tourists, theory of planned behavior, travel motivation, behavioral intention

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) declared itself to be "one nation" and the community was divided into three pillars. The **ASEAN Economic** Community (AEC), one of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community, was officially established in December 2015. The purposes of the AEC are to facilitate the movement of goods, investments, capital, services, skilled labour within ASEAN. Skilledworkers, accordingly, are to be able to move freely within the ASEAN region. The national skill framework was established and Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) were developed and implemented for specific sectors identified in the ASEAN Framework. The MRAs **ASEAN** encourage members to mutually agree on the qualifications of skilled workers including educational background and work experience. Such aforementioned factors are significant criteria for professional licenses. obtaining Recently, ASEAN has initiated MRAs for skilled workers of four major occupations, namely professions relating to construction, medicine, tourism, and accounting.

ASEAN is experiencing significant demographic change with approximately 68 million new entrants expected to join the labour force by 2025. Highly-skilled workers, including bachelor's degree holders, are noticeably younger than the ASEAN workforce as a whole. The

expected median age will be in the mid-20s (CUAcademic Service Center, 2016). This indicates that new graduates will enter the employment workplace.

On the other hand, young travelers are one of the most lucrative markets in the tourism industry. UNWTO has estimated that 20% of international tourists travelling the world in 2010 people, including were young university students. A gain of almost 300 million international youth trips per year is expected by 2020 (World Tourism Organization, 2012). In order to facilitate this tourist market, many destinations have formulated strategies to attract young travelers. However, little research has shown their travel motivations in relation to seeking job opportunities, especially following the official establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, which allowed labor to move and work easily within the ASEAN region. Therefore, by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the purpose of the current study is to seek further insight into the travel motivations and travel behavior of university students within ASEAN destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study adopted the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a theoretical framework. The TPB has been widely utilized in various areas of investigation, including tourism research. In short, the TPB was proposed by Ajzen (1991), and is used to explain two elements contributing to

the likelihood individuals of performing a specific action. These two aspects comprise volitional and nonvolitional elements. The volitional elements are attitude toward behavior (AT) and subjective norm (SN), and the non-volitional factor perceived is behavioral control (PBC), which influence behavioral together intentions.

Tourism scholars have used the TPB in two ways, as shown in Table 1. The first group of researchers adopted the original work of the TPB (e.g., Misung, Heesup, & Tim, 2012) to examine their research respondents. This approach produced varying

outcomes. For instance, a group of researchers focused on potential outbound tourists using the TPB to investigate travel intentions support the applicability of the TPB. They found that AT, SN and PBC had positive effects on travel intentions (Hsu & Huang, 2010; Misung et al., 2012; Phillips & Jang, 2012). Similarly, Lam and Hsu (2006) studied potential outbound tourists, determining that SN and PBC had a direct impact on behavioral intentions. However, in a western context, Sparks (2007) found that only SN had a partial effect on behavioral intentions.

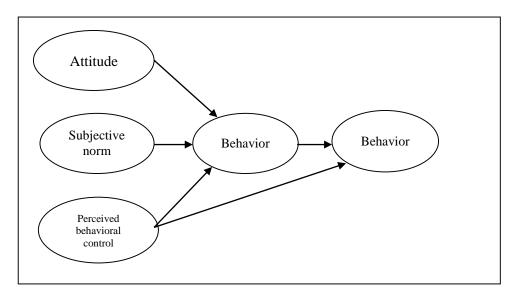


Figure 1 The Theory of planned behavior Source: Madden, Ellen, and Ajzen (1992)

Table 1: Examples of tourism studies utilizing the TPB

		ules utilizing the 11	
Author(s)	Respondents	Research context	Influencing factors of travel behavior
Lam and Hsu	Taiwanese	Behavioral	Reference group,
(2006)	tourists	intentions regarding	perceived behavioral
		the selection of a	control, previous
		travel destination	travel experience
Sparks and Pan (2009)	Chinese	Behavioral travel intentions	Reference group, perceived behavioral control, information source
Hsu and Huang	Chinese	Behavioral	Attitude, subjective
(2010)		intentions regarding	norms, perceived
		the selection of a	behavioral control,
		travel destination	travel motivation
Misung et al.	Japanese medical	Behavioral	Attitude, subjective
(2012)	tourists	intentions regarding	norms, perceived
		medical travel	behavioral control,
Naoko and Yao-	Museum visitors	Revisit intentions	Subjective norms
Yi (2012)	in Arizona, USA	and intentions to	
		recommend to	
		others	
Phillips and Jang	Seniors	Casino visit	Attitude, subjective
(2012)		intentions	norms, perceived
			behavioral control,
			gaming motivation

The second group of tourism scholars adapted the original model of the TPB as appropriate to the needs of their respective studies. Several included additional factors dependent upon their research context. Some examples include, past travel experience, perceived risks, and travel motivation (e.g., C. H. C. Hsu & Huang, 2010; Lam & Hsu, 2006; Phillips & Jang, 2012; Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010; Sparks & Pan, 2009). Regarding the additional factors, a few scholars found the positive effect of past behavior on intentions (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Phillips & Jang, 2012; Sparks & Pan, 2009). Very few studies

have examined the relationship between travel motivations and travel intentions (Hsu & Huang, 2010; Phillips & Jang, 2012). Hsu and Huang (2010) found that some travel motivations also had a positive effect on travel intentions and that behavioral intentions directly affected actual behavior when visiting a destination. However only particular motivation components, for example, shopping motivation (Hsu & Huang, 2010) and enjoyment (Phillips & Jang, 2012) influenced significantly tourist intentions. This scarcity calls for further research verify to the relationship between travel motivations and behavioral intentions. The motivational factors used in previous studies (Hsu & Huang, 2010; Phillips & Jang, 2012) imply push factors (e.g., relaxation, knowledge seeking, enjoyment, escape and socializing) with limited pull factors (shopping).

This research proposes travel motivation factors as an additional variable of the TPB. Motivation is defined as psychological or biological needs and wants that drive individuals' actions (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The push-pull model has been widely used in tourism literature (e.g., Correia, 2007; Vallem, & Moco. Gulid, Mechinda, & Serirat, 2009; Rundle-Thiele, Tkaczynski, & Beaumont, 2010). Push factors refer to sociopsychological motives emerging from the travelers themselves, while pull factors are motives aroused by destinations. Tourism scholars have suggested common travel motivations using the overarching question of why tourists travel to such a destination (e.g., Jonsson & Devonish, 2008; Kakyom, Jeonghee, & Giri, 2006; Sangpikul, 2008; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Common tourist motivations include relaxation (Jonsson & Devonish, 2008; Kakyom et al., 2006; Sangpikul, 2008; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) and novelty seeking (Gulid et al., 2009; Jang & Wu, 2006; Rundle-Thiele et al., 2010; Sangpikul, 2008).

suggest Scholars that travel motives differ depending upon tourist Previous examinations contexts. suggested that socio-demographic variables affect youth travel behavior. For example, age, marital status, and nationality, all contributed to travel patterns and travel activities (Hsu & Sung, 1997; Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003; Varasteh, Marzuki, & Rasoolimanesh, 2015). In relation to psychological factors, several researchers have shown that escaping from a daily routine was an important travel motive for young tourists (Hsu, 2011; Story, 2011; Wang & Walker, 2010). Those in the young cohort were also motivated to travel by the prospect of having new experiences (Lee & Chen, 2005; Story, 2011) and according to extremely limited studies, seeking jobs and further study (Ryan & Zhang, 2007). However, little is known about ASEAN university students' touristic motivations regarding seeking jobs while travelling within ASEAN region, especially following the establishment of the AEC.

In the case of student tourists from ASEAN universities, there may be other aspects of travel motivation, for instance, employment seeking, especially in the context of the free labor movement offered by the AEC. Based on the TPB and young tourist motivations, four hypotheses were proposed.

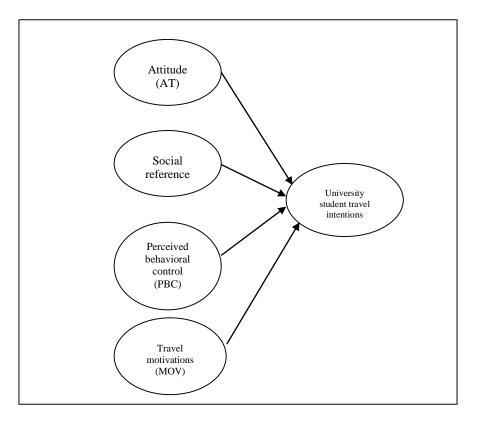


Figure 2: The research framework

- H1. Attitude has a significant positive effect on the behavioral travel intentions of university students.
- H2. Social references have a significant positive effect on the behavioral travel intentions of university students.
- H3. Perceived behavioral control has a significant positive effect on the behavioral travel intentions of university students.
- H4. Travel motivations (i.e., relaxation, cultural experience and employment seeking) have a significant positive effect on the behavioral travel intentions of university students.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research approach consisting of an online survey was utilized in this research. 7-point Likert scale measurements were used for all of the constructs in the TPB (Attitude, Social references, and Perceived behavioral control) and the additional construct (travel motivation) proposed in the study. For the purposes of the study, "travel motivation" was taken to refer to relaxation, cultural experience, and employment Questionnaire items were adopted from previous literature in TPB and tourism

studies (e.g., Hsu & Huang, 2010; Misung et al., 2012; Phillips & Jang, 2012). The online questionnaire was distributed through the researcher's connection to university students across Thailand during December 2016 and January 2017. The target respondents for this study were undergraduate students who expected to travel abroad. After one week of the distribution, 338 responses were obtained, and a total of 289 cases were deemed usable for statistical analysis. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) assisted with the scale (Churchill, measurement 1979: DeVellis, 2012), as shown in Table 2. After the iterative factor analyses, it was found that the factor of relaxation did not meet the criteria. As such, items in relation to relaxation were deleted. A series of multiple regression analyses conducted. then Standard regression analysis was determined to be the most suitable for this research as this type of multiple regression can be used to compare the effects of all hypothesised predictors by entering all independent variables at the same time (Pallant, 2013). In addition, the main purpose of the quantitative study was to examine the relationships between the independent factors and behavioural

intentions. Accordingly, no mediating constructs were proposed for this research. Thus, multiple regression was adopted as a suitable analytical technique to explore the relationships between a range of independent variables and behavioural intentions.

A congeneric factor model was adopted in this study. **Scholars** including Bryman and Cramer (2012) suggest that spurious relationships can occur when including a large number of items in one analysis. A spurious relationship refers to a relationship between two items that is not a true relationship (Bryman & Cramer, 2012). As such. avoid spurious relationships, a single congeneric model was used to conduct EFA where items for one single construct were factorised one at a time. Three forms of reliability and validity were utilised comprising content validity, construct validity and internal reliability of Content validity was consistency. investigated through the expert review panel whereas construct validity was measured using a test for unidimensionality with factor analysis. Internal reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Table 2: EFA Results of the Study

Factor and Items	Loading	Variance Explained (%)	Reliability (a)
Attitude		54.62	0.80
The visit would be pleasant.	0.73		
The visit would be fascinating.	0.78		
The visit would be worthwhile	0.70		
The visit would be rewarding.	0.73		
The visit would be satisfying.	0.76		
Social references		53.11	0.74
The people in my life whose opinions I value would approve of a visit in the near future.	0.67		
Most people who are important to me will visit the destination in the near future.	0.83		
Most people who are important to me think I should visit the destination in the near future.	0.69		
Perceived behavioral control		70.52	0.79
I have complete control over visiting the destination in the near future.	0.83		
If I wanted to, I could visit the destination in the near future.	0.86		
Whether or not to visit the destination in the	0.83		
near future is completely up to me.			
Cultural experience		55.85	0.72
I would love to visit the cultural and historical attractions of the destination.	0.69		
I would love to visit a destination that most people think deserves to be visited	0.71		
I would learn about the culture of the destination.	0.81		
I would interact with local people at the destination.	0.69		
I would experience a new culture while visiting the destination.	0.78		
Employment seeking		57.83	0.76
I would learn more about employment while visiting the destination.	0.71		
I would know more about the destination as a place to work in the future.	0.80		
I would seek job opportunities while visiting the destination.	0.77		

Table 2 (continued)

Factor and Items	Loading	Variance Explained (%)	Reliability (α)
University student behavioral travel		78.02	0.90
intentions			
I plan to visit the destination in the next 6	0.85		
months.			
I probably will visit the destination in the next	0.90		
6 months.			
I want to visit the destination in the next 6	0.88		
months.			
I intend to visit the destination in the next 6	0.90		
months			

RESULTS

All respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years old and were currently undertaking their bachelor's degree at the time of the study. More than half of them (55%) were in their 2nd year of study. Of the 289 usable cases, 30% were completed by males and 70% by females; 30% of respondents were studying in the

business and management field, while 39% of the respondents were studying education. The remainder respondents were studying in the science and technology faculty. Most of them (85%) were unemployed while either part-time some were in employment or taking paid or unpaid internships. The results of the demographic factors analysis are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Demographic factor

Den	nographic factor	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	84	29.07
	Female	205	70.93
Age	18-21	237	82.01
	22-25	52	17.99
Year of study	1	53	18.34
	2	106	36.68
	3	34	11.76
	4	96	33.22
Area of study	Business and management	88	30.45
	Science and technology	63	21.80
	Education	113	39.10
	Agriculture	2	0.69
	Other	23	7.96

Table 3 (continued)

Demo	ographic factor	Frequency	Percentage
Country of origin	Myanmar	2	0.69
	Singapore	2	0.69
	Thailand	284	98.27
Employment	Full-time employment	5	1.73
status	Part-time employment	24	8.30
	Unemployed	244	84.43
	Paid internships	7	2.42
	Unpaid internships	7	2.42

The respondents were also asked to think about the ASEAN destinations that they would like to visit in the near future. Then they ranked each of those destinations from one to ten. Table 4 shows that Singapore and Thailand

were reported to be the first destination they would like to visit in the near future. On the other hand, it was found that Thai students did not want to travel to Myanmar as nearly half of them rated this destination in 10th or 9th place.

Table 4: Ranking of each ASEAN destinations

	No. of respondents									
Country/ ranking	Cambodia	Brunei	Myanmar	Philippines	Laos	Malaysia	Thailand	Vietnam	Singapore	Indonesia
1	1	18	0	6	8	17	102	17	114	4
2	2	33	4	28	19	47	28	29	89	9
3	6	30	6	51	14	56	25	33	31	35
4	9	37	11	48	27	36	17	38	26	39
5	13	30	13	44	28	41	25	36	8	49
6	22	34	19	38	40	32	14	35	8	45
7	41	26	23	21	36	28	14	46	3	47
8	70	24	30	30	56	11	8	27	4	27
9	66	31	72	15	42	11	16	18	1	16
10	57	24	109	6	17	8	39	8	3	16

Results of the regression analyses indicated that the model was significant and four predictors (Attitude, Social references. Perceived behavioral control, and Cultural experience) had a significant impact on the behavioral travel intentions of the Thai university students, explaining 27 percent of the variance (see Table 5). Among the significant predictors, Social references made the strongest contribution to the model, followed by Attitude, Perceived behavioral control, and Cultural experience, with a similar level of contribution. In relation to the motivational factors for travel (cultural experience, and employment seeking), the findings showed only cultural

experience was found to be significant predictor of the travel intentions of the university students, while the effect of Employment seeking was not significant (p<0.05). The findings showed that university students were likely to have strong intentions to travel within the ASEAN region when they were supported by social references, for instance, friends and family. Moreover, the results in this research indicated that university students would travel in ASEAN destinations regarding what believed about the destination and their visit. Table 6 summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing.

Table 5: Regression Analysis of predictors of University Travel Behavioral Intention

Predictors	В	t	Sig.
Attitude	0.17	2.34	0.02
Social references	0.46	7.79	0.00
Perceived behavioral control	0.14	2.34	0.02
Cultural experience	0.14	2.00	0.04
Employment seeking	0.03	0.45	0.66
F	21.98		
Model significance	0.00		
Adjusted R ²	0.27		

Table 6: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis		
H1. Attitude has a significant positive effect on the behavioral travel	Supported	
intentions of university students.		
H2. Social references have a significant positive effect on the behavioral travel	Supported	
intentions of university students.		
H3. Perceived behavioral control has a significant positive effect on the	Supported	
behavioral travel intentions of university students.		
H4. Travel motivations (i.e., relaxation, cultural experience and employment	Partially	
seeking) have a significant positive effect on the behavioral travel intentions	Supported	
of university students.		

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the travel behavior university students, particularly Thai university students, following the official establishment of the AEC. With the utilization of the TPB, this study followed the approach taken by previous research, but also included the additional predictor of travel In this research, travel motivation. initially motivation focused on relaxation, cultural experience and employment seeking in the ASEAN region. However, after the iterative factor analyses, it was found that the relaxation factor should be excluded. The study provided insight into the determinants of travel behavior among Thai university students. Similar to some other existing literature (e.g., Hsu & Huang, 2010; Misung et al., 2012; Phillips & Jang, 2012) which fully supports the applicability of the TPB, the current study also suggested that the original variables of the TPB significantly contribute to travel intentions, at least in the case of Thai university students. Nevertheless, the current findings are in contrast with Lam and Hsu (2006) who studied potential outbound tourists and found that only SN and PBC had a direct impact on behavioral intentions.

In addition, this research provides further contributions to tourism literature and the applicability of the TPB. That is, one motivational factor proposed in this research, namely cultural experience, is a significant predictor of travel intentions for

university students. The extension of this additional factor further supports the advantages and flexibility of the TPB. Furthermore, this study proposed the factor of employment seeking. Even though it was not found to be a significant predictor oftravel intentions, its reliability score is still in the acceptable range for exploratory research as recommended by Hair et al. (2010) further development of the scale items is recommended to confirm the usability of these scales.

This research also provides practical implications to various organizations including those in the tourism industry. In this case, tourism businesses, especially Singaporean and destination management organizations, can use the research findings to promote appropriate travel experiences to Thai university students. The findings indicate which factors have a significant influence in the decision making of tourists in this market segment when they considering a vacation in the ASEAN region. Recommendations from social connections (identified by social references) are the strongest influential factor for the respondents. As such, the policy makers may use bloggers or celebrities, as an influential social reference, to review travel experiences, in order to attract customers from this target market. Policy makers may use this opportunity to reconsider platforms for promoting their destinations and travel activities. Online platforms including social media, for example, Facebook and Instagram, may be adopted as a distribution channel for the

tourism industry in order to promote travel services for this tourist market. The key reason is that online platforms allow audiences to share recommend their own experiences to others. Moreover, some travel packages or marketing promotions can be used to ensure the significance of the social reference. For example, a promotional buy 1 get 1 free offer for friends could adopted, or family members travelling together could receive a special discount.

As well as the influence of social references, it was also found that the cultural experience factor has significant effect on behavioral intentions. Thailand, as a rich cultural country, should focus more on giving local and traditional experience to its travellers. Because of its top rank among the ASEAN destinations, Thai university students prefer to take Local domestic trips. destination organizations management should carry out more promotion regarding the 'unseen' cultural activities which can be offered to young travellers. Many cities Thailand in are good representatives of cultural tourism. For example, Phuket is not only a beach style resort destination, it was also announced as a UNESCO city of gastronomy. Ayutthaya and Lopburi are historical cities which may be of interest to young consumers.

On one hand, due to the insignificance of the employment seeking variable, it could be implied that Thai young people do not seek job opportunities because of their lack of international language skills. Working overseas requires at least a reasonable

level of English proficiency, and possibly other languages. Young Thai prospective employees may have a lack of confidence in their language abilities, resulting in a lack of job seeking consideration while visiting a foreign destination. If this observation is true, educational policy makers should reconsider the current strategy on students' language development skills. The critical focus of this matter should be on how to improve the communication skills for voung students, such that they are ready to enter into the highly competitive work On the other hand, this industry. research suggests to the government that the young labor market does not show a preference to work abroad. Therefore, the idea of 'brain drain' may not occur in Thailand. Nevertheless, the Thai government should formulate some strategies to retain quality labor working in their own land. A higher communication skill is still a must for young employees.

Despite both theoretical practical implications, this study has a few limitations. Firstly, only Thai university students were the focus of this examination. Thus, the results may not be generalized to other young students from different nationalities. Further investigations can engage with variety of university students. Secondly, the respondents of the current study were mostly female. Therefore, the high number of this sample group might alter the influential factors of travel intentions. females are taught to follow their elders guidelines and while male students may have more freedom, this idea is perhaps the reason why social reference becomes the strongest factor in this study. Future research may involve a comparison research, re-taking the questionnaires but focusing more on male university students.

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