THE OPINION OF POTENTIAL CUSTOMER ON USING THE INTERNET
VS. TRAVEL AGENT

by

SIRIRAT PONGPANWATANA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Tourism Management

Graduate School of Business
Assumption University
Bangkok, Thailand

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Advisor and Committee Members/Examiners. It has been approved and accepted by all members of that committee, and it has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in Tourism Management in the Graduate School of Tourism Management of Assumption University of Thailand.

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ABSTRACT

This research studies on the opinion of potential customer on using the Internet vs. travel agent. The impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is a significant issue in today's tourism industry. The development of the internet has made information easily accessible to consumers, and has therefore established a direct link between consumers and suppliers. As a result, traditional travel distribution channels are changing rapidly. A major feature of this change is "disintermediation", with principals such as airlines, hotels and rental car chains bypassing intermediaries and sell directly to consumers. Travel agents considered particularly vulnerable to this process. ICTs have the potential to replace their core competencies, which include transaction processing (ticketing and settlement) and information provision (raw product information provided by suppliers).

The overall objective of this study was to find out whom the potential customer and their preference on using the Internet for information sourcing as opposed to advice from travel agent. In order to understand the perception of potential customer, the relevant theories and concepts has reviewed and synthesized to form the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This study focuses on the persons around Bangkok who have been used both the Internet and travel agent as the travel tool.

The methodology used in this research was survey research. The research instrument divided into three main sections. The first section intended to ask about Reasons for Using the Internet for Surf Information, Purchase or Reserve. The second

section asked about the Tourists Perception on Internet VS Travel agent. The final section consists of questions designed to gather demographic information. There were 400 questionnaires distributed around Silom, Sukumvit, and Kaosan Road.

The result of this study found that the overall tourists' perception on internet is Internet is more helpful than a travel agency. Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses. The majority of respondents concern for the next time if they want to travel, they will choose Internet website to surf and reserve by themselves than travel agency to arrange their trip. In addition, the study concluded with suggestion for further research.

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<div align="right">Sirirat Pongpanwatana</div>

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GENERALITIES OF THE STUDY

1.1 <u>Background of the study</u>

According to Lewis and Talalayevsky (1997) stated that information technology is having a significant impact on business, government, and other large organization. Direct electronic communication with consumers has become possible through the Internet, online services, and the use of telephones to communicate directly with computers. Of all the recent technological developments that have emerged in the last few years, the Internet is, without any doubt, the one that may have the biggest impact on the industry.

For business, the Internet helps to avoid tie zones, accelerates the creation of new products and provides a two-way communication system 24 hours a day (Cameron, 1996). The Internet as an information and communication technology is a perfect platform for companies within the industry to bring information about their products to the customers all over the world, in a direct, cost-minimizing and time-effective way. According to Burnellis (1995), Cockburn & Wilson (1996), and Pitkow & Kehoe (1996), given the rapid penetration of the Internet, and in particular the World Wide Web, companies worldwide have been involved over the last year in planning and experimenting aimed at leveraging this new technological infrastructure for business purposes.

The tremendous development and wide use of the Internet has changed our lives

and the landscape of our society including the tourism industry. The travel and tourism industry is contributing to economic growth all around the world: globally the industry recognized as having enormous potential. Tourism is an information intensive industry (Poon, 1993) in that tourism organizations rely on the exchange of information with travelers through various information channels to market their products and build customer relationships. Travelers, on the other hand, depend on travel-related information to satisfy their various information needs including travel planning (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). Many people now see searching for information online as a way to save time and cost, especially in their travel activities. To the extent that the Internet enables travelers to easily arrange and purchase their own services or products, the future of the traditional intermediary (travel agency) becomes uncertain.

- **Internet and Travel agency**

The travel agent industry is coordination intensive, in other words, it is centered on the communication and processing of information. The commodity-like nature of the products offered by travel agents and the ease with which many travel products can be described have led to concern about the future of travel agencies given the evolution of information technology. Because of an available choice to access information for tourist, the growth rate for Internet has increasing. Moreover, entrepreneurs are able to reduce the cost to operation and expand more the customer base, and able to serve an astonishing service for client response to customer's need and help to contact between the travel agency and clients more convenient. Tourist is able to purchase tourist service such as accommodation, air ticket and car rent through internet at home for 24 hour. Tourist can

search all tourist information such tourist attraction, map, schedule, payment condition, refund and insurance policy of travel agent and they receive the most satisfaction and needs through World Wide Web as it has called E-tourism.

Buhalis (2004) defines e-tourism as reflects the digitalization of all processes and value chains in the tourism, travel, hospitality and catering industries. At the tactical level, it includes e-commerce and applies ITs for maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of the tourism organization. At the strategic level, e-tourism revolutionizes all business processes, the entire value chain as well as the strategic relationships of tourism organizations with all their stakeholders. Thus, E-Tourism is a convenient choice for client to access the information cause searching through internet is inexpensive and accessible. Not only does E-Tourism access mass communication but it also changes tourist behaviors because consumer can contact travel agency straightly and they also choose the favorable service. E-Tourism plays an important role in The United States, Europe countries as the reservation, booking, and payment through World Wide Web are rising.

1.2 Statement of problem

As online travel sites continue to grow, it is interesting to notice who books on travel web sites and who calls a travel agency. Both verticals provide unique opportunities. Online travel web sites are best for individuals who know what they want. It can devote enough time to researching deals and destinations which are comfortable making their own decisions without the influence of others. You will also find many

unique "deals" on online travel sites, but remember many times travel agents can "price match" as well.

Travel specialists at travel agencies are an excellent resource, especially when it comes to group travel, unique travel like honeymoons and destination weddings, international vacations, cruises and yes even your average all-inclusive vacation. Travel agents are excellent resource to both new and veteran travelers. It's amazing how many tips and tricks a travel agent can provide that make your vacation so much easier and take a load of stress off, allowing you to enjoy what you ultimately paid for. You also can't forget that travel agents have quicker access to the deals many travel sites offer and can save you a ton of time researching if you provide a few basics like travel preferences, departure cities, etc.

Ultimately both services have their pros and cons, but it comes down to what kind of traveler you are, how accountable you want to be for your vacation decisions, what you're willing to risk, and what you'd like to gain from your entire experience. Travel agents are an excellent reference for advice and provide a variety of unique options they can personalize to your interests, while online travel sites lay out the best resort and cruise deals right in front of you for you to analyze and choose from on your own. Therefore this research will examine the potential customer as well as seeking their preference on using the Internet vs. travel agent. The focus is on the persons around Bangkok who have been used both the Internet and travel agent as the travel tool in order to know the opinion and the need of the potential customers. The research question posed

in this study is, "What is the customer preference on using the Internet vs. travel agent"

1.3 Objectives of the study

The purposes of this study are:

1.3.1 To study the role of travel agent and the use of the Internet in tourism industry.

1.3.2 To find out whom the potential customer and their preference on using the Internet for information sourcing as opposed to advice from travel agent.

1.4 Research questions

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Who is the potential customer?
2. What is the customer preference on using the Internet vs. travel agent?

1.5 Scope of the study

The research mainly focuses on examining the potential customer and their preference on using the Internet vs. travel agent as an information source and for product purchase. The target populations were the persons around Bangkok who have been used both the Internet and travel agent as the travel tool during May and June 2006. This research is a descriptive study using a questionnaire to collect data from respondents who will be selected using convenience sampling.

1.6 Limitations of the research

1. This research is focused only the perception of people around Bangkok, therefore findings of this research may not be generalized for respondents from other areas.

2. This research is conducted over a specific period of time. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized for any other time.

1.7 <u>Significance of the study</u>

Until relatively recently, travel agents have been the key intermediary between travel suppliers and consumers, with information as their primary stock in trade. However, changes to information technology and the advent of the internet have the potential to allow travel suppliers and consumers to interact directly. This research has been designed to examine the customer preference on using the Internet vs. travel agent when planning and arranging their overseas holidays. The result of this study will help both traditional travel agent and online travel agent to understand their position in the market as well as to develop an effective position for them. The study will also help them to promote its tourism products and services according to the needs and preferences of potential customer.

1.8 <u>Definition of Terms</u>

For understand clearly of this research, the following the technical terms was applying as follow:

Disintermediation: is the removal of intermediaries in a supply chain: "cutting out the middleman". Instead of going through traditional distribution channels, which had some

type of intermediate (such as a distributor, wholesaler, broker, or agent); companies may now deal with every customer directly, for example via the Internet. One important factor is a drop in the cost of servicing customers directly (Wikipedia, 2004).

E-commerce (Electronic commerce): Are the buying and selling of information, products, and service through computer and telecommunications networks (Lewis et al, 1998).

E-Tourism (electronic tourism): is the management of travel business on the Internet. It refers to selling, suggesting, reserving the accommodation for tourist via the web site.

E-business (electronic business): is the conduct of business on the Internet. It is a more generic term than E-Commerce because it refers to not only buying and selling but also servicing customers and collaborating with business partners.

Impact: The force of impression of one thing on another (Managing Effective Risk Response: an Ecological Approach, 2005).

Intermediary: is a third party that offers intermediation services between two trading parties. The intermediary acts as a conduit for goods or services offered by a supplier to a consumer. Typically, the intermediary offers some benefit to the transaction that may not be possible by direct trading (Wikipedia, 2006).

Internet: is a global network of computer networks that uses a common interface for

communication (Kleindl, 2003).

Potential customer: is a person who may buy a particular thing. There is a high possibility of this person buying that thing.

Preference: is a concept, used in the social sciences, particularly economics. It assumes a real or imagined "choice" between alternatives and the possibility of rank ordering of these alternatives, based on happiness, satisfaction, gratification, enjoyment, utility they provide. More generally, it can be seen as a source of motivation. In cognitive sciences, individual preferences enable choice of objectives/goals (Wikipedia, 2004).

Travel agency: is an intermediary who is a business or person selling the travel industry's individual parts or a combination of the parts to the consumer (Mcintosh et al, 1999).

Tourism: is the activity that occurs when tourists travel to place outside their usual environment for at least 24 hours and not more than one year for leisure, business and other purposes (World Tourism Organization, 1999)

Tourist: is a person who travels for reasons other than employment or personal business. The Unite Nations defines as one who spends more than one night but less than a year away from home for pleasure or business, except diplomats, military personnel, and enrolled student (Mill, 1990)

World Wide Web (WWW): A set of standards that allows hyperlinks and graphics to move through the internet (Kleindl, 2003).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES AND STUDIES

This chapter represents some aspects of key research areas in order to understand the concept theory before conducting the research. The purpose of this research is to examine the opinion of potential customers on using the Internet vs. travel agents as their preference. There are four main areas are discussed: travel agent definition, the role of travel agent, the travel distribution system which includes changing role and disintermediation concept. Lastly is focusing on the use of the Internet.

2.1 Travel Agent Definition

The growth in the development of transportation after the First World War, enabled people to travel to previously inaccessible areas, and as the 1930s depression ended disposable incomes increased and people experienced greater leisure time (Vasudavan and Standing, 1999 cited in Hall, 1995). Furthermore, technological innovations improved transportation and the cost of travel declined, and tourism throughout the world expanded.

Historically, travel agents were tour planners as well as sales agents for travel suppliers. Would the travel agent sell transport, accommodation and tours for suppliers, they would not only organize travel plans for customers and provide advice and specialized information on destinations, and other travel-related information (Vasudavan and Standing, 1999 cited in Dickman, 1989). In the 1950s and 1960s, airlines entered the era of jet aircraft and this was soon following by the rapid introduction of wide-bodied transport in the 1970s and 1980s.

Airlines viewed the use of travel agencies as an inexpensive and effective method of widening their distribution network in order to reach these new and expanding

markets, combined with high labor costs and difficulties in reaching the market place. This led to the use of travel agents as intermediaries, to act as sales agents for their products. Airlines soon came to rely heavily on them for distribution, often as an extension of their own office, for airline reservations, ticketing, transactions, travel advice, market coverage, market presence and packaging (Vasudavan and Standing, 1999).

According to Mcintosh et al (1999), a travel agency is an intermediary who is a business or person selling the travel industry's individual parts or a combination of the parts to the consumer. In marketing terms, a travel agent is an agent intermediary, acting on behalf of the client, making arrangements with suppliers of travel such as airlines, hotels, or tour operators and receiving a commission from the suppliers.

In legal terms, a travel agency is an agent of the principal: specifically, transportation companies. The agency operates as a legally appointed agent, representing the principal in a certain geographic area. The agency functions as a broker, bringing buyer and seller together, for the other suppliers, such as hotels, car rentals, ground operators, and tour companies. A travel agent is thus an expert, knowledgeable in schedules, routing, lodging, currency, prices, regulations, destinations, and all other aspects of travel and travel opportunities. In short, the travel agent is a specialist and counselor. (Mcintosh et al, 1999)

The travel weekly studies conducted by Louis Harris and Associates define the

travel agent as "A travel agent, besides selling prepared package tours, also prepares individual itineraries. He arranges for hotels, motels, accommodation at resorts, meals, sightseeing, transfer of passengers and luggage between terminals and hotels; furthermore, he can provide the traveler with a host of other information, which would normally be hard to get. The travel agent paid for his services through commissions. For example, if a travel agent writes up an air ticket or makes a reservation in al hotel for a client, the carrier or the hotel in the form of a commission pays him. In short, the travel agent saves the customer both time and money". (Mcintosh et al, 1999)

There are two general types of travel agents – wholesale and retail. (Gee et al, 1989) A wholesaler specializes in organizing the various components of a tour that sold to the public through a network of retail agents. A retailer is most commonly a travel or booking agent. Retail agents sell travel arrangements to consumers. Usually retailers have business relationships with a range of wholesalers. They use the wholesaler's brochure to promote the different products available to the consumer and use the wholesaler to package the arrangements. Retail travel agents act as agents for travel suppliers such as airlines, cruise ship lines, hotels, car rentals, and railroads. The retail agency receives a commission from suppliers for selling their respective services.

Retail travel agencies sell directly to the customer. Their operations involve making reservations and providing services for people who are leaving home for a vacation or for business. The traditional travel agent has two main tasks: he acts as the human intermediary between the customer and the complex computer systems of the airlines and he produces the ticket. (Gee et al, 1989)

2.2 The Role of Travel Agent

Since the early 1800s, entrepreneurs have promoted travel to affluent members of society. A system developed whereby agents were representatives and sellers of travel components on behalf of the service providers. Over the years, a travel agent has become a cost effective means of promotion for the supplier of travel products and services principally by providing advice and making bookings. The beginning of travel agency practices attributed to Thomas Cook who started special-interest tour groups on a commercial basis. The principles used then, and other developments in the field of travel, are still very much part of the framework of today's travel industry (Pearce, Morrison & Rutledge, 1998).

Traditionally, travel agents have acted as intermediaries between airline companies, wholesale travel companies, tour and accommodation providers and the consumer. The primary role of travel agents is to market and sell products and services provided by other players in the travel and hospitality industry. This includes, inter alia, providing travel information, organizing tour packages, facilitating hotel bookings, issuing air tickets and arranging car rental services (Lam & Zhang, 1998; Standing & Vasudavan, 2000). The intermediary role of travel agents can summarize into three groups of activities. First is passing information on between buyers and sellers, thus being information brokers. Second is executing transactions including issuing tickets and receiving payment. Third, giving advice based on their specialized knowledge of different products and services.

Data reflecting the activities of travel agencies confirm their primary role as intermediaries for other travel and tourism services. Travel agencies in Australia play an important role as intermediaries; 87 per cent of agencies were primarily involved in the distribution of travel products in 1997 (Standing & Vasudavan, 2000). In the U.K., travel agents are the key distribution channel for air tickets, booking 80 per cent of scheduled flights (Dumazel and Humphreys, 1999).

Travel agents are the people who help us sort through changing airfares and air schedules, vacation packages, visa requirements and resort options. They arrange itineraries, set up car rentals, book hotel accommodations and tours, and give general advice on traveling. They can provide advice about complicated things, such as customs regulations and vaccinations. On the other hand, they can give advice about simpler but very essential matters, such as weather conditions, local customs and currency exchange rates. In many cases, they have visited the destinations they talk about, so they are able to provide a first-hand account of what a traveler might expect (Career Prospect in Virginia 2006).

A travel agent's typical day includes not only booking hotel, car and airplane reservations, but also researching unusual destinations for clients, helping others get passports for international trips, or visiting a hotel or restaurant to see whether it is worth recommending to clients. Each time agent's book reservations on airlines, cruise ships, hotels or tour packages, they receive a commission from those companies. It was once a

given that anyone thinking of a big international trip would visit a travel agent first (Career Prospect in Virginia 2006).

Today, even technology has reduced some role of travel agent; they do still play a role in some types of travel. Although many companies have begun arranging business trips in-house, travel agents still arrange trips for many organizations, planning meetings and conventions to various cities. They also continue to market cruises and resort packages, and plan group trips. Moreover, many are increasingly specializing in niche markets, as the general consumer becomes better informing about travel. For example, some now specialize in organizing trips for seniors, or for gay couples, or for adventure travelers or bicyclists. Some specialize in tours to Zanzibar or in tours dedicated to opera, or yoga or wine, or any other interest you can think of. Many now work at home or visit the homes of their clients. While the future of this career is very uncertain, there will probably always be at least a small role for agents who become specialists in a special destination or a particular type of travel, or for those marketing to well-heeled customers unwilling to make their own travel arrangements (Career Prospect in Virginia 2006).

Constantly changing airfares and schedules, thousands of available vacation packages, and a vast amount of travel information on the Internet can make travel planning frustrating and time-consuming. To sort out the many travel options, tourists and business people often turn to travel agents, who assess their needs and help them make the best possible travel arrangements. In addition, many major cruise lines, resorts,

and specialty travel groups use travel agents to promote travel packages to millions of people every year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006).

Travel agents consult a variety of published and computer-based sources for information on departure and arrival times, fares, and hotel ratings and accommodations. They may visit hotels, resorts, and restaurants to evaluate comfort, cleanliness, and quality of food and service so that they can base recommendations on their own travel experiences or those of colleagues or clients (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006).

Travel agents also promote their services, using telemarketing, direct mail, and the Internet. They make presentations to social and special interest groups, arrange advertising displays, and suggest company-sponsored trips to business managers. Depending on the size of the travel agency, an agent may specialize by type of travel, such as leisure or business, or destination, such as Europe or Africa (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006).

Travel agents work hard on behalf of the consumer. The role of a travel agent is to make the process of going on a trip - whether for work or pleasure - be a stress free and memorable experience. Travel agents spend time not only booking tickets and searching for affordable prices, but also personalizing their services for individual clients. The job of a travel agent has grown and adapted to reflect the changes within the travel industry, and to reflect the difference in the way people think about travel. Many travel agents recognize that consumers today have done their homework and are more knowledgeable

about what they want. Clients who turn to a travel agent desire an in-depth, personal approach and want the advice and expertise of a professional (American Society of Travel Agents 2006).

According Lewis and Talalayersky (1997), travel agents represent an important example of an intermediary between producers (such as airlines, hotels, or rental car firms) and consumers (prospective travelers). The travel agent industry has seen considerable recent consolidation, but most agencies are independent small businesses that get the bulk of their revenue from commissions paid by airlines. The prospective traveler who deals with an agency usually gets effective, personal service and can benefit from the expertise of the agent and the agent's colleagues. The agent can issue plane tickets on behalf of the provider, but also acts in the consumer's interests. For example, an agent may recommend using a different airline than the one initially suggested by the passenger, in order to provide a quicker or cheaper way to get to a destination.

Important roles remain for travel agents, although consolidation of agencies may continue. The prospective traveler who contacts an agency is in fact delegating some of the search and evaluation process to the agent. The traveler also expects that the agent will find the product that best matches individual requirements. In making travel arrangements, the agent also plays a role in marketing a producer's services. The traveler may not have been aware, for example, of a discount fare introduced an hour before. Few travel agents simply follow customer orders; they provide time-consuming advice, particularly to leisure travelers. It has claimed that the extremely complex nature of

airline fares is at least partially motivating by carriers' desire to make comparisons between airlines difficult. Yet perhaps some of this complexity partially offset by the very existence of CRSs, because such systems allow agents to more easily perform such comparisons. Whatever the origins of the current fare system, consumers benefit from CRSs because they simplify the agent's job of finding the flight that best suits the individual's needs (Lewis and Talalayersky, 1997).

Conversely, agents play a role in filtering out information generated by service providers that the consumer does not want to know about, such as inapplicable discount fares. Ultimately, travel agents, like any intermediary, are responsible for integrating and balancing producer and consumer interests. Should agents fail to continue doing so, they will lose their suppliers and clients (Lewis and Talalayersky, 1997).

2.3 The Travel Distribution System

In any industry a channel of distribution is the way in which the ownership of a product is transferred from its original owner, normally a manufacturer, to the ultimate owner, usually a consumer. (Renshaw, 1992) It quite often involves 'middlemen' who may for a time purchase the goods themselves before reselling them or, as in the case of the travel industry, middlemen, such as travel agents, who never actually own the product yet are responsible for ensuring the effective transfer of its ownership from the supplier to the consumer. In the travel industry, Renshaw (1992), cited in Mill (1985) noted that distribution is about the process of transferring the travel products produced by principals, such as transport, accommodation and inclusive tours, to the consumer. Tan

and Pearce (2004) cited in Buhalis (2000) states that distribution channels have two main purposes: to provide information for potential travelers and intermediaries; and to provide a mechanism for them to book, confirm and pay for their reservations.

A channel of distribution can be simple or complex in any industry, for example in travel; it could base on a handshake agreement between a supplier, such as an hotelier, and a travel agent. It may require a detailed written contract. Alternatively, some suppliers prefer to deal directly with customers and choose not to use agents as intermediaries. Tan and Pearce (2004) described distribution channels as "an operating structure, system or linkage of various combinations of travel organizations through which a producer of travel products describes and confirms travel arrangements to the buyer".

Yet in travel and tourism the 'middlemen' often provide more than just a means of transferring ownership from principals to consumers, they also provide help and information. Renshaw (1992), cited in Mill (1985) notes that the role of distribution in travel has two-fold purpose, ensuring that potential travelers can obtain the information they need to make a vacation or trip choice and, having made that choice, that they can make the necessary reservations. In other words in the travel business those organizations acting as the channel of distribution must get sufficient information to the right person at the right time and in the right place to allow the consumer to make the right purchase decision. In addition, such organizations must provide a suitable mechanism so that the consumer can make, and pay for, the necessary purchase.

With respect to the entire travel industry, the distribution system maybe defined as the process of producing, marketing, selling, and delivering travel-related services from travel suppliers to consumers. (Gee et al, 1989) In this process, travel agents serve as intermediaries between travel suppliers and ultimate consumers. They sell the products offered by travel suppliers such as airlines, cruise ships, railroads, bus companies, car rental firms, hotels, and sightseeing operators to the public, often adding special services and customizing arrangements according to client needs.

A retail agency must deal with wholesalers, tour operators, consolidators, general sales agents, and specialty channelers either as business associates or as competitors. As shown in figure 2.1, suppliers can sell their services directly to travelers or through any one or more stages in the sales distribution system.

Suppliers				Buyers
Carriers Lodging Food Services Car Rental Firms Entertainment Cruise Line Resort Etc.				Individual or Group Traveler
	Travel Agent, Tour Operator, or Specialty Channeler			Individual or Group Traveler
	Specialty Channeler Wholesaler, or Tour Operator	Travel Agent		Individual or Group Traveler
	Wholesaler or Tour Operator	Travel Agent	Specialty Channeler	Individual or Group Traveler

Figure 2.1 Travel sales distribution systems

Source: Chuck Y. Gee, James C. Makens, and Dexter J. L. Choy, 1989. The Travel Industry, 2nd ed. New York: Van Nortrand Reinhold, p. 178.

Tourism consists of a relatively small number of large suppliers and a relatively large number of small suppliers. As recognized by Buhalis and Laws (2001), cited in Wilson and Crotts (1995) buyer-seller relationships in the travel trade are complex, given the nature of the tourism product. A tourism distribution channel is defined as 'an operating structure, system or linkage of various combinations of travel organizations through which a producer of travel products describes and confirms travel arrangements to the buyer' (Buhalis and Laws, 2001 cited in Mill and Morrison, 1992). It is so much easier for a customer to contact a travel agent and purchase a holiday than to contact all the potential suppliers of the sub-components of the package.

In travel and tourism, providers of tourism attractions, facilities and services may sell direct to consumers or use one or more intermediaries such as tour operators and travel agents. Most large producers use a combination of distribution channels for their products and this combination described as the distribution mix (Buhalis and Laws, 2001). To emphasizes that channels are organized and serviced systems created to provide convenient access to consumers, away from the location of production and consumption and paid for out of marketing budgets. Buhalis and Laws (2001), cited in Woodruffe (1995) refers to the concept of the 'place' element of the marketing mix, which in tourism is concerned chiefly with two main issues: accessibility and availability.

'Place' does not mean only the location of a tourist attraction or facility. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, it is the location of all points of sale that provide customers is with access to tourist products.

The travel distribution system consists of tourists, suppliers and three main types of intermediaries: tour operators, retail travel agents and so called 'speciality channellers'. The last group is sometimes referred to as a support network and includes incentive travel firms, meeting and convention planners, hotel representatives, association executives, corporate travel offices, etc. (Buhalis and Laws, 2001). Distribution is the most important activity along the tourism chain. Without adequate air access and product distribution channels in the marketplace, the best destinations in the world would find it difficult to survive. Two key aspects of distribution are important for tourism destination, air transportation and the role of tourist boards and promotion agencies in the marketplace. (Buhalis and Laws, 2001 cited in Poon, 1993, p. 326)

```
            ┌─────────────────────┐
            │ Principals / Suppliers │
            └─────────────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐
    │ Tour operators │ ◄──────┐
    └──────────────┘          │   ┌─────────────────┐
          ▲                    ├──│ Support network │
          ▼                    │   └─────────────────┘
    ┌──────────────┐           │
    │ Travel Agents │ ◄─────────┤
    └──────────────┘           │
          │                    │
          ▼                    ▼
    ┌──────────────┐
    │   Tourists    │
    └──────────────┘
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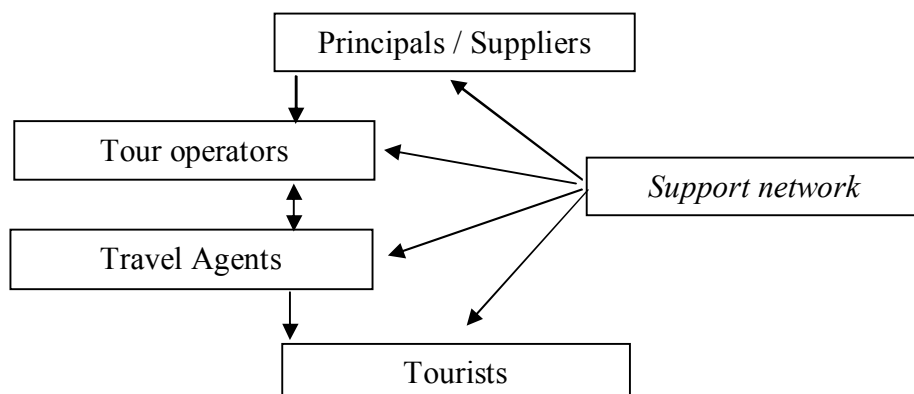
Figure 2.2 Tourism distribution channel

The role of an intermediary or the intermediary has well defined in a traditional business environment. According to Ali (2004), the purposes of an intermediary, is any person or agency that acts on behalf of both the buyers and the sellers (manufacturer) so that the collective benefits of all the parties maximized. As such, real estate agents, travel agents, wholesalers, retailers are all intermediaries. Take the example of a retail outlet. Retail outlets are the last stage in the distribution channel. Their functions were well defined and ranged from providing information to concluding transactions. However, with the advent of WWW as a global platform for pursuing business activities and consequently the emergence of e-commerce has provided the customers a cheaper alternative to retail outlets and other forms of intermediaries. Customers have discovered that an online purchase is often more lucrative to their wallets and fits well within their monthly budget. Furthermore, the Internet fulfills the consumers' need for reliable and timely access to information in a more cost-effective manner than an intermediary does; the cost of obtaining information using intermediaries is one of the reasons for a product's high price (Ali, 2004).

2.3.1 Disintermediation Risks of New Information Technology

There has been considerable discussion in the travel industry press about the inevitable "disintermediation" of travel agents as a result of the widespread availability of the Internet and IT in general. However, "from an academic point of view the "disintermediation" hypothesis is little documented, especially with respect to its

underlying theoretical arguments and implications" (Vander Heijden, 1996).

Internet commerce has introduced new, virtual market spaces in addition to the traditional physical market spaces. Angehrn (1997) introduced a generic framework, the ICDT model to classify and illustrate significant business opportunities and threats generated by the Internet. The model describes four new, virtual market spaces that are being created by the Internet. They are the information, communication, transaction and distribution spaces. Angehrn treats each space separately because they each require different strategies and technological approaches. The virtual information space is where company, product and price information is provided to die customer. It is a one-way communication channel. The virtual communication space is where interaction and relationship building with the customer occurs. The virtual distribution space is where products and services are delivered. Since it is a virtual space, it is only suitable for delivery of digitized products and services. The virtual transaction space is where orders, invoices, and payments occur.

The risk of disintermediation is related to the ease with which technology can be used to replace the role of an intermediary in each of these virtual spaces. Bloch and Segev (1996) proposed that the positive impacts of electronic commerce for existing intermediaries would be:

• Raising of entry barriers for new entrants by increasing customer switching costs

• Faster introduction of new products

• Re-intermediation of new intermediaries acting as information brokers

Bloch and Segev (1996) argue that electronic commerce will have most impact on industries where customer service and information play an important role in the buying process. This category would include industries such as banking, travel and retailing of commodities such as books, CDs, and wine. When their methodology was applied to the travel industry, and travel agents specifically, the greatest impact was shown to be on the travel agent's roles as transaction processors (ticketing and settlement) and suppliers of raw unprocessed, product information. These roles will continue to be replaced by technology as suppliers provide standard product information; electronic ticketing and electronic funds transfer services directly to the consumer. The role of advisor, critically assessing product and destination information and assisting the consumer to make a suitable choice based on their preferences, was not seen to be under any real threat. This indicates that travel agents need to re-position and focus on the latter role if they are to survive and grow.

Brenner, Kolbe and Hamm (1996) and Lenz (1996) investigated the risk of disintermediation and concluded that the risk is related to the ability of information technology to replace the core competencies of the intermediaries. Lenz concluded that the roles that are most easily replaced by technology, transaction processing and information provision, will be the first to be automated, as has already happened with the banks. The recently moves by airlines to cap or reduce travel agent's commission and continuing expansion of direct sales to consumers, highlights the vulnerability of the transaction space. Similarly, focusing on recommending and selling preferred suppliers

standard packaged products, presumably because of higher commissions or lower cost of sale, compromises the travel agents perceived independence and value added in the mind of the customer. Poon (1993) asserts that "Players closest to consumers (e.g. travel agents, hotels) and those in control of the industry's information are expected to gain".

Since the travel agent is the closest intermediary to the customer at the point of sale (and usually the point of departure). The risk of disintermediation will be minimal if they are operating in an area that is difficult to replace with IT. The market spaces where the greatest risk of disintermediation exists for travel agents are the transaction, information and distribution spaces. The space where least risk exists is the communication (or relationship) space. This may seem paradoxical since information and communications technologies are creating the risks. However, Angehrn (1997) defines the communications space as the space where person to person communication takes place and is therefore minimally affected by communications technology itself. Communications technology simply provides the infrastructure that allows the exchange of information between human participants at either end of the communications channel. It does not enhance the message, it simply delivers it.

Re-Intermediation Opportunities

While information technology is designed to capture, store and process information, it is not capable (at this stage) of capturing, storing and analyzing the "semantics" of that information to the same level of performance as a human expert. The Internet is a huge repository of information but it still requires a human intermediary to

assess the reliability, quality and appropriateness of the retrieved information. Over time this situation will improve as more standardization and controls are put in place, but the anarchic nature of the Internet will make it extremely difficult to enforce. Poon (1993) argues that if travel agents adopt an appropriate strategic response to the changes that are occurring, there will be enormous prospects for increased income generation. "It is to ensuring the satisfaction of the travel consumers that agencies must give priority in order to ensure their long-term survival and competitiveness. The ability of travel agents to acquire, provide and transmit unbiased information in a courteous, efficient and timely manner will be the key to their competitive success." (Poon, 1993)

More recent literature (Bloch & Segev, 1996; Karcher, 1996; Milne, 1996; Ng & Sussman, 1996), electronic ticketing initiatives by the airlines and the opinions of the participants in this study indicate that ticketing is rapidly reducing in importance and the ability to create personalized packages is now vitally important. Given that provision of advice is a core competency, then the risk of disintermediation will increase only if provision of advice can be easily replaced by technology. This is highly unlikely in the short term. At the same time, the quality of the advice provided by Retail Travel Agents should be significantly improved by access to reliable, high quality destination information (Milne, 1996), through the Internet, assisting them to reposition to more of a consulting role. Real opportunities exist for the travel agent of the future to become a network information broker (Lamp & Keen, 1997) by finding, assessing and quality controlling information obtained from the Internet and other electronic and physical sources and conveying it, together with appropriate advice, to the customer in a clearly

understandable form.

2.4 The Internet

The late 1990s saw great commercial interests in the Internet. The Internet, which has had a profound impact on all facets of our lives, is teaching people that they can go online and quickly find out about any subject they are interested in. Consumers in the Information Age are no longer satisfied with requesting information and then awaiting its arrival. They are learning fast that the Internet can provide them with instant information. In the future, prospective tourists will not wish to travel until they have the comfort of detailed information on where they are going (The Foreign Language School at Dalian University of Technology, 2003).

The Internet originated from the military network ARPANet, which was introduced by the US Department of Defense in 1969 (Lewis, et al, 1998). Ever since the removal in 1990 of the requirement that official support obtained to join the Internet, the number of computer servers and users from private firms and individuals has been growing at an exponential rate.

Today, it is rare to see larger organizations without a web site today. The reason why the website is important to the tourism industry is that the products of the tourism industry do not exist when they purchased. They are exclusively dependent upon representations and descriptions by the travel intermediaries to attract consumers, that is, information in printed and audio visual forms (Buhalis, 2000). When travel bought, it is

typically no more than information on a computer reservation system. What the traveler is buying is the right to the product at some time in the future. Travel is information at the point of sale.

The tourism industry uses the Internet because it can reach large numbers of consumers worldwide with information and product offers at relatively low cost. It can provide information of greater depth of quality than has been possible through the traditional medium of print. Also internet is enabling consumers to book quickly and easily (WTO, 1999).

Having realized that Web-based tourism information systems are required not to offer online brochures only, but to provide both value and service, many researchers are trying to research an develop new technologies to help tourism sectors survive in the new century. For example, The Internet TRAveller System introduced by Valeria and Guillon (1998) can streamline the travel process from booking and ticketing to expense reporting and processing.

For many types of small businesses, marketing through the Internet can offer inexpensive access to electronic commerce, putting the firm on an equal footing with larger ones (Lewis and Talalayevsky, 1997). For example, any travel agency can establish a World Wide Web site for a nominal cost, allowing Internet users anywhere to have access to its services. A travel agency in Austin, Texas offers a feature on its web site that seeks out low fares, and recently offered 5 percent to 10 percent off TWA and

Continental tickets. As mentioned above, customers who use online services should get a price break as the traveler is undertaking some of the search and evaluation that would normally be the agent's responsibility. While surfing the web for travel bargains may be time consuming, it does offer the advantage of a reasonably consistent experience. Dealing with human agents, of course, depends on the individual's concerned (Lewis and Talalayevsky, 1997).

Lewis, et al, (1998) stated that with the emergence of the Internet, the process of fast information transmission could address effectively at a low cost. In other words, tourists can now receive comprehensive, timely and relevant information in a virtual environment to assist their decision-making process. This, in turn, necessitates the balancing of perishable tourism products and changeable tourist demand. Furthermore, the tourism industry diversified, with a plethora of different suppliers that operate independently, even as tourists expect traveling to be a complete experience. To resolve this mismatch, the Internet offers an effective means for developing a single and sustainable electronic infrastructure for information gathering and business transactions for both travelers and suppliers. A natural outcome of this is that the suppliers can carry out one-to-one marketing and mass customization. In other words, travel suppliers can now understand each customer has needs, and therefore target each customer individually and deliver tailor-made products. More importantly, travel suppliers can understand how to deliver information and sell their products and services to customers directly through their Web sites (Lewis, et al, 1998).

Because of the online travel developments, business competition for traditional travel agencies has increased. Lewis, et al (1998) cited in Poon (2001) argues that relying more heavily on the Internet gives suppliers a new independence that will gradually decrease their dependence on, and their commission payable to, travel agencies. Similarly, travelers may buy more directly from suppliers, thus bypassing travel agencies. Inevitably, the travel agencies' traditional intermediary role as a distribution channel has changed leading to the possible ultimate disintermediation of travel agencies (Lewis, et al, 1998).

The advent of the Internet and other online services, combined with widespread adoption of personal computers by businesses and consumers, had led to a growing role for electronic commerce in the world economy. Electronic commerce is the buying and selling of information, products, and services through computer and telecommunications networks. The emerging electronic commerce marketplace expected to support all business services that normally depend on paper-based transactions (Lewis, et al, 1998).

Travel agents currently play three key roles. First, they act as information brokers, passing information between buyers and suppliers of travel products. Second, they process transactions by printing tickets or forwarding money. Third, they act as advisors to travelers. IT will profoundly affect the first two roles and force travel agents to focus on the third, advisory role. Travel agencies can play a valuable role by using IT to assist the consumer in dealing with the complexity of the marketplace. Despite incentives to do so, travelers will not always want to approach travel suppliers directly. Some agencies

have set up Web sites that allow prospective travelers to compare schedules and fares from different airlines, in effect repositioning the agencies as electronic intermediaries that offer significant value added (Lewis et al, 1998).

Lewis and Talalayevsky (1997) stated that information technology (IT) is having a significant impact on businesses, governments, and other large organizations. In the past five years, direct electronic communication with consumers has become possible through the Internet, online services, and the use of telephones to communicate directly with computers. The case has made that it will be possible to bypass intermediaries, as they will no longer be necessary for the coordination and management of information. As the role of intermediary's declines, profit margins along the value chain will redistributed to producers and consumers.

Developments in information technology, services and applications will have a far-reaching impact on the tourism industry in an increasing competitive environment. Each of the various sections of the travel industry will be affected both suppliers and consumers as global distribution channels change, offering new chances to improve communication with business partners and consumers as well as profits. The array of choices includes traditional computer reservation systems, internet, telephone marketing, call centers, kiosk systems, interactive TV as well as smartcards and ticket less travel. All provide new opportunities to drive down communication costs and to carry out direct marketing, not only for large companies, but also for small and medium-sized enterprises as well as destinations. Now home or business users can check out a broad variety of

options and fares thereby 'bypassing' parts of the established tourism value chain. Consumers enjoy much more choice and access to information. They do not have to rely on information provided by intermediaries anymore. As a result, experts and the media alike discuss the future role, especially of the travel agents. (Kuom and Oertel, 1999)

With its rich visual images, multi-media capabilities, and the wealth of content through links with other related agencies and organizations, the Internet lends itself to providing information worldwide. The Internet also offers many possibilities for booking and purchase, and thus for disintermediation, but it is still a relatively new medium, not everyone is sufficiently Internet knowledge to purchase online and issues of confidence arise with regard to security of payment (Tan and Pearce, 2004).

The Internet has helped transform the travel industry. It helps educate the consumer by providing vast amounts of information about destinations and different travel options. Both consumers and travel professionals have benefited from the Internet, which makes the possibility of travel to exotic places more imaginable. It has helped consumers see in full color and, in some cases, real time, where they would like to visit. The Internet gives travelers the ability to do comparative shopping for attractive deals or packages. It also has helped many travel agencies, hotels, resorts and other travel-related suppliers flourish by bringing in business through Web sites (American Society of Travel Agents, 2006).

The Internet as a communication, transaction and distribution channel

Internet research suggests that many people are attracted to using the Web as an information-gathering tool (Schonland and Williams, 1996; Walle, 1996) in comparison with other media. As the popularity of using the Internet increases, many companies use it for marketing activities and as a distribution and communication channel. In terms of promotion, the Internet is undoubtedly faster and provides round the clock and global services when compared with conventional marketing communication channels (Ellsworth and Ellsworth, 1996). The Internet also allows bi-directional marketing and offers wider, deeper materials and richer advertisement content. Quelch and Klein (1996) define a firm marketing its products or services through the Internet as a global firm, because consumer's world-wide can access it. The Internet provides a boundless platform for marketing and advertising, and even as a channel of distribution to generate additional sales. Besides, Kohli (1996) and Sullivan (1997) note that companies can save on transaction costs and test new products before market launch. The development of electronic commerce can allow business units to access new customers, access remote or niche markets and offer alternative access to traditional customers (Kohli, 1996).

The Internet and the travel industry

Smith and Jenner (1998) note that travel products and services are perfectly suited to online selling because they possess the necessary characteristics that can function in the electronic environment. According to Peterson *et al*. (1997), three main characteristics of products and services are likely to influence Internet usage; for both information seeking and making online purchases. These are cost and frequency of purchased; value proposition; and degree of differentiation. Travel products (e.g. vacation

packages), in general, engage a higher level of involvement, intangibility and higher level of differentiation than other tangible consumer goods and, therefore, are more easily sold through the Web (Bonn et al., 1998). Frew and Dorren (1996), echo that the development in electronic communication is significant for tourism marketers who sell a perishable, intangible, heterogeneous and high-risk product. The ease of description and commodity-like nature of many travel products (i.e. airline seats or hotel rooms) also favor the development of electronic commerce (Lewis and Semejin, 1998).

Additionally, the structural elements of the industry also support a shift towards a more electronic means of carrying out transactions. Lewis and Semejin (1998) indicate that the structure is currently acquiring more decentralized market characteristics where each buyer has direct access to each seller. The lower the transportation costs, the more likely is it that the products will be sold over the Net. Marcussen (1999) suggests that services like travel and tourism are ideal for selling over the Net since there are no transportation costs. In the airline industry, travelers can directly book their tickets from suppliers. Marcussen (1999) also points out that the European no-frills (cheap ticket) airline sector and its Internet activities are among the most successful Internet sellers in Europe. One reason for the success of no-frills airlines is the non-payment of commission that arises from direct relationships with the customer. Indeed, many airlines offer discount fares that are available exclusively to online users and are promoting the use of electronic ticketing (Ramsay, 1997), thereby minimizing the number of intermediaries, reducing the amount of commission paid and being able to offer attractive prices to clients.

Apart from the cost saving, Lewis and Semejin (1998) also note that knowledge of consumer behavior, including buying profiles and purchasing habits for related products (such as rental cars), is important information that serves as the basis for developing marketing strategies. Apart from the airline industry, hotel sectors can also trim the cost of distribution. Processing reservations through the Internet can be cheaper that processing those booked through other channels, particularly with commission is involved. When using the Internet for reservations, it is necessary to consider not only the opportunity to reduce costs, but also the potential for incremental revenue. Results indicate that a growing trend in rooms booked via the Internet is not emerging from existing customer bases, thereby implying that the Internet is able to attract new market segments (Connolly et al., 1998).
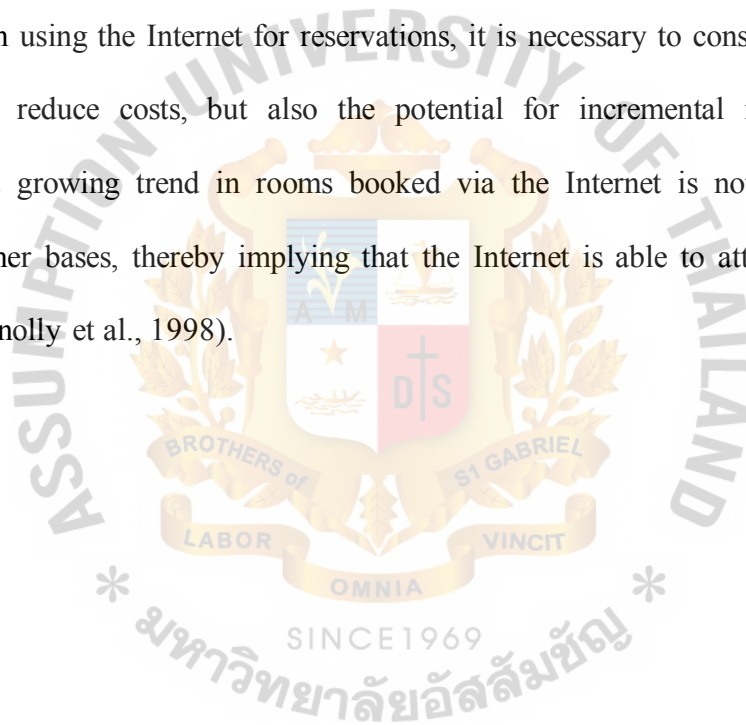
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research framework. There are categorized into three parts. The first part will show the theoretical framework in the research that is drawn from literature review. The second part is the conceptual framework that explains the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The final part describes the operational of the independent and dependent variables of this study.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Referring from the literature review, the theory has been stated that travel agents was established because of the growth in the development of transportation after the World War I. Historically, travel agents were tour planners as well as sales agents for travel suppliers. Not only would the travel agent sell transport, accommodation and tours for suppliers, they would organize travel plans for customers and provide advice and specialized information on destinations, and other travel-related information (Vasudavan and Standing, 1999 cited in Dickman, 1989). In the 1950s and 1960s, airlines entered the era of jet aircraft and this was soon followed by the rapid introduction of wide-bodied transport in the 1970s and 1980s.

Airlines viewed the use of travel agencies as an inexpensive and effective method of widening their distribution network in order to reach these new and expanding markets, combined with high labor costs and difficulties in reaching the market place (Vasudavan and Standing, 1999 cited in Dickman, 1989). This led to the use of travel agents as intermediaries, to act as sales agents for their products. Airlines soon came to rely heavily on them for distribution, often as an extension of their own office, for airline reservations, ticketing, transactions, travel advice, market coverage, market presence and packaging.

A travel agent is thus an expert, knowledgeable in schedules, routing, lodging, currency, prices, regulations, destinations, and all other aspects of travel and travel opportunities. In short, the travel agent is a specialist and counselor (Mcintosh et al, 1999). Constantly changing airfares and schedules, thousands of available vacation packages, and a vast amount of travel information on the Internet can make travel planning frustrating and time-consuming. To sort out the many travel options, tourists and business people often turn to travel agents, who assess their needs and help them make the best possible travel arrangements. Also, many major cruise lines, resorts, and specialty travel groups use travel agents to promote travel packages to millions of people every year.

Therefore to be more defined about travel agency, according to Mcintosh et al (1999), is a middleman who is a business or person selling the travel industry's individual parts or a combination of the parts to the consumer. In marketing terms a travel agent is an agent middleman, acting on behalf of the client, making arrangements with suppliers of travel such as airlines, hotels, or tour operators and receiving a commission from the suppliers.

Travel agents work hard on behalf of the consumer. The role of a travel agent is to make the process of going on a trip - whether for work or pleasure - be a stress free and memorable experience. Travel agents spend time not only booking tickets and searching for affordable prices, but also personalizing their services for individual clients (American Society of Travel Agents 2006). The role of the travel agencies also includes

three key tasks. First, to perform the functions of information broker which passing information between buyers and suppliers. Second, to process transactions, including printing tickets and forwarding money to suppliers and third, to advise travelers (Lewis et al., 1998).

According to Ali (2004) the role of an intermediary or the middleman has been well defined in a traditional business environment. The purposes of an intermediary, is any person or agency that acts on behalf of both the buyers and the sellers (manufacturer) so that the collective benefits of all the parties are maximized.

As the time passed and technology has been developed. It created many new things that having impact on human life also the business. Lewis and Talalayevsky (1997) stated that information technology (IT) is having a significant impact on businesses, governments, and other large organizations. In the past five years, direct electronic communication with consumers has become possible through the Internet, online services, and the use of telephones to communicate directly with computers. The case has been made that it will be possible to bypass intermediaries, as they will no longer be necessary for the coordination and management of information. As the role of intermediary's declines, profit margins along the value chain will be redistributed to producers and consumers.

Developments in information technology, services and applications will have a far reaching impact on the tourism industry in an increasing competitive environment. Each

of the various sections of the travel industry will be affected both suppliers and consumers as global distribution channels change, offering new chances to improve communication with business partners and consumers as well as profits. The array of choices includes traditional computer reservation systems, internet, telephone marketing, call centers, kiosk systems, interactive TV as well as smartcards and ticket less travel. All provide new opportunities to drive down communication costs and to carry out direct marketing, not only for large companies, but also for small and medium-sized enterprises as well as destinations. Now home or business users can check out a broad variety of options and fares thereby 'bypassing' parts of the established tourism value chain. Consumers enjoy much more choice and access to information. They do not have to rely on information provided by intermediaries anymore (Kuom and Oertel, 1999).

According to The Foreign Language School of Dalian University of Technology (2003) cited in Werthner and Klein (1999), the present intermediaries will fall out of the value chain, but the appearance of new intermediaries on the Internet can be observed. These intermediaries will provide new types of services, for example, transparent price comparison, easier access to information, variable product aggregation. The Internet would compete with the travel agencies. The majority of travel agencies limit their role to that of booking agencies. Since they rely on information to sell products, the need for the travel agents can be questioned when the Internet can provide the same information in a more convenient form and individuals can make their own travel arrangements by home computers. Even if travel agencies will not be eliminated from the distribution chain, they will be threatened and they will lose market share (The Foreign Language School of

Dalian University of Technology, 2003)

The Internet originated from the military network ARPANet, which was introduced by the US Department of Defense in 1969 (Lewis, et al, 1998). As a consequence of the online travel developments, business competition for traditional travel agencies has increased. Lewis, et al, (1998) cited in Poon (2001) argues that relying more heavily on the Internet gives suppliers a new independence that will gradually decrease their dependence on, and their commission payable to, travel agencies. Similarly, travelers may buy more directly from suppliers, thus bypassing travel agencies. Inevitably, the travel agencies' traditional intermediary role as a distribution channel has changed, leading to the possible ultimate disintermediation of travel agencies. The advent of the Internet and other online services, combined with widespread adoption of personal computers by businesses and consumers, had led to a growing role for electronic commerce in the world economy (Lewis, et al, 1998).

According to Webopedia (2003), disintermediation is removing the middleman. The term is a popular buzzword used to describe many Internet -based businesses that use the World Wide Web to sell products directly to customers rather than going through traditional retail channels. By eliminating the middlemen, companies can sell their products cheaper and faster. Many people believe that the Internet will revolutionize the way products are bought and sold, and disintermediation is the driving force behind this revolution.

Travel agents currently play three key roles. First, they act as information brokers, passing information between buyers and suppliers of travel products. Second, they process transactions by printing tickets or forwarding money. Third, they act as advisors to travelers. IT will profoundly affect the first two roles and force travel agents to focus on the third, advisory role. Travel agencies can play a valuable role by using IT to assist the consumer in dealing with the complexity of the marketplace. Despite incentives to do so, travelers will not always want to approach travel suppliers directly. Some agencies have set up Web sites that allow prospective travelers to compare schedules and fares from different airlines, in effect repositioning the agencies as electronic intermediaries that offer significant value added (Lewis et al, 1998).

Most people can easily book their own flights and hotel accommodations using the internet. They can also find other types of information--on exchange rates, visa requirements and weather, for example with one click of the mouse. This means that fewer and fewer people use travel agents.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

This section is an explanation of conceptual framework. Conceptual framework composed of two variables, which are independent variables or influence factors and dependent variables. Based on the studied review in Chapter 2, it can be concluded that the factors of internet advantages representing as the independent variables and customer

preferences are described as dependent variables. The conceptual model is presented as following:
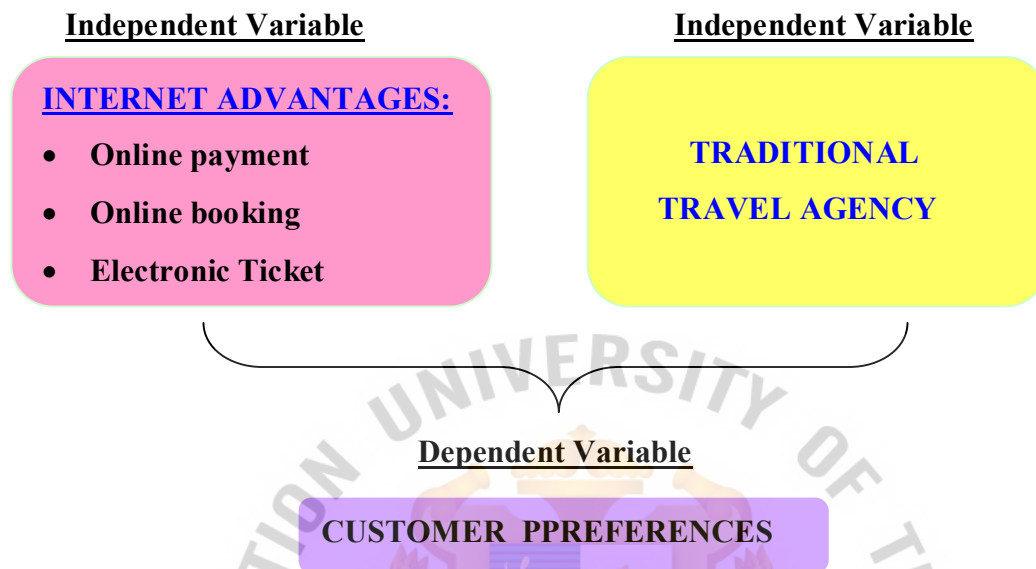
Figure 3.1: Conceptual framework

3.3 Defining the variables

3.3.1 Define the independent variables

- **Online payment:** An electronic payment made via a web browser for goods and services using credit or debit cards. Most money in today's world is electronic, and tangible cash is becoming less frequent. With the introduction of internet / online banking, debit cards, online bill payments and internet business, paper money is becoming a thing of the past (The Free dictionary by Farlex 2008, http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com)**.**

- **Online booking:** Prior to the Internet, travelers could write or telephone the hotel directly, or use a travel agent to make a reservation. Nowadays, online travel agents

will have pictures of hotels and rooms, information on prices and deals, and even information on local resorts.

- **Electronic ticket** or e-ticket: is used to represent the purchase of a seat on a passenger airline, usually through a website or by telephone. This form of airline ticket is rapidly replacing the old paper tickets. Where paper tickets are still available, airlines frequently charge extra for issuing them. E-tickets are also available for certain entertainment venues.

- **Traditional travel agent**: is an agent intermediary, acting on behalf of the client, making arrangements with suppliers of travel such as airlines, hotels, or tour operators and receiving a commission from the suppliers.

3.3.2 Define the dependent variables

- **Consumer Preferences:** This is used primarily to mean an option that has the greatest anticipated value among a number of options. Preference and acceptance can in certain circumstances mean the same thing but it is useful to keep the distinction in mind with preference tending to indicate choices among neutral or more valued options with acceptance indicating a willingness to tolerate the status quo or some less desirable option.

3.4 Operationalization of influencing Variables and Measurements

Table 3.1: Operational definitions of influencing variables

Variables	Concept	Conceptual Definition	Operational Components	Measurement of Scale used
Independent variable	Internet Advantages	The opportunities to reserve on-line, ask for any required information through link to	- Online payment - Online booking - Electronic Ticketing	Interval

		other tourism sectors, click feature for detailed information, and forward the information of web pages to others through e-mail.		
	Traditional travel agent	An agent intermediary, acting on behalf of the client, making arrangements with suppliers of travel and receiving a commission from the suppliers		Interval
Dependent variable	Customer Preference	An option that has the greatest anticipated value among a number of options.	Customer Preference	Interval
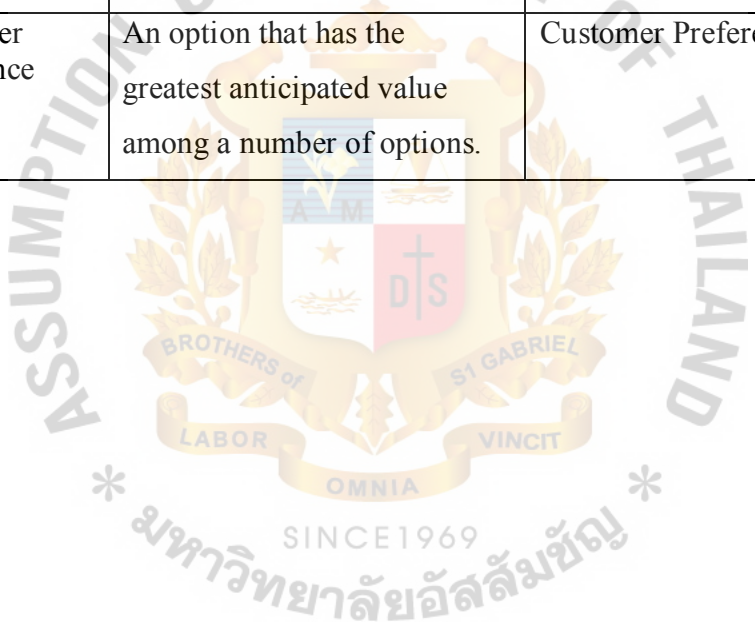
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology and provide step-by-step procedure of how this study is conducted. The research includes research methods used, respondents and sampling procedures, research instrument and questionnaire, collection of data/ gathering procedures, and the statistical treatment of data.

4.1 Research Methods Used

Descriptive research is the research that designed to describe characteristics of a population or a phenomenon (Zikmund, 2003). Descriptive research aims to describe what is – what has observed or reported (Veal, 1992). Most survey research is descriptive research wherein a questionnaire used to describe characteristics of certain groups as well as to estimate the proportion of people in a specified population who behave in a certain way (Churchill, 1995).

In addition, this method provides benefits in that a great deal of information could collect from a large population economically (Baker, 1991). Zikmund (2000) defined survey as a research technique in which information gathered from a sample of people via use of a questionnaire, a method of data collection based on communication with a representative sample of the target respondents.

The survey method is an appropriate research technique for this study because the objectives of research are factual data, measuring perceptions that survey research can serve well. Therefore, the data for this research will collect by survey method using a questionnaire as it deemed the most suitable method for answering the research questions

posed in this study.

4.2 Target population and Sample Size

Target population is the specific, complete group relevant to the research project (Zikmund, 2003). For this research, the target populations were the persons around Bangkok who have used both the Internet and travel agent as an information source and for product purchase. In 2006, the populations in Bangkok are 5,695,956 people (Bangkok Metropolitan Administrator, 2005). This research used a sample sized by applying the Taro Yamane formula as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)2}$$

Where as:

n = Sample size

N = Elements of population, in this study was 5,695,956

e = Error of sampling, in this study was 5 percent or 0.05 proportion,

Substitution in the formula:

$$n = \frac{5,695,956}{1 + 5,695,956(0.05)}$$

$$= 399.9$$

Therefore, the numbers of 400 respondents were used as the sample for the research. The questionnaires will distribute in Bangkok at business and tourist areas such as Silom, Sukumvit, and Kaosan Road.

4.3 Sampling Method

Sampling methods are classified as either *probability* or *nonprobability*. For this research, non-probability sampling was used. Non-probability sampling (Wikipedia, 2004) is any sampling method where some elements of the population have *no* chance of selection or where the probability of selection can't be accurately determined. It involves the selection of elements based on assumptions regarding the population of interest, which forms the criteria for selection. The type of non-probability sampling that used in this research is the convenience sampling. Convenience sampling (Wikipedia, 2004) is a type of nonprobability sampling which involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population which is close to hand. That is, a sample population selected because it is readily available and convenient.

4.5 Research Instrument and Questionnaire

This research will carry out by using a questionnaire as the instrument as it can gather information from large number of respondents with low costs. Even though questionnaire design is a complicated method, it is an easy way to obtain information from respondents (Davis, 1997). Also, the result from questionnaire is an easier method of measurement as Kinnear and Taylor (1996, p.353) suggest that "The function of questionnaire is measurement. Questionnaires can be used to measure respondent's past

perceptions and characteristics".

The questionnaire is perception-rating scales that an individual strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree with respond to a single question. Most of the questions in the questionnaire are closed ended questions. In this research, the questionnaire settled based on the conceptual frameworks, which are the Internet advantages; online booking, online payment, e-ticket, the traditional travel agent and customer preferences.

The questionnaire divided into three main sections as follows:

The first section is intended to ask about the reasons for using the internet for surf information, purchase or reserve. Multiple-choice questions will be used to asked respondents the reason why they used or unused the Internet as the travel tool for arranging their trip.

The second section is to measure the tourist's perceptions on internet vs. travel agency. In this part, respondents were asked to rate their perception toward the matter topic. All the questions use the five-point Likert scale as it enables the respondents to indicate some degree of attitudes or opinion. The scale choices range from "Strongly Disagree" representing No. 1 to "Strongly agree" representing No. 5.

The final section consists of questions designed to gather demographic information about gender, age, education level, occupation and nationality. This enables the research to know the respondents' characteristics. A multiple-choice question will used in this section

4.6 Pretest

A pilot study conducted before the actual field survey in order to ensure that the questionnaire correctly interpreted by respondents and can measure what the research expected to receive from consumers (Cooper and Schindler, 1998). Aaker and Day (1990) further state that the first draft of questionnaire normally tends to be imperfect. It might be term that is not well-defined or ambiguous statement. In this research, the pilot study introduced as a pre-test before actual research method will implement to test the questions, which lack clarity.

Pretest is a trial run with a group of respondents used to screen out problems in the instructions or design of a questionnaire (Zikmund, 2003). To check understandable of wording in the questionnaire, the pretest for reliability is conduct by doing pretest with the sample size of thirty people.

A reliability test conducted by means of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. Thirty Questionnaires distributed to sample respondents of thirty people composed of people who used to make a booking or reservation both through Internet and through travel agent around Bangkok. SPSS used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. In case, the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient is equal or greater than 0.6, it means the questionnaire is reliable.

Table 4.1 Pretest result

ITEM	ALPHA

Internet gives me the opportunity to increase knowledge and new experience through website.	0.912
Internet is easy to access and fast.	0.906
I mostly use internet to find information more than going to see travel agent.	0.908
E – Ticket is flexible and convenient.	0.913
E – Tickets are easy to use and offer you many benefits.	0.911
Easy and simple to read e – ticket receipt.	0.911
I mostly issue e – ticket through airline website.	0.911
Online booking is less travel expense.	0.914
Booking online is easier and uncomplicated.	0.908
I mostly make a booking online such as hotel, car rental, etc.	0.909
Online payment is safe and secure.	0.914
Online payment makes my life easier.	0.908
I prefer to search for information online but make a booking and payment through travel agent.	0.929
I prefer to use internet and book online.	0.909
I prefer to see travel agent for my travel.	0.935
Factors impacting on the changing role of travel agent	0.919

In order to evaluate the questionnaire, all questions tested in SPSS program by using the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha Scales. Reliability is the degree to which measures are free from random error and therefore yield consistent results (Zikmund, 2000). Sekaran (1992) noted that if the reliability value is equal to at least 0.6, it considered reliable.

As the pretest result or reliable analysis from the study (see table 4.1) indicate, the

Alpha coefficient for all attributes were greater than 0.60 therefore, it was considered reliable. This result indicated that the questionnaire for this research is sufficiently reliable for examining the research's hypotheses.

4.7 Collection of Data /Gathering Procedures

The researcher will collect data by using primary and secondary data. Primary research is to gathering the original data. Primary data is the data gathered and assembled specifically for the research project at hand (Zikmund, 2003). According to Veal (1992) discussed that primary data is the new data specifically collected in the current research project (the researcher is the primary user). In this research project, the original data did by questionnaires survey with sampling of the population. The researcher will ask each respondent to fill out the questionnaire in order to derive the information to answer the research objectives. All the questionnaires will return to the researcher after they finished. The questionnaires will distribute to 400 respondents in Bangkok around Sukumvit, Silom and Kaosan Road during June 2006.

In addition, this research needs secondary data to explore and review literature relevant to the research problems. Secondary research is to study about the relevant literatures and previous research studies. As Wright and Crimp (2000) argued that, it is important for researchers to use existing material, which is relevant to the research purpose in terms of managing time effectively, saving costs, and validation of effort. This enables the researcher to gain information needed and saving in time and cost.

In this research, secondary data, the relevant literatures and previous research studies obtained from the books, journal articles, and web sites. A search of database such as OMNI and ABI/INFORM provide various useful journals that help to find out information about travel agent and internet threaten. Moreover, for a wider search, information from other sources outside the University, which are Chulalongkorn University and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Library, has conducted.

4.8 Statistical Treatment of Data

After the data have been collected, the returned questionnaires were encoded and interpreted by statistical package for social science (SPSS) and analysis in term of descriptive analysis. Descriptive statistics provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures. Together with simple graphics analysis, Descriptive statistics form the basis of virtually every quantitative analysis of data and used to present quantitative descriptions in a manageable form. The research used descriptive method to explain the characteristics of the situation. It was applied the central tendency with "MEAN" to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents toward the perception. All statistical manipulations of the data followed by commonly accepted research practices.

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The questionnaire constructed to ascertain the levels of tourist's perception on Internet advantages and travel agent. To measure the perception, the Likert rating scales is used to measure;

Rating Scale	Scale Value	Average score
Strongly Disagree (SD)	1	1.00 – 1.80
Disagree (D)	2	1.81 – 2.60
Neutral (N)	3	2.61 – 3.40
Agree (A)	4	3.41 – 4.20
Strongly Agree (SA)	5	4.21 – 5.00

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

As the data analysis presentation and interpretation based on the data of 400 samples collected, this chapter is consist of following three sections. The first section provides the Descriptive Statistics concern demographic profile. The second section presents results on the reasons for using the internet for surf information, purchase or reserve. The last shows the results on tourist's perception on internet.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis refers to the transformation of raw data into a form that will make them easy to understand and interpret, rearranging, ordering, manipulating data to provide descriptive information (Zikmund, 2003)

5.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The data of 400 respondents analyzed in this study. As stated in Chapter 4, the respondents were persons around Bangkok have used both the Internet and travel agent as an information source and for product purchase, during the month of May and June 2006. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown using frequency distribution and percentage as follows:

Table 5.1: A summary of Respondents by Gender

Gender

|	Frequency	Valid Percent
Male	166	41.5
Female	234	58.5
Total	400	100.0

Figure 5.1: A summary of Respondents by Gender
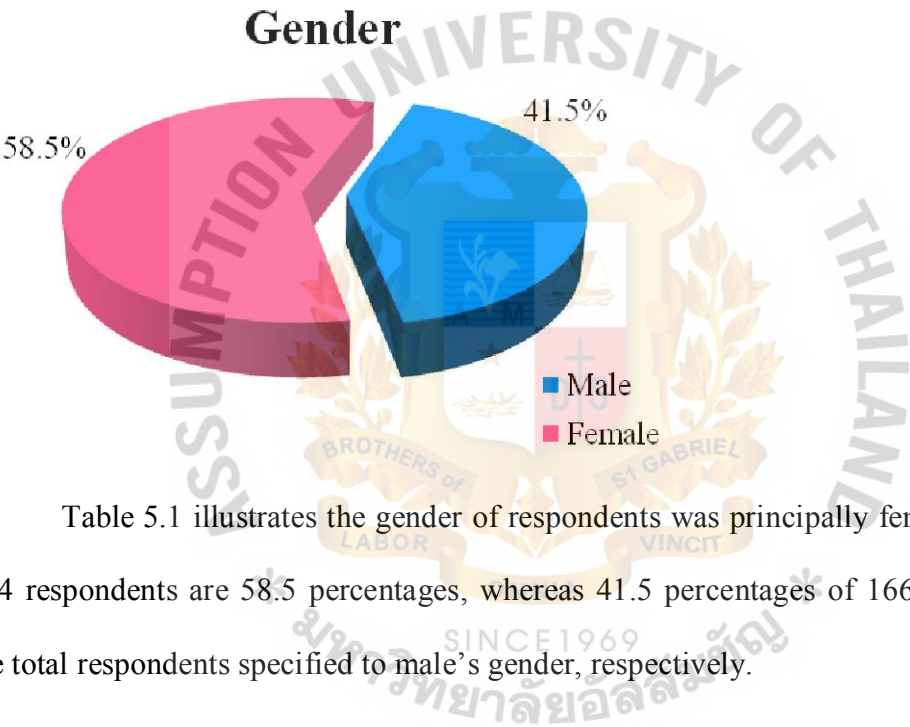
Table 5.1 illustrates the gender of respondents was principally female, there were 234 respondents are 58.5 percentages, whereas 41.5 percentages of 166 respondents of the total respondents specified to male's gender, respectively.

Table 5.2: A summary of Respondents by Age

Age

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Below 20 years	4	1.0
20-29 years old	156	39.0
30-39 years old	182	45.5
40-49 years old	47	11.8
Above 50 years old	11	2.8
Total	400	100.0

**Figure 5.2:** A summary of Respondents by Age
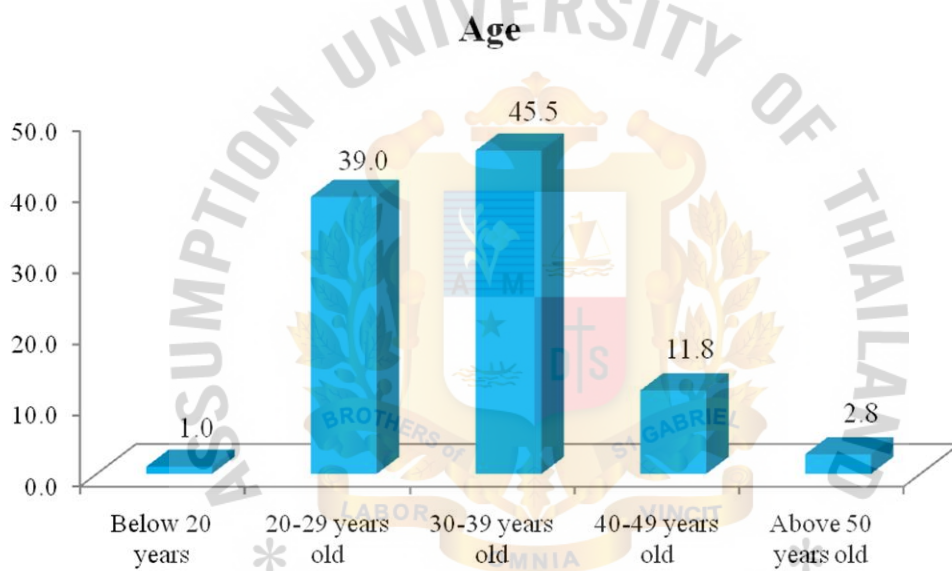
Table 5.2 and figure 5.2 show that the majority of age of the respondents in this research is 182 respondents are 45.5 percentages specified the age between 30 – 39 years old. Following by the age range between 20 – 29 years old found 156 respondents are 39.0 percentages. Next 11.8 percentages of 47 respondents specified to the age range between 40 – 49 years old. The age over 50 years old found 11 respondents are 2.8 percentages. Finally, the minority group was the group of four respondents whose age below 20 years old, represented only 1.0 percentage, respectively.

Table 5.3: A summary of Respondents by the highest level of education

Which of your highest level of education?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Below a high school graduate	4	1.0
High school graduate	17	4.3
Undergraduate degree	262	65.5
Postgraduate degree	104	26.0
Others	13	3.3
Total	400	100.0

**Figure 5.3:** A summary of Respondents by the highest level of education
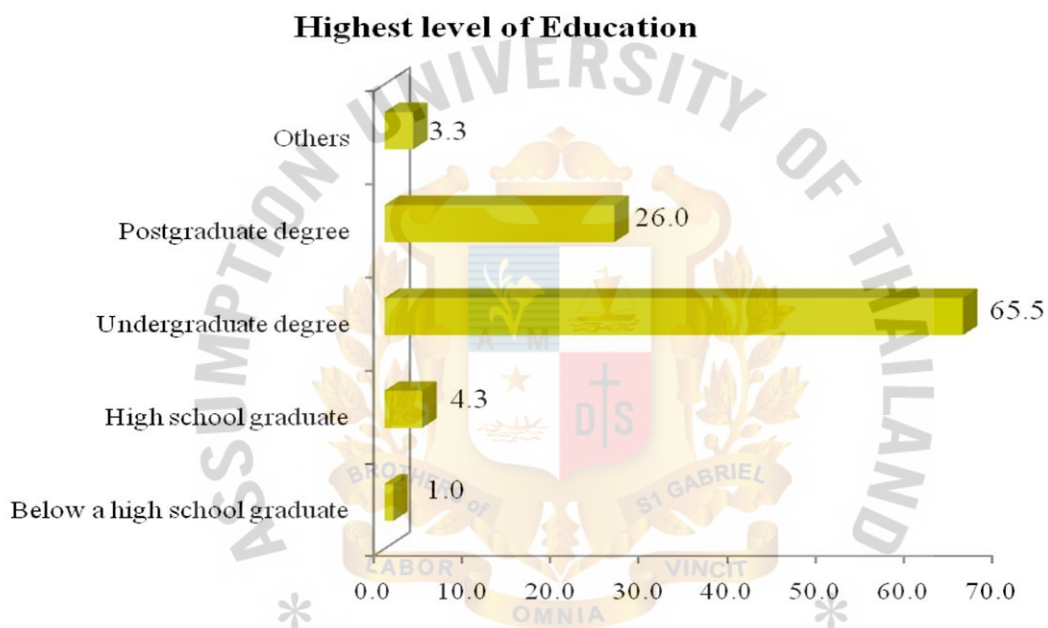
Table 5.3 and figure 5.3 show that the group of respondents concern the highest level of education found 262 respondents are 65.5 percentages whose undergraduate degree. The next degree is postgraduate degree by having 104 respondents are 26.0 percentages. Following by 4.3 percentages of 17 respondents indicate high school graduate. As the other level of education was 13, respondents are 3.3 percentages. The minority group is 1.0 percentage of four respondents specified to below a high school graduate education level, respectively.

Table 5 4: A summary of Respondents by Occupation

What is your occupation?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Business owner	22	5.5
Student	16	4.0
Employee	304	76.0
Government/ State enterprise officer	48	12.0
Others	10	2.5
Total	400	100.0

Figure 5.4: A summary of Respondents by Occupation
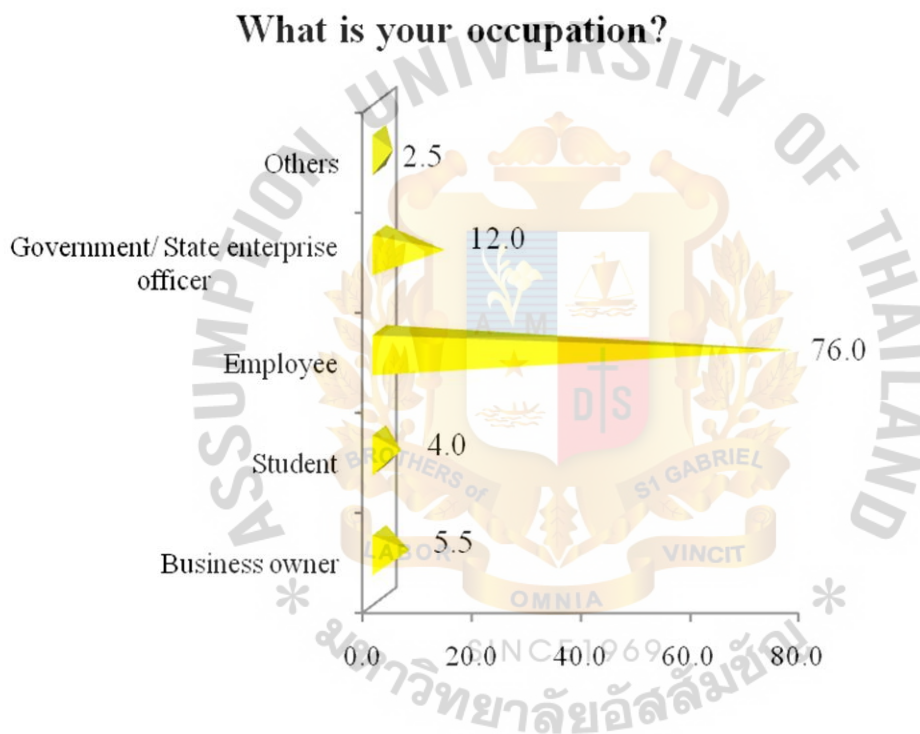
Employee occupation is the highest about 76.0 percentages of 304 respondents. Following by 48 respondents are 12.0 percentages indicated to government or state enterprise officer. The next occupation is business owner found 5.5 percentages of 22 respondents. In addition, 16 respondents are 4.0 percentages specify student occupation; the minority group was the groups of 10 respondents are 2.5 percentages specified to others occupation, respectively.

Table 5.5: A summary of Respondents by Nationality

What is your nationality?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Thailand	360	90.0
East Asia	12	3.0
The Americas	21	5.3
Europe	7	1.8
Total	400	100.0

Figure 5.5: A summary of Respondents by Nationality
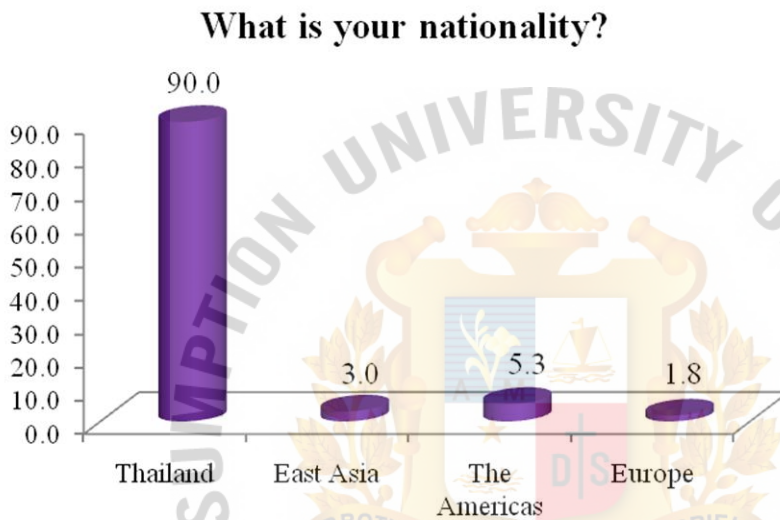
According to the highest respondents of nationality consider to Thailand, there were 360 respondents are 90.0 percentages, the next found 5.3 percentages of 21 respondents specified to the Americas, East Asia have 21 respondents are 5.3 percentages, the next found 1.8 percentages of 7 respondents specified to the Europe, respectively.

5.2 Reasons for Using the Internet for Surf Information, Purchase or

Reserve

Table 5.6: The use of the Internet for travel information

Did you ever use the internet for travel information?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	364	91.0
No	36	9.0
Total	400	100.0

Figure 5.6: The use of the Internet for travel information
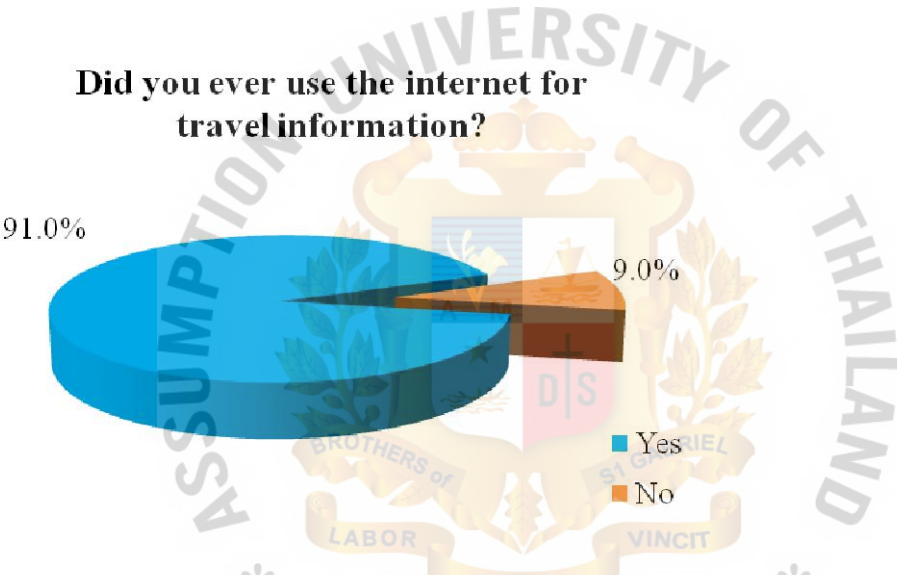
From the result, 364 respondents out of 400 respondents have ever used the Internet for travel information, which is 91.0 percentages. While only 36 respondents out of the total respondents have never used it's, which can be calculated as 9.0 percentages.

Table 5.7: Reasons for not using the Internet

Reasons for not using the internet

|	Frequency	Valid Percent
Prefer other services	15	41.7
Concerned about the security	4	11.1
No knowledge about using the internet	8	22.2
Not interested in using the internet	8	22.2
No access to the internet	1	2.8
Total	36	100.0

Figure 5.7: Reasons for not using the Internet
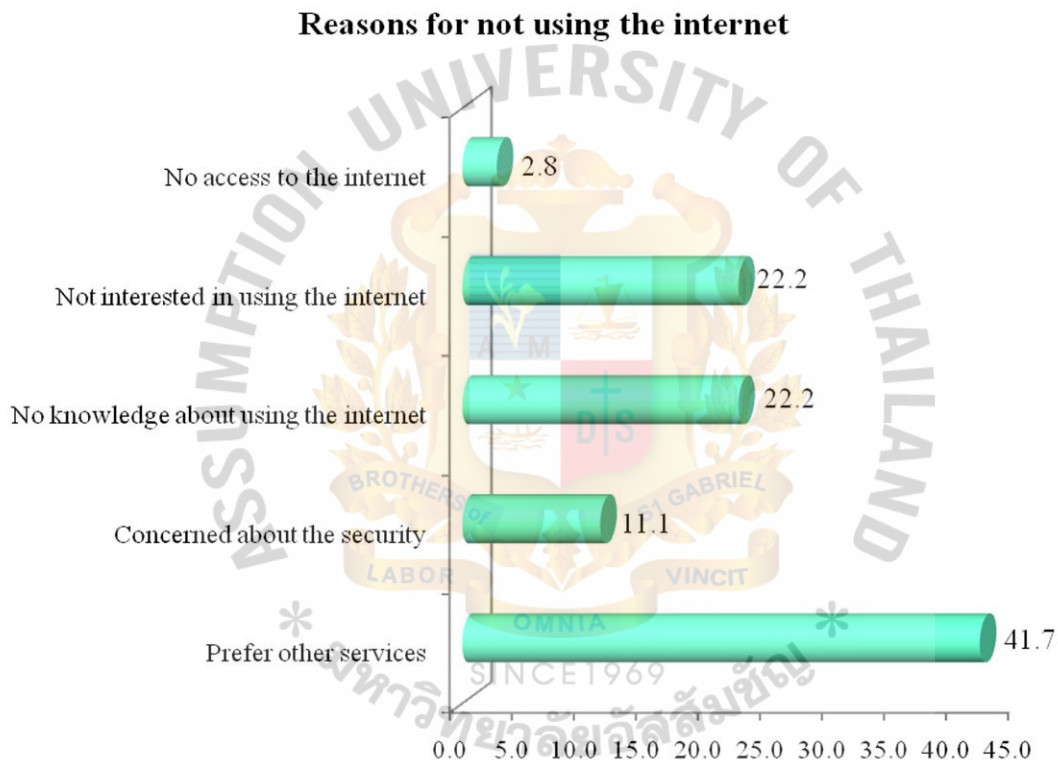
The most important reasons for not using the Internet prefers other services by finding 41.7 percentages of 15 respondents. No knowledge about using the Internet and not interested in using the internet was 8 respondents are 22.2 percentages each, 11.1 percentages of 4 respondents indicate to concerned about the security, and followed by 1 respondent are 2.8 percentages specified to no access to the Internet, respectively.

Table 5.8: Purpose of using Internet for this trip

Purpose of using Internet for this trip

	Responses N	Percent of Cases
Searching the Information	356	97.8%
Purchased air tickets	179	49.2%
Purchased transportation	58	15.9%
Purchased accommodation	203	55.8%
Purchased package tours	138	37.9%
Purchased other tourism products and service	88	24.2%
Total	1022	280.8%

Figure 5.8: Purpose of using Internet for this trip
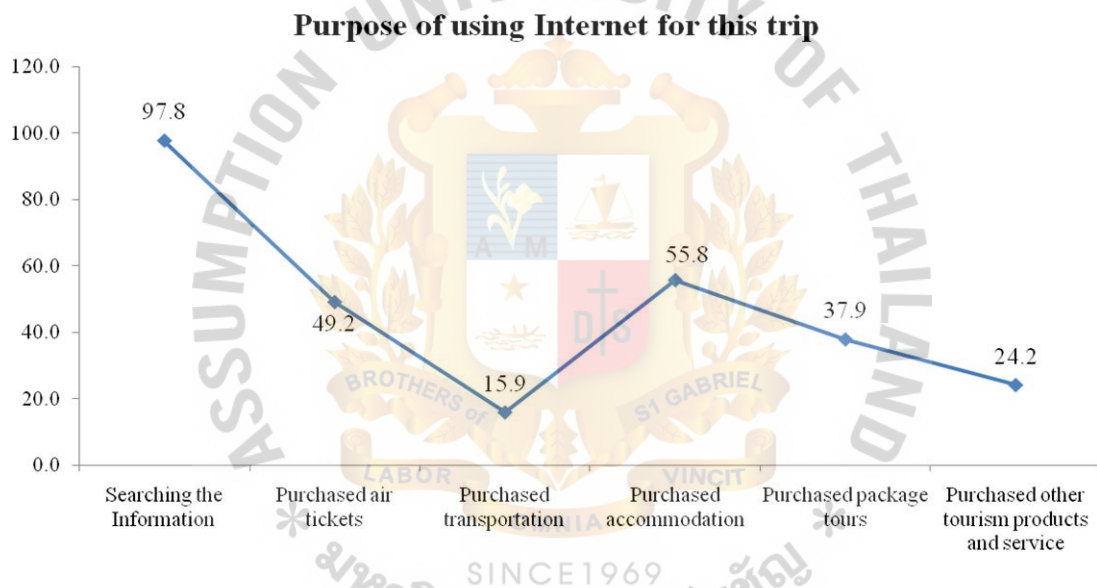
The highest purpose of using Internet for this trip is searching the information by having 356 respondents are 97.8 percentages. Then 55.8 percentages of 203 respondents indicate to purchase accommodation. As the next purpose concern purchased air tickets was 179 respondents are 49.2 percentages. Purchased package tours, as the next purpose concern purchased other tourism products and service was 88 respondents are 24.2 percentages. The last followed by 58 respondents are 15.9 percentages specified to purchase transportation, respectively.

Table 5.9: Reasons for using the Internet for travel information, reserved or purchased

The Most Important Reasons for using the Internet for travel information or reserved / purchased

	Responses N	Percent of Cases
Using the Internet saves time	177	49.2%

Very Important Reasons for using the Internet for travel information or reserved / purchased

	Responses N	Percent of Cases
Their tourism products and services are attractive	84	23.3%

Important Reasons for using the Internet for travel information or reserved / purchased

	Responses N	Percent of Cases
Less costly	68	18.8%

Figure 5.9: Reasons for using the Internet for travel information reserved or purchased
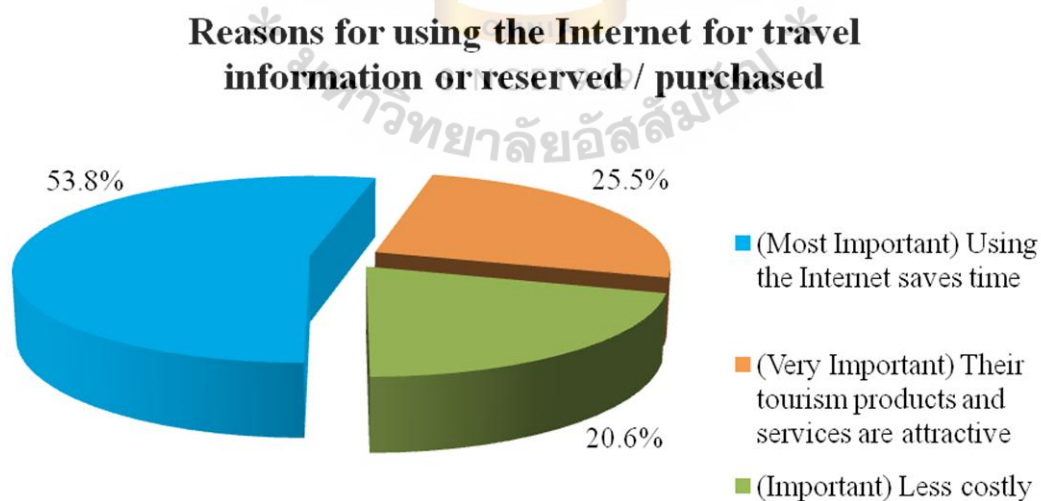
Reasons for using the Internet for travel information, reserved or purchased, the

most important reasons concern using the Internet saves time were 177 respondents are

49.2 percentages. The next level is very important 23.3 percentages of 84 respondents. In

addition, the important reason level found 18.8 percentages of 68 respondents specified to

les costly, respectively.

Table 5.10: Comparing to a travel agency say that Internet

Comparing to a travel agency, would you say that Internet is?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Much worse	1	.3
Somewhat worse	19	5.2
About the same	109	29.9
Somewhat better	181	49.7
Much better	54	14.8
Total	364	100.0

Figure 5.10: Comparing to a travel agency say that Internet

Comparing to a travel agency, would you say that Internet is?
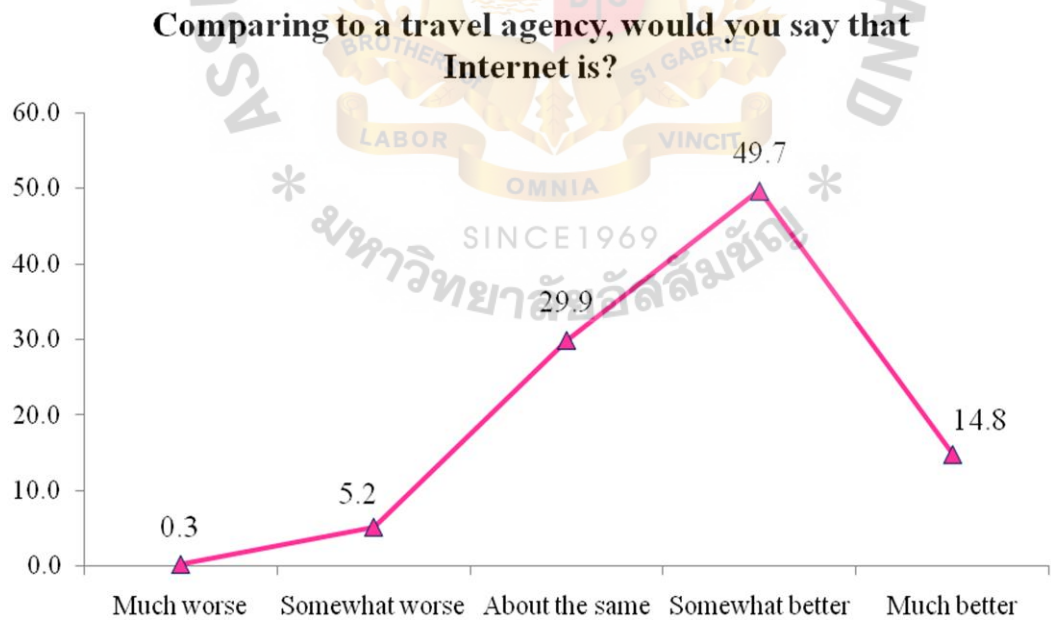
As comparing to a travel agency when saying about the Internet is somewhat

better, there are 181 respondents are 49.7 percentages, 29.9 percentages of 109 respondents indicate to about the same. The next comparing was 54 respondents are 14.8 percentages think that much better, 19 respondents are 5.2 percentages specify to somewhat worse level. In addition, followed by one respondent are 0.3 percentages find it much worse, respectively.

Table 5.11: The internet for traveling information or reservation the accommodation via internet again

Will you use the internet for traveling information or reservation the accommodation via internet again?

|	Frequency	Valid Percent
Probably will not	3	.8
Might or might not	16	4.4
Probably will	118	32.4
Definitely will	227	62.4
Total	364	100.0

Figure 5.11: The internet for traveling information or reservation the accommodation via internet again
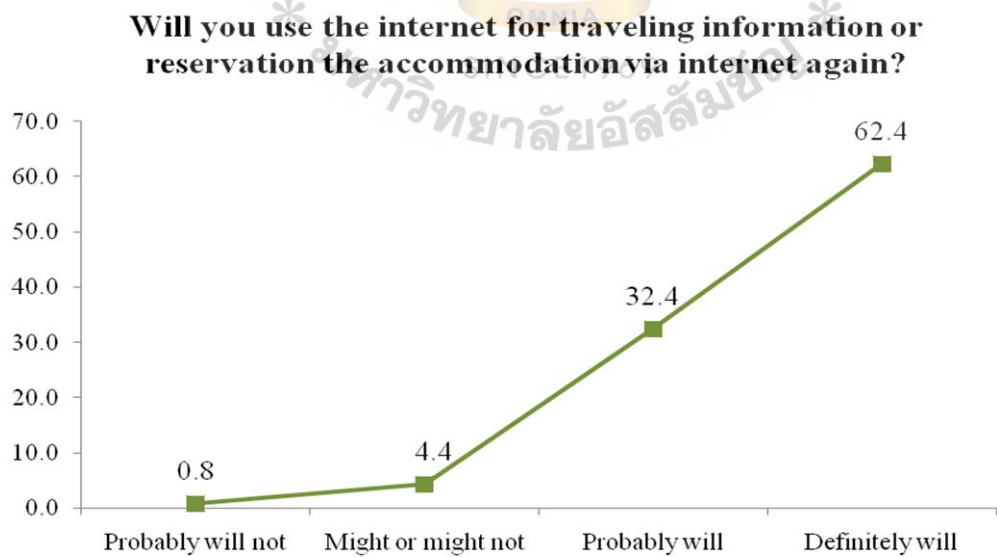
However, the internet for traveling information or reservation the accommodation

via internet again consider to definitely will 227 respondents are 62.4 percentages, 32.4 percentages of 118 respondents indicate to probably will, as might or might not that have 16 respondents are 4.4 percentages, and followed by 3 respondents are 0.8 percentages specified to probably will not, respectively.

5.3 Tourists Perception on Internet VS Travel Agent

Table 5.12: The Internet is more helpful than a travel agency

I find the Internet is more helpful than a travel agency.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	1.9
Disagree	18	4.9
Neutral	136	37.4
Agree	162	44.5
Strongly Agree	41	11.3
Total	364	100.0

As the result, the respondents find the Internet is more helpful than a travel agency by having 162 respondents out of the total, which is 44.5 percentages indicated to agree level of perception.

Table 5.13: It is easier to find the price of accommodation in each website than call to travel agents

It is easier to find the price of accommodation in each website than calls to travel agents

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	1.4
Disagree	12	3.3
Neutral	77	21.2
Agree	186	51.1
Strongly Agree	84	23.1
Total	364	100.0

It is easier to find the prices of accommodation in each website than calls to travel agents, as having 186 respondents or 51.1 percentages of the total indicated to agree level of perception.

Table 5.14: The price of accommodation in each website is cheaper than travel agents

The price of accommodation in each website is cheaper than travel agents.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	3	.8
Disagree	39	10.7
Neutral	208	57.1
Agree	87	23.9
Strongly Agree	27	7.4
Total	364	100.0

Most of the respondent find that the price of accommodation in the website is not cheaper or expensive than travel agents, as having 208 respondents or 57.1 percentages indicated to neutral level of perception.

Table 5.15: Online payment through Internet is safe and secure.

Online payment through Internet is safe and secure.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	14	3.8
Disagree	95	26.1
Neutral	179	49.2
Agree	63	17.3
Strongly Agree	13	3.6
Total	364	100.0

The result shows that online payment through Internet is not certainly safe and secure. As most respondents indicated neutral level of perception, this is 179 respondents or 49.2 percentages.

Table 5.16: Internet is much more flexible and has various choices than travel agents.

Internet is much more flexible and has various choices than travel agents.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	2.7
Disagree	15	4.1
Neutral	124	34.1
Agree	168	46.2
Strongly Agree	47	12.9
Total	364	100.0

Internet is much more flexible and has various choices than travel agents by having 168 respondents or 46.2 percentages out of total, of which indicated to agree level of perception.

Table 5.17: Information on the Internet website is much updated.

Information on the Internet website is much updated.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	14	3.8
Disagree	9	2.5
Neutral	91	25.0
Agree	151	41.5
Strongly Agree	99	27.2
Total	364	100.0

Most respondents find that information on the Internet website is much updated, as showing 151 respondents or 41.5 percentages indicated to agree level of perception.

Table 5.18: Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses.

Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	1.4
Disagree	13	3.6
Neutral	54	14.8
Agree	153	42.0
Strongly Agree	139	38.2
Total	364	100.0

The study shows that most of the respondents think "Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses" by indicated to agree level of perception, which is 153 respondents or 42.0 percentages.

Table 5.19: The value of the Internet, as compared to its price, is excellent

The value of the Internet, as compared to its price, is excellent.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	3	.8
Disagree	12	3.3
Neutral	120	33.0
Agree	200	54.9
Strongly Agree	29	8.0
Total	364	100.0

As a result, people admitted that the value of the Internet, as compared to its price, is excellent by having 200 respondents or 54.9 percentages indicated to agree level of perception.

Table 5.20: Overall satisfaction with your Internet experience

Overall, how satisfied are you with Internet experience?

|	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	2	.5
Disagree	15	4.1
Neutral	114	31.3
Agree	198	54.4
Strongly Agree	35	9.6
Total	364	100.0

For the overall, most respondents are satisfied with their Internet experience. By having 198 respondents or 54.4 percentages out of the total indicated to agree level of perception.

Table 5.21: Next time will choose, if you want to travel

Next time, if you want to travel you will choose?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Travel Agency to arrange my trip	83	22.8
Internet website to surf and reserve by myself	281	77.2
Total	364	100.0

Figure 5.21: Next time will choose if you want to travel
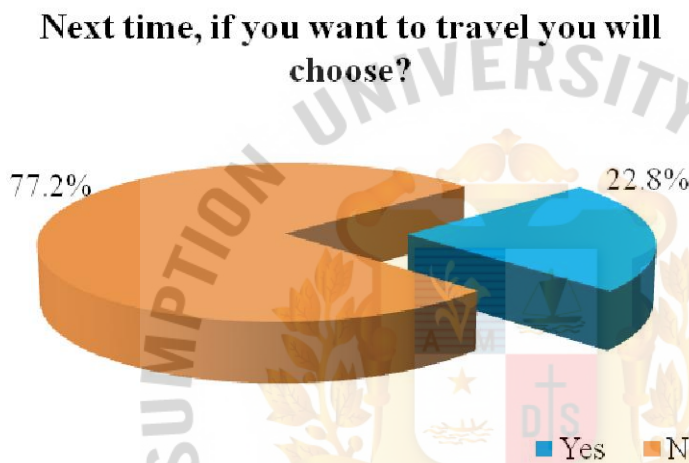
As a result, the majority of respondents will absolutely choose the Internet websites to surf and reserve by themselves, rather than visiting the travel agency. Of which shows 281 respondents or 77.2 percentages, choosing to use the Internet website, while 83 respondents or 22.8 percentages choosing to use travel agency to arrange their trip. Consumers find their satisfactory in using Internet website and will continuously use it for next travel.

Table 5.22: Tourists perception on internet vs. travel agent

TOURISTS PERCEPTION ON INTERNET VS TRAVEL AGENT

	N	Mean	Rating Scale
I find the Internet is more helpful than a travel agency.	364	3.58	Agree
It is easier to find the price of accommodation in each website than call to travel agents.	364	3.91	Agree
The price of accommodation in each website is cheaper than travel agents.	364	3.26	Neutral
Online payment through Internet is safe and secure.	364	2.91	Neutral
Internet is much more flexible and has various choices than travel agents.	364	3.62	Agree
Information on the Internet website is much updated.	364	3.86	Agree
Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses.	364	4.12	Agree
The value of the Internet, as compared to its price, is excellent.	364	3.66	Agree
Overall, how satisfied are you with Internet experience?	364	3.68	Agree
Total	**364**	**3.62**	Agree

According to the level of measurement, overall tourists' perception on internet has 3.62 of average mean indicate to agree level. The highest level is rated at agree level of measurement. The highest of this level about Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses have the average mean of 4.12. With 3.91 of average mean indicated to agree level that it is easier to find the price of accommodation in each website than call to travel agents. The next perception consider to the information on the Internet website is much update by having the average mean of 3.86. The next have 3.68 of the average mean, which rated at agree level, of overall the respondents satisfied with Internet experience. The value of the Internet, as compared to its price, is excellent by having the average mean of 3.66. The next is 3.62 of average mean specify Internet is much more flexible and has various choices than travel agents. In addition, they find the Internet is more

helpful than a travel agency by having the average mean of 3.58.

The finally level consider to neutral specified to the price of accommodation in each website is cheaper than travel agents by having the average mean of 3.26, and 2.91 of the average mean indicated online payment through Internet is safe and secure.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the procedures discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter composes three main sections. The first section is summary of findings. It concludes demographic profile of respondents, the reasons for using the internet for surf information, purchase or reserve, the tourist's perception on internet. The second section focused on conclusion. Finally, direction for research is recommended.

6.1 Summary of Findings

This survey research is to study "The Opinion of Potential Customer on Using the Internet VS Travel Agent". This study purposes are to identify the characteristic of the real potential customer, to study the use of the Internet in the tourism industry, to examine the customer preference on using the Internet for information sourcing as opposed to advice from travel agent. According to the focus of this study are the persons around Bangkok who have used both the Internet and travel agent as an information source and for product purchase during the month of May and June 2006. This research is a descriptive study using a questionnaire to collect data from respondents who will be select using convenience sampling. The researcher collected all of the questionnaires. Therefore, this data analysis presentation and interpretation based on the data of 400 samples collected consist of following descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

6.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The gender of respondents was principally female more than male (58.5% > 41.5%), which is 234 respondents out of the total. The majority of age of the respondents is in between 30 – 39 years old. The group of respondents concern the highest level of education whose undergraduate degree. Employee occupation is the highest. According to the highest respondents of nationality consider to Thailand.

Table 6.1: The majority respondent's demographic characteristics

Demographic		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	234	58.5
Age	30-39 years old	182	45.5
Level of education	Undergraduate Degree	262	65.5
Occupation	Employee	304	76
Nationality	Thailand	360	90

6.1.2 Reasons for Using the Internet for Surf Information, Purchase or Reserve

The most respondent ever use the Internet for travel information. The majority important reasons for not using the Internet prefer other services, no knowledge about using the Internet and not interested in using the internet, the security, and no access to the Internet.

The highest purpose of using Internet for this trip is searching the information, purchased accommodation, as the next purpose concern purchased air tickets, purchased package tours, as the next purpose concern purchased other tourism products and service,

and followed by purchased transportation. The most important reasons for using the Internet for travel information, reserved or purchased concern is saving time. As comparing to a travel agency when saying about the Internet is somewhat better. Moreover, the result shown that tourist will definitely use the internet for traveling information or reservation the accommodation again.

6.1.3 Tourists Perception on Internet vs. Travel agent

Table 6.2: Summary of tourists' perception on internet vs. travel agent

TOURISTS PERCEPTION ON INTERNET									
	N	Gender	Rating Scale					Mean	Rate Scale
			SA	A	N	D	SD		
1. I find the Internet is more helpful than a travel agency.	364	Male	26 (7.14)	43 (11.81)	44 (12.09)	20 (5.49)	11 (3.02)	3.58	Agreement
		Female	64 (17.58)	58 (15.93)	75 (20.6)	17 (4.67)	6 (1.65)		
2. It is easier to find the price of accommodation each website than call to travel agents.	364	Male	41 (11.26)	57 (15.66)	38 (10.44)	7 (1.92)	1 (.27)	3.91	Agreement
		Female	71 (19.51)	75 (20.6)	61 (16.76)	10 (2.75)	3 (8.2)		
3. The price of accommodation in each website is cheaper than travel agents.	364	Male	33 (9.07)	20 (5.49)	45 (12.36)	33 (9.07)	13 (3.57)	3.26	Neutral
		Female	33 (9.07)	72 (19.78)	64 (17.58)	30 (8.24)	21 (5.77)		
4. Online payment through Internet is safe and secure.	364	Male	4 (1.1)	20 (5.49)	72 (19.78)	31 (8.52)	17 (4.67)	2.91	Neutral
		Female	4 (1.1)	49 (13.46)	126 (34.62)	29 (7.97)	12 (3.3)		
5. Internet is much more flexible and has various choices than travel agents.	364	Male	33 (9.07)	55 (15.11)	45 (12.36)	7 (1.92)	4 (1.1)	3.62	Agreement
		Female	30 (8.24)	77 (21.15)	100 (27.47)	10 (2.75)	3 (.82)		
6. Information on the Internet website is much updated.	364	Male	55 (15.11)	50 (13.74)	30 (8.24)	7 (1.92)	2 (.55)	3.86	Agreement
		Female	36 (9.89)	111 (30.49)	57 (15.66)	13 (3.57)	3 (.82)		

								Mean	Level
7. Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses.	364	Male	52 (14.29)	58 (15.93)	32 (8.79)	2 (.55)	0 (.)	4.12	Agreement
		Female	63 (17.31)	122 (33.52)	33 (9.07)	2 (.55)	0 (.)		
8. The value of the Internet, as compared to its price is excellent.	364	Male	30 (8.24)	52 (14.29)	44 (12.09)	17 (4.67)	1 (.27)	3.66	Agreement
		Female	45 (12.36)	77 (21.15)	78 (21.43)	19 (5.22)	1 (.27)		
9. Overall, how satisfied are you with Internet experience?	364	Male	38 (10.44)	36 (9.89)	61 (16.76)	8 (2.2)	1 (.27)	3.68	Agreement
		Female	46 (12.64)	60 (16.48)	107 (29.4)	6 (1.65)	1 (.27)		
Total	**364**							**3.62**	**Agreement**

The result obtained show that the majority of respondents both male and female's perception which rated at agreement level, concerning for the next time if they want to travel, they will choose Internet website to surf and reserve by themselves than travel agency to arrange their trip. To categorize the respondent's perception by gender, it can be discussed as follow:

First Internet is more helpful than a travel agency, female rated at neutral level as well as male. Second it is easier to find the price of accommodation in each website than call to travel agents; both female and male rated at agree level. The price of accommodation in each website is cheaper than travel agents, female rated at agree level while male rated at neutral level. Next online payment through Internet is safe and secure; both respondents rated at agree level. Then Internet is much more flexible and has various choices than travel agents, both female and male rated at agree level. Sixth Information on the Internet website is much updated, female rated at agree level while male rated at strongly agree. Seventh Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses; both

respondents rated at agree level. Lastly the value of the Internet, as compared to its price, is excellent, female rated at neutral level while male rated at agree level. Finally overall satisfaction with your Internet experience, female rated at neutral level while male rated at agree level.

6.2 Conclusion

The Travel Agent Service Industry is undergoing substantial change as a result of environmental and technological changes. Internet usage was the main issue identified in relation to trends and practices that are currently occurring within the industry. The issue, however, is closely linked to the issues of distribution and service. The internet has enhanced the distribution of travel-related content, pricing information and travel planning tools for consumers. In enhancing the empowerment of consumers to conduct their own research, as well as to plan and book their own travel, it has also created transparency, which has resulted in more price-sensitive travellers. The internet also provides travellers with increased options due to the growing number of sites available and the information and services offered. However, it is unsustainable for agents to continue to compete on price (Bergin-Seers, O'Mahony and Quiazon, 2005).

To conclude from the research, the finding shows that the highest purpose of using Internet for this trip is searching the information, purchased accommodation, as the next purpose concern purchased air tickets, purchased package tours, purchased other tourism products and service, and followed by purchased transportation accordingly. As comparing to a travel agency when saying about the Internet is somewhat better, the

result also shown that tourist will definitely use the internet for traveling information or reservation the accommodation again.

Moreover overall tourists' perception on internet has 3.62 of average mean indicate to agreement level. Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses by having the average mean of 4.12 and 3.91. It also found that it is easier to find the price of accommodation in each website than call to travel agents, as the information on the Internet website is much update and has various choices than travel agents. In addition, they find the Internet is more helpful than a travel agency by having the average mean of 3.58. From the overall result, the research question can now be answered as the customer (majority of respondents) are more satisfy with the Internet rather than travel agency.

6.3 Recommendation and Future Study

It is important to note that, although the study found a general trend towards the uptake of online bookings, travel agencies still remain the mode of booking. Nevertheless, the internet, whether perceived as a threat or a benefit, plays a pivotal role in the distribution and provision of services. The increasing use of technology, both by providers and consumers within the industry, highlights the need for travel agents to differentiate themselves from the services offered through the internet. A refocus of the travel agent's role, which places the emphasis on, for example, niche marketing, value-adding and personalized services, could effectively meet the challenges brought on by the internet.

Those who are experienced in the trade are now freed up from completing basic tasks and can concentrate on planning complex itineraries and using their expertise to sell. The role of agents has changed from taking reservations to offering advice and consulting services for customers. Travel agencies now look out for a consumer's best interest by using IT resources to help them find the best products. In the future, travel agents will increasingly become agents of the travelers rather than agents of the suppliers, focused on customizing travel packages and services. What travel agencies can do is enter the online travel segment and add value to the products they recommend to their customers, and also adopt survival and adaptation strategies based on new technologies that will allow them not only to stay in business, but also to thrive in the new competitive environment.

Although this study confirms many of the issues that have affected the tourism industry over the last five years, the emergence of new travel providers, the changing needs of consumers and the speed with which technology and internet usage has been taken up highlight the need for further research which is not only up-to-date, but more importantly considers the issues within different and more specific contexts. Current available data, while identifying the internet as a pervasive factor in booking trends and patterns, do not adequately account for the needs and desires of consumers and the ways in which consumer views relate to distribution and service. The recommendations put forward throughout this report are, therefore, also a reflection of the need to broaden the research parameters beyond the confines of internet usage and more specifically within different markets.

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APPENDIX A

I am a student at Assumption University (ABAC). I am conducting research on the topic entitled "The Opinion of Potential Customer on Using the Internet VS Travel Agent". Would you please give me your opinion on the following questions? This questionnaire will take only a few minutes and your information will keep in confidence.

Part 1: REASONS FOR USING THE INTERNET FOR SURF INFORMATION/ PURCHASE OR RESERVE

In this part, please answer the question concerning on the profile of your journey and the use of the internet behavior. Please marks X.

1.1 Did you ever use the internet for travel information?

    ( ) Yes (Please skip to 1.3)

    ( ) No

1.2 Reasons for not using the internet

    ( ) Prefer other services

    ( ) Concerned about the security

    ( ) No knowledge about using the internet

    ( ) Not interested in using the internet

    ( ) No access to the internet

 (Please skip to the last page)

1.3 Purpose of using Internet for this trip (may answer more than one)

    ( ) Searching the Information

    ( ) Purchased air tickets

    ( ) Purchased transportation

    ( ) Purchased accommodation

    ( ) Purchased package tours

    ( ) Purchased other tourism products and service

1.4 Reasons for using the Internet for travel information or reserved / purchased

(Ranking three level for your reason)

3 = the most important, 2 = very important, 1 = important

( ) Using the Internet saves time.

( ) Their tourism products and services are attractive.

( ) Their tourism products and services can be customized as desired.

( ) Convenient process to reserve or purchase products and services via the websites.

( ) Less costly

( ) Many promotions

( ) Others: Please indicate _____

1.5 Comparing to a travel agency, would you say that Internet is...?

( ) Much better

( ) Somewhat better

( ) About the same

( ) Somewhat worse

( ) Much worse

1.6 Will you use the internet for searching travel information or reserving the accommodation for your next trip?

( ) Definitely will

( ) Probably will

( ) Might or might not

( ) Probably will not

( ) Definitely will not

Part 2: TOURISTS PERCEPTION ON INTERNET VS TRAVEL AGENCY

Please mark (X) on the following, based on your perception about the use of Internet vs. Travel agency.

Scales: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1

Question	Level of agreement	
	SA	SD

	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
1. I find the Internet is more helpful than a travel agency.					
2. It is easier to find the price of accommodation in each website than call to travel agents.					
3. The price of accommodation in each website is cheaper than travel agents.					
4. Online payment through Internet is safe and secure.					
5. Internet is much more flexible and has various choices than travel agents.					
6. Information on the Internet website is much updated.					
7. Internet is easy to access and less travel expenses.					
8. The value of the Internet, as compared to its price, is excellent.					
9. Overall, how satisfied are you with Internet experience?					

2.2 Next time, if you want to travel you will choose ……………?

( ) Travel Agency to arrange my trip

( ) Internet website to surf and reserve by myself

Part 3: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

3.1 Gender   ( ) Male   ( ) Female

3.2 Age   ( ) Below 20 years   ( ) 20-29 years old

                    ( ) 30-39 years old   ( ) 40-49 years old

                    ( ) Above 50 years old

3.3 Which of the following describes your highest level of education?

( ) Below a high school graduate

( ) High school graduate

( ) Undergraduate degree

( ) Postgraduate degree

( ) Others please identify………….……..

3.4 What is your occupation?

( ) Business owner

( ) Student

( ) Employee

( ) Government/ State enterprise officer

( ) Others please specify……………………………

5. What is your nationality?

( ) Africa

( ) East Asia

( ) The Americas

( ) Europe

( ) Others please specify…………………………..

Thank you very much for your time and co-operation

APPENDIX B

แบบสอบถามฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจ "ความคิดเห็นของนักท่องเที่ยวเกี่ยวกับการให้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยว
ระหว่างการใช้อินเตอร์เน็ทหาข้อมูลเอง กับ การใช้ตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยว" ขอความกรุณาท่านแสดงความ
คิดเห็นตามความเป็นจริง ความเห็นของท่านจะเป็นประโยชน์อย่างยิ่งต่อการพัฒนาและปรับปรุงการทำงานด้านการ
ให้บริการในด้านต่างๆให้มีประสิทธิภาพต่อไป

ตอนที่ 1 เหตุผลในการตัดสินใจใช้บริการทางอินเตอร์เน็ทในการหาข้อมูลและซื้อสินค้าผ่านทางอินเตอร์เน็ท
คำชี้แจง: ตอบแบบสอบถามต่อไปนี้ โดยทำเครื่องหมาย X ลงในช่องว่างที่ตรงกับคำตอบของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม
มากที่สุด

1.1 ท่านเคยใช้บริการอินเตอร์เน็ทในการหาข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับการท่องเที่ยวหรือไม่
    ( ) เคย   (ข้ามไปข้อ 1.3)
    ( ) ไม่เคย
1.2 เหตุผลที่ไม่เลือกใช้บริการผ่านทางอินเตอร์เน็ท
    ( ) ชื่นชอบบริการอื่นมากกว่า
    ( ) กังวลเกี่ยวกับเรื่องความปลอดภัย
    ( ) ไม่มีความรู้เกี่ยวกับการใช้อินเตอร์เน็ท
    ( ) ไม่มีความสนใจที่จะใช้อินเตอร์เน็ท
    ( ) ไม่มีช่องทางในการใช้บริการอินเตอร์เน็ท
(โปรดข้ามไปตอนที่ 3)

1.3 วัตถุประสงค์ที่ท่านใช้บริการอินเตอร์เน็ทเพื่อการท่องเที่ยว (ตอบได้มากกว่า 1 ข้อ)
    ( ) เพื่อค้นหาข้อมูล
    ( ) ซื้อตั๋วเครื่องบิน
    ( ) ซื้อบริการการขนส่ง/รถเช่า
    ( ) ซื้อที่พัก/โรงแรม
    ( ) ซื้อแพ็กเก็จทัวร์
    ( ) ซื้อสินค้าหรือบริการอื่นๆ ด้านการท่องเที่ยว
1.4 เหตุผลในการใช้บริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวหรือซื้อสินค้าผ่านทางอินเตอร์เน็ท
    (โปรดเรียงตามความสำคัญ 3 ลำดับ: 3 = สำคัญมากที่สุด, 2 = สำคัญที่สุด, 1 = สำคัญ)
    ( ) ประหยัดเวลา
    ( ) มีสินค้าหรือบริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวที่น่าสนใจ
    ( ) สินค้าหรือบริการด้านการท่องเที่ยวสามารถกำหนดได้ตามต้องการ

( ) สะดวกในการทำจองหรือซื้อสินค้าผ่านทางเว็บไซด์

( ) ประหยัดค่าใช้จ่าย

( ) มีการส่งเสริมการขายที่หลากหลาย

( ) อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ...

1.5 ในความคิดของท่าน ท่านคิดว่าการบริการทางอินเตอร์เน็ทเป็นอย่างไรเมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับตัวแทนจำหน่าย

( ) ดีกว่ามาก　　　　　( ) ดีกว่า　　　　　　　　　( ) เท่าเทียมกัน

( ) ไม่ค่อยดี　　　　　　( ) ไม่ดีเลย

1.6 ท่านคิดว่าจะใช้บริการอินเตอร์เน็ทเพื่อหาข้อมูลท่องเที่ยวหรือทำการจองผ่านอินเตอร์เน็ทอีกในอนาคตหรือไม่

( ) ใช้แน่นอน　　　　　( ) อาจจะใช้　　　　　　　　( ) ไม่แน่ใจ

( ) อาจจะไม่ใช้　　　　( ) ไม่ใช้แน่นอน

ตอนที่ 2 แบบสอบถามความคิดเห็นของนักท่องเที่ยวที่มีต่ออินเตอร์เน็ทและตัวแทนจำหน่ายการท่องเที่ยว

คำชี้แจง: โปรดแสดงความคิดเห็นเกี่ยวกับการใช้บริการระหว่างอินเตอร์เน็ทกับตัวแทนจำหน่ายในด้านการท่องเที่ยว

ดังรายการต่อไปนี้ โดยทำเครื่องหมาย X ลงในช่องที่ตรงกับความคิดเห็นของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามมากที่สุด

รายการ	ผลการประเมิน				
	เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง (5)	เห็นด้วย (4)	เฉยๆ (3)	ไม่เห็นด้วย (2)	ไม่เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง (1)
1. ท่านได้รับประโยชน์จากอินเตอร์เน็ทมากกว่าบริษัทตัวแทนจำหน่าย					
2. ท่านสามารถค้นหาราคาของที่พัก/โรงแรมจากอินเตอร์เน็ทได้ง่ายกว่าการโทรหาตัวแทนจำหน่าย					
3. ท่านพบว่าราคาค่าที่พัก/โรมแรมจากอินเตอร์เน็ทถูกกว่าตัวแทนจำหน่าย					
4. การชำระเงินผ่านทางอินเตอร์เน็ตมีความปลอดภัยและเชื่อถือได้					
5. อินเตอร์เน็ทมีความยืนหยุ่นและมีทางเลือกที่หลากหลายกว่าตัวแทนจำหน่าย					
6. ข้อมูลในอินเตอร์เน็ทได้รับการทำให้ทันสมัยอยู่เสมอ					
7. อินเตอร์เน็ทง่ายต่อการเข้าถึงและลดค่าใช้จ่ายในการเดินทาง					
8. เมื่อเปรียบเทียบราคากับคุณค่าของอินเตอร์เน็ทนั้น ท่านคิดว่ามันเป็นที่น่าพอใจ					
9. กล่าวโดยสรุป ท่านมีความพึงพอใจต่อประสบการณ์ทางอินเตอร์เน็ทของท่านหรือไม่					
รวม					

2.2 ถ้าท่านมีโอกาสท่องเที่ยวครั้งต่อไป ท่านจะเลือกใช้บริการใด

( ) บริษัทตัวแทนจำหน่าย

( ) ผ่านทางอินเตอร์เน็ตด้วยตัวเอง

<u>ตอนที่ 3</u> ข้อมูลทั่วไป

คำชี้แจง: โปรดทำเครื่องหมาย X ลงในช่องที่ตรงกับความเป็นจริงเกี่ยวกับผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม

3.1 เพศ   ( ) ชาย   ( ) หญิง

3.2 อายุ   ( ) ต่ำกว่า 20 ปี   ( ) 20 - 29 ปี   ( ) 30 – 39 ปี

                ( ) 40 – 49 ปี   ( ) 50 ปีขึ้นไป

3.5 ระดับการศึกษาสูงสุดของท่าน

   ( ) ต่ำกว่ามัธยมปลาย   ( ) มัธยมปลาย/ปวช.   ( ) ปริญญาตรี

   ( ) สูงกว่าปริญญาตรี   ( ) อื่นๆ โปรดระบุ...

3.6 อาชีพ

   ( ) ค้าขาย/ธุรกิจส่วนตัว   ( ) นักเรียน/นักศึกษา   ( ) พนักงานบริษัท/องค์กรเอกชน

   ( ) รับราชการ/เจ้าหน้าที่ของรัฐ   ( ) อื่นๆ โปรดระบุ...

**ขอขอบคุณทุกท่านที่ให้ความร่วมมือในการตอบแบบสอบถาม*