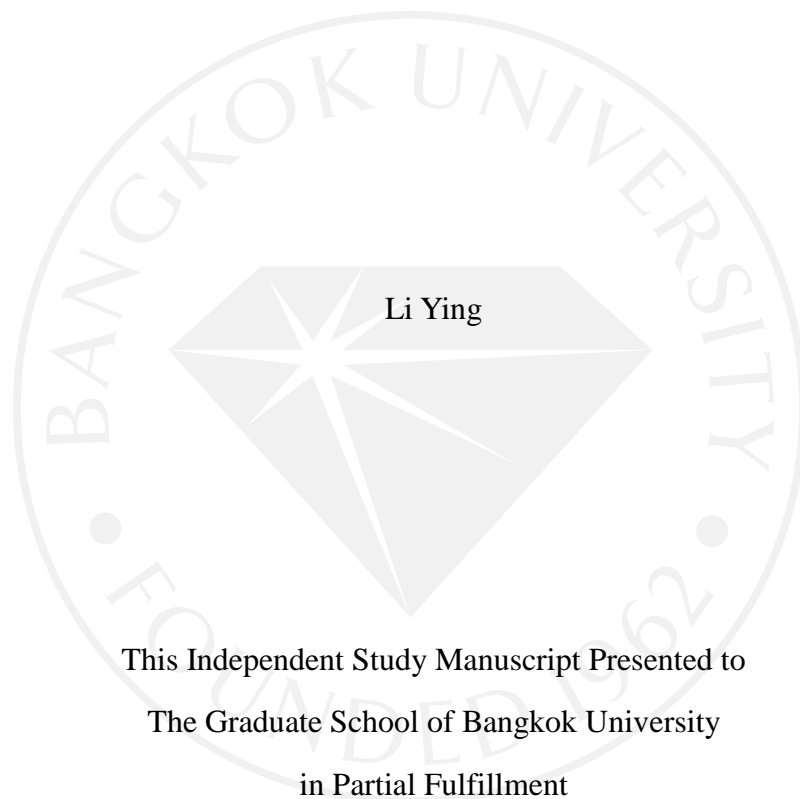


THE INTERNET AND AGENDA SETTING: THE INTERPLAY AMONG CHINESE
SOCIAL MEDIA, ONLINE FORUM, AND CHINESE MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA
REGARDING THAILAND TOURISM ISSUES



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the Graduate School
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SOCIAL MEDIA, ONLINE FORUM, AND CHINESE MAINSTREAM NEWS
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The Internet and Agenda Setting: The Interplay among Chinese Social Media, Online
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ABSTRACT

The research used quantitative approach to explore media agenda setting effects among Chinese social media - Sina Micro Blog, Chinese online forum – *Tianya* Forum and Chinese mainstream news media – *China Daily* regarding Thailand tourism issues.

Media coverage on the *China Daily*, and posts on the social media and forum covering the tourism issues in Thailand will be gathered during the time period that is from December 27, 2016 to February 27, 2017 to do the further analysis. All the data were examined via content analysis, and the media agenda setting effects were measured by the salience of issues about Thailand tourism selected from the three media. Spearman rank correlation testing was applied to determine whether evidence of media agenda setting influences existed among the selected media channels.

The results showed that Chinese social media might set issue agenda for Chinese online public agenda throughout the whole examined time span. The rank correlation between the issue agenda of Sina Micro Blog and *Tianya* Forum was .939. ($r_{\text{rho}} = .939$; $p < .01$). However, Chinese traditional mainstream news media (*China Daily*) did not set

the online public agenda through most of the time. Since the weakest and non-significant relationship was shown between the *Tianya* Forum and the *China Daily*'s agenda ($r_{\text{rho}} = .197$; $p > .05$). The rank correlation between the issue agenda of Sina Micro Blog and *China Daily* was .263. ($r_{\text{rho}} = .263$; $p > .05$), suggesting that the propaganda tool of Chinese government seemed to have no impact on the issue agenda of social media platform except one time period. So the inter-media agenda setting effects between them were partly supported. Overall, the evidence in this study suggests that Chinese social media has become a competing agenda setting force with traditional mainstream media in China in the new digital era.

Keywords: Agenda setting, Chinese social media, Online public agenda, Thailand tourism issues, Rank correlation

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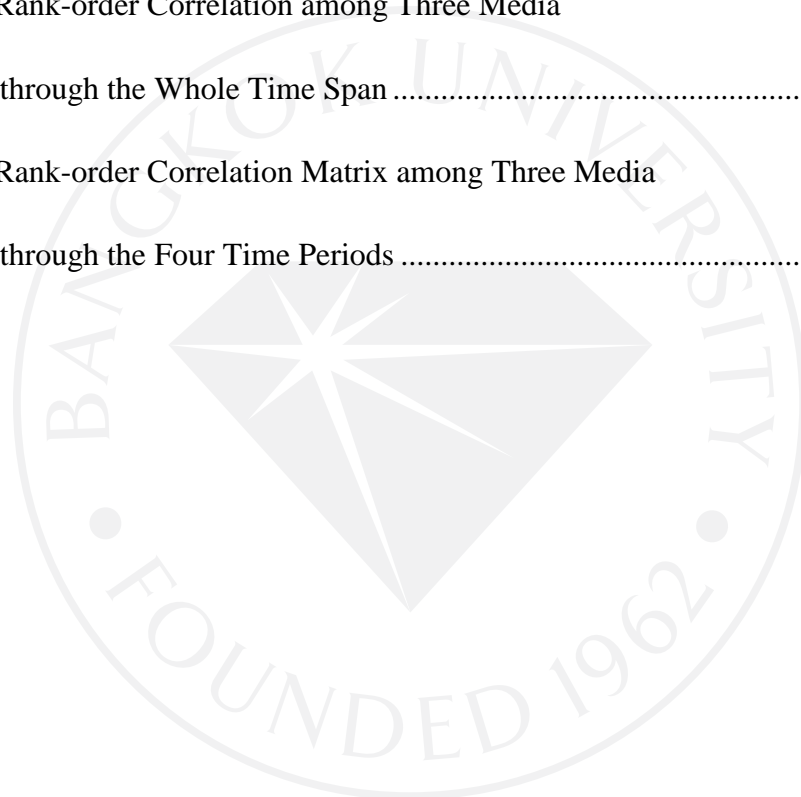
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rational and Problem Statement

Recent years, Thailand has been claimed as the most popular overseas travel destination by Chinese tourists (Ji, 2016). As shown in Figure 1, Bangkok is the most popular destination for Chinese tourists with 8.2 million overnight visitors, which followed by Seoul with 5.2 million, Tokyo with 2.7 million. Thailand is a popular tourism destination perceived by the most of the Chinese tourists due to its landscape advantage and afforded travelling costs (Zhang, 2012). The number of Chinese tourists to Thailand reached 4.9 million in the first half of 2016, according to Tourism Authority of Thailand (2015). The Buddhism, unique folk culture, Thai food culture, and other factors can be regarded as Chinese tourists' intimal image perception towards Thailand. Nowadays, the Internet has drastically changed the ways in which people receive news and information. For most of the Chinese tourists, besides word of mouth, mass media including traditional and online media is another important way for people to acquire related information and form the perceptions towards Thailand tourism. The former includes television, newspaper and so forth, the latter includes various social media platforms. They play a major part in forming images of Thailand tourism image regarding the food, accommodations, transport and relative safety as well as political stability in tourists' mind in a direct or indirect way (Fodness & Murray, 1997).

For its best, viewing mass news coverage via traditional media or posts about Thailand tourism via social media platforms can shape audiences' initial perception towards Thailand tourism. For example, a famous Chinese comedy called *Lost in*

Thailand is a powerful evidence of the positive impact of media on the destination image. The movie was a great success and gained a lot media attention on traditional media and has caused the heat discussion on social media platforms in China, which even resulted in the boom of Chinese tourists in Thailand in the year of 2012.

For its worst, some issues such as the national mourning in Thailand, Indonesia volcano eruption risk, lasvegas shooting case in America have affected the tourist's perception of instability or crises on tourism destination. The salience of these negative issues has been recognized as the factor that can influence tourists' decision-making of choosing the tourism destination (Hall & O'Sullivan, 1996).

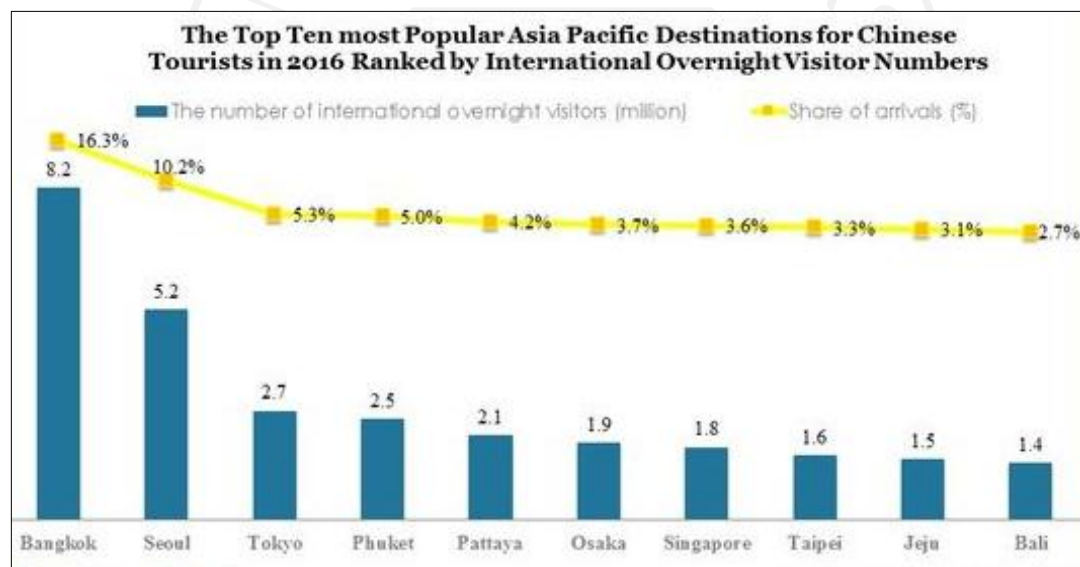


Figure 1.1: The Top Ten Most Popular Destinations for Chinese Tourists

As we all known, in China, the government tightly control the mass media, which serve as a tool to set or guide the public's agenda (Dai, 1999). However, the rise of the Internet and the prevalent of social network have reduced people's reliance on traditional media for acquiring information so that has affected the power of traditional mainstream media to set agenda for the public. Some researches about citizen journalism (Nip, 2009;

Xin, 2010) have showed the influence of social media on the agenda setting effects of traditional news media. Take the example of Wenchuan Earthquake happened in China in the year of 2008, before official information was released, the posts covering the earthquake on the social media platforms firstly posted by the citizen journalists. And these posts have become the important information source and were adopted in the traditional media, such as CCTV (China Central Television) and stated-owned newspaper like *China Daily* (Luo, 2013). In this case, the online media has replaced the traditional media as an original news resource of an important issue.

Besides social media platforms, the Internet also provides open forums for the public to have a free discussion on various topics through electronic bulletin boards, or online chat rooms. At the same time, online forums provides the Internet users with the space that enables them to freely discuss some important topics that was reported in the media. In other words, the netizens use the news coverage on the media as materials or topics that they can discuss with other netizens on the open forums. From the perspective of mass communication, it highlights the role of the media in setting the importance of issues for the public. The media interprets issues and gives them more or less importance through the amount news coverage. The news media influence the issue salience perceived by the public, similarly, the Internet users may use the news media as a guide to choose the issues that is important and has the value to be discussed online (Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002). Therefore, mass media coverage of certain issues not only make the issue appear to be important, it will also stimulate enough interest in the topic so that the Internet users will discuss more about them through the online platform.

On the contrary, the netizens' intensive discussion of an issue on forums can add news value to an issue, which results in the media attention and high media coverage (Luo, 2013). Thus, it assumed that the netizens' concern on an issue, measured by the

amount of posts on the forum, was correlated with the salience of media coverage, which was represented by the amount of news coverage on the traditional media and social media platforms.

For the relationship between online public agenda and media agenda, relatively little research has been undertaken on this topic from the perspective of tourism. With the boom of social media platform and Thailand tourism boom in China, my research would like to explore the interplay among Chinese social media, mainstream news media and online forum at the new digital era on the aspect of tourism based on the agenda setting theory.

1.2 Objectives of Study

In the old days, people usually acquire information through the traditional media like the television, broadcast, and other print media. Nowadays, the Internet provides the public with more access to acquire information and the public are prone to use online media to look for news or other information (Fu, 2013). In our daily life, individuals usually accept news from the traditional media, and then discussed or talk about them with other people online or offline. Due to the Internet's characteristic of transmitting information, some researchers (Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002) assumed that the traditional theories of mass communication can directly apply to online communication. The focus of this study is to investigate whether the new online communication forms affect the first level agenda setting effects as it has been in the age of traditional media.

This study examines two aspect of the Internet: online forum or the electronic bulletin boards and social media platform; one aspect of traditional media: stated-owned newspaper. The objective of my research as follow:

1. To examine the difference of the salience of Thailand tourism issues on the

Chinese social media, traditional media, and online forum.

2. To examine whether the new online communication platforms affect the transfer of salience in agenda setting effects as it has been in the age of traditional media.

1.3 Scope of Study

In 2009, the Twitter's Chinese version Sina Micro Blog, also called Sina Weibo gained national wide popularity (Fu, 2013). According to *2016 Sina Micro Blog Users Development Report*, the number of Sina Micro Blog daily active users was up to 297 million in 2016, which showed a rapid growth of 34% compared with the same period in 2015 (Data Weibo, 2017). Moreover, it is playing an important role in transforming a small event into a nationally concerned issue or promoting social change in Chinese society. Every day the users of both official institutions and individuals post the content that they regard as important and valuable to the public via the Sina Micro Blog platform. Posts on the Sina Micro Blog were marked with the time of posting and is visible to all with the function of comment, like, and repost. In my research, the amount of posts about Thailand tourism issue on the Sina Micro Blog served as the surrogate for the social media agenda.

Previous researches (Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002; Lee, Lancendorfer, & Lee, 2005) have explored the way to represent the online public agenda in the new media environment. They measured it by accounting the amount of users' posts on online forums or electronic bulletin boards (EBB). In other word, the frequency of online forum discussions of each issue surrogated the online public agenda. As for online public agenda in China, it originated from the online platforms such as online forums, chat rooms, and individual blogs. They has been regarded as a more and more powerful agenda setting force to add salient to some certain events (Lou, 2014).

This study focuses on the interplay among Chinese social media, mainstream news media, and online forum. Specifically, in order to reach the study objectives, one main social media platform in China - Sina Micro Blog, one Chinese mainstream news media – *China Daily*, and one online forum – *Tianya* Forum as online public agenda will be chosen as the analysis targets. Media coverage on the *China Daily* and posts on the social media and *Tianya* forum covering the tourism issues in Thailand will be selected to do the further analysis. Content analysis, Spearman r correlation were applied to determine whether the interplay existed among the selected media channels and online public agenda. Micro Blog postings, forum postings, and news coverage regarding Thailand tourism issues were gathered during the time period that is from December 27, 2016 to February 27, 2017.

1.4 Research Questions

My research tries to investigate the interplay of first level agenda setting effect among Chinese social media, mainstream news media, and online forum on Thailand tourism issues based on the Agenda Setting Theory. The research questions were listed as follows:

RQ₁: What are the Thailand tourism issues emphasized in the online public agenda and other two selected media agendas? Are there any differences between them?

RQ₂: Is there any correlation of issue salience transfer existing among the three media through the different time periods?

1.5 Significance of Study

Tourism attracted media attention due to its economic significance. The increasing number of Chinese tourists in recent years has tremendously benefited Thailand's

economy. Thus, for the stakeholders in the Thai tourism industry, more attention should be paid on the news coverage on tourism covered by the Chinese media because they generally tend to be negative although local media reporting often contains more positive stories about tourism development.

The challenge is how to deal with the implications of certain issues and concerns being salient in the public mind. Media has the influence on shaping the public mind on certain issue which also includes destination image. For Thai tourism industry, understanding what kind of issues reported by the Chinese media and concerned by the Chinese tourists is important for them to analysis the consumer behavior of Chinese tourists.

As the Internet continues to become an important channel for the public to acquire the information they want, this research provides a direction for the further study to combine the mass communication approaches with the usage of Internet. Besides the traditional media agenda like newspaper and television, the new media has been on the stage. My research highlights the importance for the tourism industry that develop a much better understanding of the processes behind the salience of issues online at the new media era.

1.6 Definition of Terms

1. Content Analysis: It is an important and popular research method that applied in the research of media. Content analysis is considered as a wide cluster of techniques. The researchers choose these effective techniques that best help them answer their substantive questions of their studies (Krippendorff, 2004).

2. Sina Micro Blog: Sina Micro Blog is also called Sina Weibo. “Weibo” is the Chinese word with the same meaning as “micro-blog”. It refers to the mini-blogging

services in China, including social chat sites and platform sharing. The prevalence of Sina Weibo is the biggest event in the Chinese Internet over the past years. The coverage of China's state-owned news media usually censored by the government, so Sina Weibo had become another important source for the breaking news and online stories sharing and commentary (Shu, 2013).

3. *China Daily*: *China Daily* is an English-language newspaper has the widest print circulation of any English-language newspaper in China (over 200,000 copies per issue, of which a third are abroad). Its global circulation reached 900,000 copies with 45 million print and web readers worldwide. *China Daily* is one of the most-frequently quoted Chinese media around the world (*China Daily*, 2016).

4. *Tianya* Forum: *Tianya* Forum or *Tianya* Club, founded on 14 February 1999, is one of the most popular Internet forums in China (Cao & Tang, 2013) with chat rooms, blog, individual spaces, and photo album services. The netizens always use *Tianya* Forum to express their opinion on certain issue or posting for asking advice on certain field.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Media Agenda in the New Digital Era

The prevalence of the Internet has provided the public with a huge amount of information and more opportunities to participate in the interactive communication process (Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2006). This type of communication form and the characteristic of network have given more power to people of which the agendas normally set by the traditional mass media like television and newspapers (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). Through exchange of information and opinions, netizens gradually get rid of the agenda set by the traditional mass media that originally determine what issues are important to be covered for catching the public's attention. People with access to network can post an incident or express opinions directly on the Internet. In such a new media environment, the process of agenda setting is different from it in the past. According to Chaffee and Metzger (2001), "the key problem for agenda setting theory will change from what issues the media tell people to think about to what issues people tell the media they want to think about" (p. 375).

Different from the past, the new media environment is populated by citizen journalists, individual bloggers, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Nowadays, each person is able to become the center of the information production process. Whether the nature of agenda setting effects will be changed under the new media circumstance is still remain unsure. Some researches mentioned that mass communication researchers were prone to more traditional forms of communication such as television, broadcast, and print media which they noted that fit "much more conveniently into models for appropriate research topics and theories of mass

communication” (Morris, & Ogan, 1996, p. 39). Other studies also showed that the existing mass communication theories may not suited to the new media environment.

According to the agenda setting theory, mass media influences the public’s priorities by issue salience. However, with the advent of the social media platform, the power of the traditional media to set the agenda for the public has be weaken in some degree (Williams & Deli, 2004). As the online media has much vaster platforms than the traditional media, as well as the decline of the print media, it may appear that social media is a more powerful platform where the common people can determine issues of importance for public discussion. According to Messner and Distaso (2008), traditional media regularly cite blogs or online discussion as the source of news. Based on this phenomenon, some giants in traditional media field have turned to adopting more flexible online business models to adjust the changing media environment, even leveraging some aspects of social media in order to fight for more market share.

The increasingly important role of social networks play in the agenda setting determines a direction in the traditional research about the agenda setting since the public can now create their own media through the Internet (Luo, 2013). Social networks have changed the way people perceive the world. The massive participation in social networks makes the voices of the public heard. The comments or replies give people the opportunity to express their thoughts or open new paths for discussion. Kim and Lee (2006) found that agenda setting research in new media environments is different from traditional agenda setting research, because of the Internet competes with traditional media and has tremendous ability for the users’ interaction. Scholars (Lee, & Lancendorfer, 2005) stated that the issues are posted on the social media platforms or open forums by the netizens form the agenda in which other netizens perceive the issue salience since the Internet users are concerned the hot topics discussed on the Internet.

The academics also noted that online media plays a role in making Internet users' priority of the issues and shaping public opinions. Some researches show that the Internet users not only create its own agenda, but also influence the strength of traditional media that set the agenda for the public.

2.2 Media Agenda in Chinese Context

The application of agenda setting theory in China is totally different from those typical democratic countries. As we all known, as a communistic country, the mass media system in China was strictly censored by the government, mass media in China was considered as a "mouthpiece" or "transmission belt" of the Chinese government (He, 2009; Jiang, 2014). Thus, for a long time, many foreign academics argue that the media in China are largely biased, with propaganda and manufactured information due to their media system. Media practices in China at certain times and their role in the process of setting the agenda lack credibility (Fang & Yu, 1996, Zhang, 2002). According to McCombs (2004), the effects of agenda setting are less likely to happen in China than those that liberate societies or democracy countries (Luo, 2013). Nevertheless, since the implementation of reform and opening policy at early 1990s, the agenda-setting theory has been widely debated in China (Chen & Yen, 2007; He, 2009; Tong, Zhan & Guo 1999; Zhang, 2002). During that time, the agenda setting theory has received a lot of enthusiasm, mainly because this theory corresponds to the government's perception to the role and influence of the mass media on shaping the public's mind (He, 2009; Jiang, 2014). As a result, researches on China's agenda setting environment focused mainly on the context of "guiding public opinion" or "effective propaganda". For example, Li (2009) and Jiang (2014) argues that setting the agenda can play an important role in manufacturing the consensus on some important public issues, shaping public opinion on

some sensitive topics, and in favor of the government to implement the national and international policies.

Nowadays the environment of the mass media has changed sharply with the prevalent of social network. McPhail (2011) noted that, the social media platform now is a powerful mass medium where users gathering as an immediate and relatively free communication environment. As the number of Internet users is rapidly increasing, the influence of social media agenda on traditional media and public agenda cannot be ignored. With the development of the social media platform in China, there is an increasing concern about the impact of the online media on agenda setting effects compared with the past when there was very few studies have systematically studied the influence of the Internet on the agenda setting process of traditional media (Luo, 2013). More than 10 years ago, very few researches focused on the examination of online media agenda setting. Therefore, people were unclear whether the online media agenda effects on other types of media or even reversed agenda setting functions exist in China's media industry (Jiang, 2014). Nowadays, with the boom of social media and the development of the new media in China, Chinese scholars have started paying more attention to the negligence. Studies on the new media and agenda setting have been focusing on how the agenda-setting role of mainstream media has been weakened in the new media era (Jiang, 2014).

A previous study (Li, & Qin, 2001) adopted content analysis of online posts covering the several issues on the *Tianya* Forum, as one of the most popular Internet forum in China and the news report of the issue in the print version of the *People's Daily*, one of the stated-owned news organization in China. The results suggested that the issue agenda of online public discussion, at the most of the time, have little similarity with the agenda of Chinese mainstream media regardless of the fact that the *Tianya* Forum

established by Hainan Tianya Online Network Technology Ltd is a commercial-oriented forum (Li, Qin, & Kluver, 2003). Scholars also argued that online media could weaken the power of traditional media to define the public agenda and challenge the mastery of traditional media by revising the agenda established by them (Li, Qin & Kluver, 2003).

Although the development of online media in China has attracted increasingly attention, few systematic studies have clarified the media agenda setting involving the Internet and the inter-media agenda effects between the online media and other traditional media (Fu, 2013). In addition, few studies explored the difference of the salience of issues on different agendas at different time, although it is the original approach of studying agenda setting theory (McCombs, 2004).

2.3 First-level Agenda Setting

McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) proposed a theory about agenda setting in the early 1970s to argue with the statement that media effects are immediate reflections of the media. Researchers found a significant correlation between the amount of news coverage on the media and the issue propriety hold by the audiences. These results led to the conclusion that the news media has a great impact on the rank of issue importance. It was thought that more exposure would result in greater effects. Little attention has been given to the mechanisms by which the exposure was carried out in the first place. The agenda setting theory proposes the premise that the exposure itself is not sufficient; the content must be made salient for the audiences before being processed and received.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) also undertook a research of exploring the relationship between the mass media and the public's perceptions to the priority of the electoral issues in the 1968 presidential campaign. McCombs and Shaw hold the assumption that the mass media has the function of setting agenda for the public. In order to prove this

assumption, they tried to match people's perceptions towards the key electoral issues with the issues that received the most media coverage. In the analysis process, one hundred registered voters were required to identify what they considered as the important issues of the campaign and give the priority to these issues. The finding suggested that there was a strong correlation between voters' perceptions of the important issues and the issues most reported by the mass media. Later, it has become the base for further studying the agenda setting theory.

The agenda setting theory focuses on the role of the media as the "gatekeeper" to build the real world in the public's mind (Lippmann, 1922; McCombs, 2004). The issues that were more reported or discussed by the media are perceived as the more important ones by the publics. In other word, mass media can transfer the importance of the issues or media agenda to the public agenda, which the main content of the first level agenda setting. Further studies have revealed that the attributes of the important issues can also be transferred from the media to the public, which established the second level agenda setting. Although there are some disagreements, several researches (Rosen, 2006) focused on the process of media setting the agenda had argued that the relationship between the media agenda and the public agenda was mono-directional.

In general, the traditional study methods of agenda setting research included survey design and content analysis. However, some experimental studies (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) have also provided strong evidence for the causal relationship between the media and the public agenda at the individual level. It suggested that the amount and attributes of media coverage has an impact on the aspect of how the public perceived to the issues. Using these methodologies, the researchers (Seaver, 1998) identified the ways in which the media agenda shaping public opinion: First is manipulating, which means that the media composes the issue salience hold by the public through the amount or the intensity

of coverage. Another one is called transmitting, which means the attributes or sub-issues that are transferred to the public.

Based on the assumptions of agenda setting theory, media salience is “the key independent variable in agenda setting research” (Kiousis, 2004, p. 71). The scholar like Kiousis (2004) defined the key elements to measure the variable of media salience. They are “attention” and “prominence”. Attention is usually “gauged by the sheer volume of stories or space dedicated to topics” in the media (p. 74). And, Prominence means that the importance of issues is communicated through “the positioning of a story within a media text” (p. 74). In one media agenda setting research, the author argued that the attention approach “has been valuable for measuring salience” (p. 74).

Thus, in my research, in order to reach study objective – first level agenda setting effects among Chinese social media, mainstream media and online forum, the transfer of issue salience on the three media will be measured.

2.4 Online Media and Inter-Media Agenda

McCombs and Bell (2011) observed that journalists live in “an ambiguous social world” so that they will “rely on one another for confirmation and as a source of ideas”. With the prevalent of online media, the influence of the online media on other types of media’s agenda cannot be ignored. An investigation (Lim, 2010) explored the media agenda within the different types of media focused on the online media. The researcher compared the issue agendas of the two newspapers and one online media platform in South Korea. The finding implied that the main newspaper influenced the secondary newspaper as well as the online media platform at the first level of agenda setting. Other researchers like Lee and Lancendorfer (2005) explored the two levels of inter-media agenda setting effect between the social networks and the newspaper during South

Korea's general election in the year of 2000. The results showed that the Internet can influence the media setting agenda. During the election, the newspapers had effects of agenda setting on the social media platform in the first level; while the Internet, in turn, influenced the media on the second level of agenda setting.

Other researchers have found there is a strong correlation existing between blogs and the media agenda (Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008). The finding stated that the media had the effect of agenda setting on the blogs about the campaign. More specifically, in terms of the relationship between the online blogs and the news report on the television, the relationship was a two-way influence among them. Another study looked at the effect of agenda setting between online media and traditional print media in China. It has been discovered that online media, such as blogs or social networks, select and respond more quickly to news reported by foreign news media organizations or citizen journalism than traditional media (Li, Qin & Kluver, 2003).

2.5 Application of Agenda Setting Theory Today

Based on the research finding of McCombs and Shaw, specialists on the mass media continued to expand the agenda setting theory. They proposed the new questions and build comprehensive research models to study a wider range of the media agendas and their effects on the public in the different context. For the political context, Kiouisis (2004) broadened the agenda setting theory by analyzing the effects of the media on enhancing the public attitudes towards the election campaigns. During the presidential election in 1996, they examined how media attention to certain election issues reinforces public attitudes towards those issues. The finding suggested a positive relationship between the amount of media coverage and the strength of public attitudes. Some previous studies (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) applied comparative methods to do the

content analysis of the media coverage, and interviews and survey results to study the issues such as drug abuse, abortion, gun control, homosexual marriage, and unemployment. They have extended the scope of the field that can apply the agenda setting theory (McCombs, 2005). Other subsequent researches of agenda setting have focus on the political contexts such as the nation image, legal systems, and public diplomacy. The long-time exposure to mass negative coverage covering a country will cause the citizens in a country hold the negative perceptions towards another country (McCombs, 2005).

Since the agenda setting theory in the field of political communication has been intensively examined, the recent researches have been focus on the other fields. The theory can also be applied to the context of commerce, such as advertising, marketing, commercial news, corporate reputation, crisis management and public relations. McCombs and Carroll (2003) stated that the central idea of the agenda setting can also be applied into the business communication range. In their study, companies were categorized as the study objects. The findings supported the impact of business news agenda setting on the perception of these companies hold by the public. In addition, other scholars such as Kiouisis, Popescu, and Mitrook (2007) have used a triangulation of research methods and found empirical evidence of the agenda setting effect of media coverage on public relations can influence the reputation building. These studies mentioned above have proved the flexibility and versatility of agenda setting theory especially the first level agenda setting, to address a wide range of contexts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research attempts to explore the interplay among Chinese social media- Sina Micro Blog, online public agenda - *Tianya* Forum, and state-owned news media- *China Daily*. Micro Blog postings, forum postings, and news coverage regarding Thailand tourism issues were selected across four time period and there is a one-day time lag between each period since the research is involved with the inter-media agenda effects. Content analysis was used to examine all the data, and the agenda setting effects were measured by the salience of issues about Thailand tourism selected from the three media. Spearman r correlation coefficient is applied in the research. Since Spearman rank correlation is computed on ranks and depicts the monotonic relationship and is more appropriate for measurements taken from the ordinal scales (Statistic solutions, 2017). The media agendas in this study provides a comprehensive view of agenda setting effects based on the assumption that there would be some difference of issue salience transfer to the public agenda between the online media and traditional media.

3.2 Data Collection and Sampling

According to the research design, two media channels – online social media Sina Micro Blog, mainstream news media *China Daily* and one online forum, *Tianya* Forum were selected.

Mainstream Media Agenda (*China Daily*): The typical source of the mainstream media agenda in China is the stated-owned media, as the mouthpiece of the government

and its policies (Luo, 2014). *China Daily*, a national newspaper was selected in this study as a source of the mainstream media agenda.

The news coverage provided by *China Daily* has always been labeled as formal and official news source released by the government. In addition, *China Daily* is an active media user with 27.66 million followers on the Sina Micro Blog (Fu, 2013). Thus, it can imply that now in China, the traditional media has expanded their ways to set the agenda for the publics through cooperating with the social media platform. In order to have a clear division between social media and traditional media, and get rid of the interval influence caused by the official account of *China Daily* on the social media platform, all the news articles were selected from *China Daily*'s print version.

To measure the media agenda of the Chinese mainstream news media— *China Daily*, the unit of analysis is each news articles about the Thailand tourism issues. Firstly, all the news articles mentioned “Thailand tourism”, “travel in Thailand”, “Thailand self-help tour”, “Thailand group tour” was picked out. Then, the news articles of which the main theme were not about Thailand tourism, for example, news coverage about the yearly amount of Chinese tourists and the revenue of Thailand tourism industry would be filtered out. Those final selected news articles construct the issue agenda of the mainstream news media.

Social Media Agenda: Sina Micro Blog, also called Sina Weibo, is the most popular social media platform in China with numerous registered users. By the end of 2016, Sina Corporation announced that it had 297 million daily active users (Data Weibo, 2017). Sina Micro Blog often serves as a virtual town square for people to have expressions with “a level of freedom not elsewhere in the country” (Mozur, 2013). Thus, it can be assumed that this media might have some inter-media influence on other media. In other words, it

might be very sensitive or would quickly respond to other media's agenda and have more instant influence on online public opinion than other traditional media.

To measure the media agenda of Sina Micro Blog, each post that is related to the Thailand tourism issues is considered to be a unit of analysis. When users search the key word to see the related postings or topics, Sina Micro Blog presents the result of postings on the search result page in an auto rank of "Hot Degree" done by Sina's data system. It means that the related postings or topics will appear in an order from the most influential and discussed one to the least degree one according to the criteria of the times of one posting is viewed, like and commented by other users. All the posts and topics related to Thailand tourism on the result page within the time frame were selected. Both repetitive messages and the posts with few words or without any substantial meaning were excluded. Some hot postings and topics which were posted or reposted with the same content or format by different users were coded only once when the first time it appeared on the search result page. The posts that didn't meet the criteria mentioned above needed to be excluded, and they would be replaced by the next post which meets the criteria. Those final selected postings or topics construct the issue agenda of Chinese social media.

Online Public Agenda: some researches (Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002) has demonstrated the validity of the use of the electronic bulletin board as a substitute measurement for the online public agenda. In China, electronic bulletin boards have played an important role in the life of Internet users. These open online forums give Chinese Internet users the freedom to express themselves and communicate with each other (Luo, 2013). One of the most popular online forums in China is the Tianya Forum, the largest open forum in China, created in 1999. It is considered as one of the most influential Chinese language forums (Cao and Tang, 2013).

To measure the online public agenda, each post related to the Thailand tourism issues on the *Tianya* Forum is examined to be a unit of analysis. *Tianya* Forum has different sections related to the different subjects. The main section of the *Tianya* Forum was chosen in this research because of its popularity among the users as well as its rich content of various issues or topics. When the key word such as “Thailand tourism” was input in this section’s search page, the post that includes the key word will appear on the result page in the time order. All the posts or topics related to Thailand tourism on the result page within the time frame were selected. Both repetitive messages and the posts with few words or without any substantial meaning were excluded. The online posts selected from the *Tianya* Forum construct the online public agenda.

3.3 Time Lag

The time lag is one of the most important factors when examined the agenda setting effect (Wanta & Hu, 1994). Some researchers (Winter & Eyal, 1981) stated that the effective span is from four to six weeks. Scholars have also noticed that the optimal time lag deviated from the different types of media. According to Wanta (1997), the optimal time lag varied from four to five days for the newspaper to eight weeks for the magazines. Other scholars like Wanta and Hu (1994) concluded the similar result. They studied five news media and discovered that there are different time lags between the different media. The national newspaper is one week, local news organization is two weeks, the regional newspaper is three weeks, and the magazine usually is eight weeks.

In terms of media agenda setting within media, most previous researches (e.g., Vliegthart & Walgrave, 2008) used fixed lags in the inter-media agenda setting process. The short time lags were more appropriate to use in the research focused on the inter-media agenda setting. Because it was impossible for an editor to “wait for weeks

before picking up an issue that received considerable attention in another medium” (p. 861).

Moreover, several studies found a much shorter time lag when online media platforms were involved in the media agenda setting process. Previous studies adopted different time lags from one day to one week. According to Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002), “the time lag for traditional news media to affect online discussions should be relatively short” (p. 455). Social networks have reduced the time lag due to the nature of the Internet: immediate responses to the message (Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008). As an emerging type of online media, the social media platform allowed for the immediate exchange of information and discussion. Because of this characteristic of social networks, the researcher held the view that the time lag should be very short when the social media involved in the agenda setting process. Therefore, in my research, a relatively short time lag, one day, was chosen to explore the inter-media agenda setting effects among Chinese social media and Chinese mainstream news media.

3.4 Time Frame

The time frame is another vital factor need to be considered into the agenda setting studies. The typical span in the previous agenda setting research is from four to eight weeks regardless of some disagreements about the time frame for the agenda setting effects occurrence (McCombs, 2004). On the other hand, four time periods were more reliable than two time periods when examining the inter-media agenda setting effect between the online media and traditional media (Lee, L. & Lee, 2005).

Based on the previous research, the time frame of this study was set as a two-month and four time periods which were around the duration of 2017 Chinese New Year. Because the Chinese New Year is most important festival in China and it’s also the

longest holiday for Chinese people. Thus, every year during the Chinese New Year, many Chinese people will travel abroad and citizens who have the desire to travel will pay more attention to the tourism information through both the traditional and online media channels than usual. Traditional media and online media will focus more on the holiday events especially tourism issues, and there will be hot discussion and mass sharing on social network during this special period. Thus, the duration of Chinese New Year can be consider as a typical period to explore the media agenda effects on public perception towards tourism destination.

As mentioned before, the time lag examined in this study was one day. Thus, the time frame was from December 27, 2016 to February 27 , 2017, which was further divided into four periods: Time 1 (December 27, 2016 – January 10, 2017), one month prior to the Chinese New Year; Time 2 (Jan 12 – Jan 26, 2017), 15 days prior to the Chinese New Year Eve; Time 3 (Jan 28 – Feb 11, 2017), a synchronous period of the Chinese New Year Holiday; and Time 4 (Feb 13- Feb 27, 2017), one month after the Holiday. Each time period lasts for 15 days.

3.5 Coding Produce

Instrument: The unit of content analysis is each selected news article from *China Daily*, and online posts from Sina Weibo and *Tianya* Forum. Any selected unit containing more than one theme was coded into only one category according to its main issue (Fu, 2013). The issue receiving the most coverage in the news article or online posts was considered as the main issue. For the coverage, it was measured by the number of words given to a certain issue (Fu, 2013). For Sina Weibo and *Tianya* forum, the unit of analysis was each post. The issue receiving the most coverage in each post was identified as the

main issue. For *China Daily*, the unit of analysis was each news article. The issue receiving the most coverage in each article was identified as the main issue (Fu, 2013).

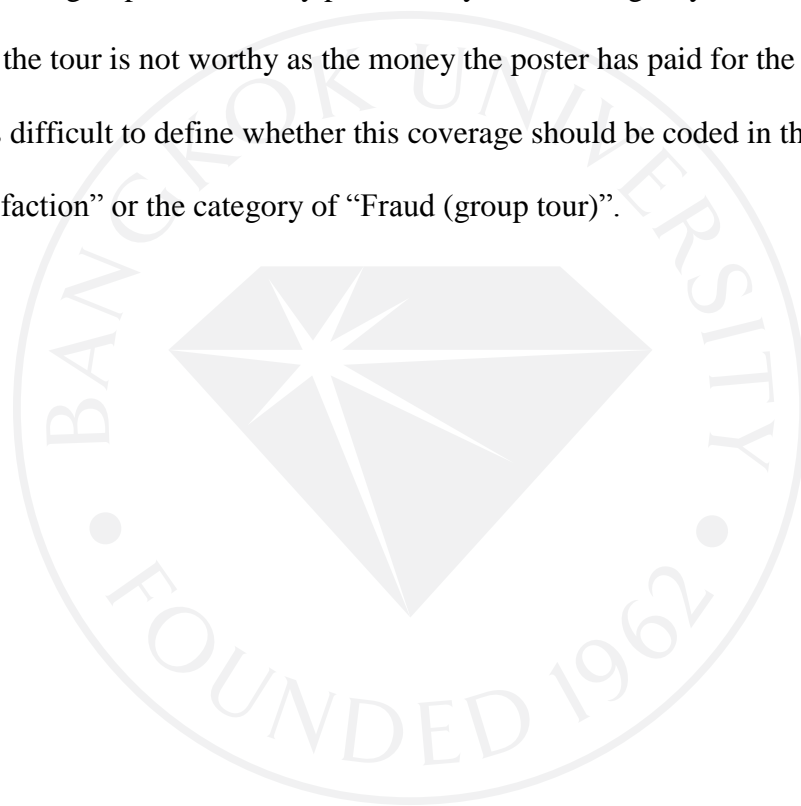
Each agenda was organized by making a table of tourism issues with their salience ranking, which was measured by the amount of news articles or posts collected from the three media.

Issue Categories: Based on the preliminary examination of data, the researcher reviewed hundreds of news articles and online posts to create, revise and add new issue category until the issue categories became comprehensive (Fu, 2013). Each selected unit from the three media was coded into different categories according to its main issue on Thailand tourism. In total, there were ten categories: food satisfaction, accommodation satisfaction, transport convenience and safety, health care, social issue influence, Fraud (group tour), shopping experience, political reasons, culture shock, and irresistible incident. In the analysis, the unit that includes the subcategories of the broad category was code into the broad category. For example, the broad category of “food satisfaction” was made up of subcategories like taste, food safety, and food hygiene quality. In appendix, the researcher listed some example posts about Thailand tourism issue on Sina Micro Blog and *Tianya* Forum, and news article covering Thailand tourism issues on *China Daily* for a more clear understanding.

3.6 Inter-coder Reliability Test

In my research, 20% of the sample from newspaper articles and online posts was randomly selected to test the inter-coder reliability. They are 53 social media postings, 4 news articles from *China Daily*, and 25 posting from *Tianya* Forum. There are two coders, besides the author, responsible to code the samples. Cronbach’s Alpha satisfactory result was applied in my research to test the inter-coder reliability. The inter-coder reliability

was 98.5% in this research, which was more than the acceptable amount of 75% (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). The rest of 1.5% disagreements caused by a considerable amount of posts or news articles that have more than one theme. Because of the words and length of the news article, it was difficult for the coders to determine the main theme of the news articles. For example, some news articles from *China Daily* covered an incident about the food during the poster's trip, what didn't match with the things presented in the group tour itinerary provided by the travel agency. The food supplying through all the tour is not worthy as the money the poster has paid for the tour. In this case, it was difficult to define whether this coverage should be coded in the category of "Food satisfaction" or the category of "Fraud (group tour)".



CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Finding Summary

Totally, 414 units of analysis were collected. Among them, 102 news coverage and posts were found in Time 1. In time 2, the amount of media attention dropped sharply. Only 63 reports and posts were found. The amount of sample reached a peak with 154 units in Time 3, and then sharply decreased to 95 in Time 4.

Since Time 1 included a three-day new year holiday (from Dec 31, 2016-Jan 2, 2017), the tourism issues began to receive attention one month before the Chinese New Year. The greatest amount of postings or news articles focused on the synchronous period of the Chinese New Year Holiday, which was identified as Time 3. And after the long holiday ended, there was an obvious decrease in the amount of postings or news reports in Time 4, which indicated that media's and public attention quickly turned to other newsworthy events. The rank correlation testing results showed that Chinese social media might set issue salience for Chinese online public agenda throughout the whole examined time periods. The rank correlation between the issue agenda of Sina Micro Blog and *Tianya* Forum was .939. ($r_{\text{rho}} = .939$; $p < .01$). However, Chinese traditional mainstream news media did not set the online public agenda through most of the time. Since the weakest and non-significant relationship was shown between the *Tianya* Forum and the *China Daily*'s agenda ($r_{\text{rho}} = .197$; $p > .05$). The rank correlation between the issue agenda of Sina Micro Blog and *China Daily* was .263. ($r_{\text{rho}} = .263$; $p > .05$), suggesting that the Chinese state-owned news media seemed to have no impact on the issues agenda of social media platform except one time period. In a word, the finding in this research

reveals that Chinese social media has become a competing agenda setting force with traditional mainstream media in China in the new digital era.

4.2 Issue Agendas

Research Question 1 seeks to explore what kind of issues were emphasized in the three media and their differences. In the Sina Micro Blog, the top three categories were “Group tour fraud”, “Food satisfaction”, “Transport convenience and safety”, “Group tour fraud” was the most dominant issue in the Sina Micro Blog, and it remained as the most salient issue across the four time periods. “Food satisfaction” as the second most concerned issue over time also received significant attention. Two categories, “Political reasons” and “Irresistible incident,” received the least attention in the Sina Micro Blog. In the *Tianya* Forum, a total amount of 126 posts about the Thailand tourism issues was found, of which the top one and third categories were same as those in the Sina weibo, but the second one were a little different. “Accommodation satisfaction” instead of “Food satisfaction” was second dominant in the *Tianya* Forum, remaining as the second most salient issue over time. Same as in the Sina Micro Blog, “Political reasons” and “Irresistible incident” got the least attention in the *Tianya* Forum. For the mainstream media, the dominant category has a big different from the two online platform. In *China Daily*, the top three categories were “Group tour fraud”, “Transport convenience and safety”, and “Shopping experience”.

Although both the online platforms paid similar attention to the tourism issues, there were still some differences between them. The biggest difference is that the rank order of “Transport convenience and safety” in the Sina Micro Blog fluctuated much. The coverage of “Transport convenience and safety” at Time 3 was almost five times as much as that at Time 2, which made “Transport convenience and safety” replace

“Accommodation satisfaction” rank into the top three list on Sina platform. While the rank order of issues categories in *Tianya* Forum was relatively steady. Another difference is that the rank order of “Food satisfaction” in the Sina Micro Blog remains the second across time but in the *Tianya* forum it descends to the fourth and the second place remains to be “Accommodation satisfaction”. Table 4.1 to 4.3 shows the issue agenda of each kind of selected media in each time period.

4.2.1 The Social Media Agenda

Table 4.1 shows the social media agenda which were represented by the amount of posts on the Sina Micro Blog, and its rank order of the tourism issues.

A total amount of 267 postings about the Thailand tourism issues was found on the platform of Sina Micro Blog. In Time 2, the number is least as 40 because this time period is, and when the Chinese New Year holiday began, the number of postings reached a peak in Time 3 with 103 postings. And after the long holiday, the number has decreased, 59 postings got great attention from the users of Sina Micro Blog.

As for the specific tourism issues, in Time 1, “Group tour fraud” was the top issue on social media platform with the proportion of 35.4 %. More than 1/3 of postings were about the group tour fraud happened during the trip to Thailand, while other issues are all lower than 15%. “Food satisfaction”, “Accommodation satisfaction”, and “Transport convenience and safety” got the similar amount of attention, of which the proportion took up 13.8%, 12.3%, and 12.3% respectively.

In Time 2, “Group tour fraud” still got the highest amount of attention of all the 40 postings, with a proportion of 42.5%. However, the overall amount of each issue has an obviously flop compared with that in Time 1. It indicated that tourism didn’t catch much attention from Chinese social media since this time period is so called off-season of

tourism, when the Chinese people are all prepared for celebrating the coming New Year. In Time 3, the amount of postings on tourism issues is greatest among the four time periods. The beginning of Chinese New Year Holiday made this time period called the tourism peak season when a great number of Chinese tourists chose to travel outbound. Thus, media will give much attention to the tourism issues at this time periods. The amount of postings on “Fraud”, especially group tour fraud incident, is at the first order again. It implied that the group tour to Thailand has a big problem at present and the tourists have actually suffered from this. In Time 4, with the end of the New Year Holiday, the amount of postings has a sharp decrease. However, same as the previous three time period, the tourism issues on “Group tour fraud”, “Food satisfaction”, “Transport convenience and safety”, and “Accommodation satisfaction” still stay heated in this time period. These four categories ranked top four among all the 10 categories on tourism issues. Overall, they were the most concerned issues on the social media platform, which account for 34.5%, 14.2%, 12.0%, and 11.6% of all the selected postings respectively through all the four time periods.

4.2.2 The Chinese Mainstream Media Agenda (*China Daily*)

Table 4.2 shows the Chinese mainstream media agenda, respectively represented by the number and its rank order of the tourism issues in *China Daily*.

As a state-owned news organization in China, *China Daily* usually gives more media’s attention to the domestic and international incidences on economics or politics than the social affairs like tourism issues. Thus, *China Daily* media’s coverage on tourism issues were much less than other two online platforms. 21 news articles were found in total. Same as the social media, of which the amount of posts went up to the peak in Time

3, mainstream news media had the largest number of news articles on tourism issues in Time 3 with 9 news articles, accounted for almost half of all the selected news articles.

Time 2 only received three news stories. Time 1 and Time 4 received 5 and 4 news articles respectively. In Time 1, “Group tour fraud” was the only covered issues. It took up 40% of the 5 news articles. In Time 2, only three categories of “Group tour fraud”, “Shopping experience”, and “Transport convenience and safety” got covered by the news media. Other issues got on media attention at all. In Time 3, the Thailand tourism issues got the largest number of news reports from the *China Daily*. Issues about “Group tour fraud”, “Shopping experience”, and “Transport convenience and safety” all got two news reports. Each of them took up a proportion of 22.2%. Four news reports were found in Time 4. “Group tour fraud” took up 50% of all the news articles in this time period. Both “Irresistible incident” and “Transport convenience and safety” got one piece of news coverage, which accounted for 25 %.

Generally, “Group tour fraud”, “Transport convenience and safety”, and “Shopping experience” were the most covered issues of the news media. “Group tour fraud” totally got 7 news reports, which was 33.3% of all the 21 news reports. “Transport convenience and safety” was the second most-covered issue with 5 news stories, which took up a proportion of 23.8%. The third one was the issues on “Shopping experience”. Four news articles accounted for 19.0%. On the other hand, absolutely different from the social media- Sina Micro Blog and online BBS-*Tianya* Forum, “Food satisfaction” and “Accommodation satisfaction” were the least concerned issues of the traditional news media. They received no coverage at all through the four time periods.

4.2.3 The Online Public Agenda

Table 4.3 shows the online public agenda which was represented by the amount of posts on the *Tianya* Forum, and its rank order of each coded tourism issues.

A total amount of 126 postings on the Thailand tourism issues was found on the platform of the *Tianya* Forum. 32 postings were found in Time 1. In Time 2, public attention received by the tourism on the *Tianya* Forum decreased to 20. The number reached a peak in Time 3 with 42 postings and when the New Year Holiday ended, 32 postings got great attention from *Tianya* Forum users as many as in Time 1. In more detail, in Time 1, “Group tour fraud” was also the top issue on the BBS platform with the proportion of 34.4%. Categories of “Social issue influences”, “Shopping experience”, “Health care” and “Culture shock” got the same amount of public attention. Each of them took up 6.3%. In Time 2, the public’s attention on the tourism faded out sharply. Categories of “Political reasons”, “Culture shock” and “Irresistible incident” received no media attention at all. However, “Group tour fraud” still got the greatest amount of discussion from the users on the *Tianya* Forum, with a proportion of 40%. In Time 3, 16 postings of “Group tour fraud” category took up 38.1% of all the 42 postings on the tourism issues. Meanwhile, during this time period, users began to discuss about issues on “Irresistible incident” compared with that in Time 1 to Time 2. Thus, the category of this accounted for a proportion of 4.8%, having a higher rank order during this time period. In Time 4, the discussion on “Group tour fraud” remained heated in Time 4. 31.3% of the selected postings shared about the experience of the posters who has suffered from the fraud during their trip in Thailand. Overall, “Group tour fraud”, “Accommodation satisfaction”, and “Transport convenience and safety” were the most discussed issues on the BBS platform. These three categories accounted for 35.7%, 14.3%, and 11.1% of all

the selected postings on tourism issues respectively. On the contrary, “Political reasons” received least public attention, since only one postings fell into this category through across the four time periods.

4.3 Rank Correlation among Three Media

Research Question 2 aims to examine whether there any correlation of issue salience transfer existing among the three media through the different time periods. Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 respectively shows the rank-order correlations among Chinese social media, mainstream media and online public agenda through the whole time span and four sequential time periods. Spearman r correlation coefficient was applied to undertake the correlation analysis.

As shown in Table 4.4, there was a significant and high rank correlation between the agendas of Sina Micro Blog and the *Tianya* Forum ($r_{\text{rho}} = .939$; $p < .01$), which suggests that most of the audiences of these two media focused on the similar issues with similar importance priority despite some differences discussed above. However, there was no significant relationship between the Sina Micro Blog’s agenda and the mainstream media’s agenda ($r_{\text{rho}} = .263$; $p > .05$), suggesting that they had different issue concerns. The weakest and non-significant relationship was shown between the *Tianya* Forum and the *China Daily*’s agenda ($r_{\text{rho}} = .197$; $p > .05$), indicating that these two agendas had little in common.

The result implied that the Chinese social media agenda and online public agenda had much more in common. In other words, Sina Micro Blog has more power than traditional news media to influence online public’s priority on the tourism issues.

Table 4.5 shows the rank correlations between the three agendas through four time periods. In total, 45 pairs of issues agendas were tested to be not significantly correlated.

They are the mainstream media news agendas in Time 1 and in Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .592$; $p > .05$), in Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .488$; $p > .05$), in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .592$; $p > .05$). The mainstream media news agendas in Time 2 and in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .545$; $p > .05$), the mainstream media news agendas in Time 3 and in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .449$; $p > .05$).

The mainstream media news agendas in Time 1 with the online public agenda in Time 1 ($r_{\rho} = .477$; $p > .05$), in Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .390$; $p > .05$), in Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .388$; $p > .05$), in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .359$; $p > .05$) and in total ($r_{\rho} = .409$; $p > .05$). The mainstream media news agendas in Time 2 with the online public agenda in Time 1 ($r_{\rho} = .423$; $p > .05$), in Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .405$; $p > .05$), in Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .333$; $p > .05$), in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .406$; $p > .05$) and in total ($r_{\rho} = .390$; $p > .05$). The mainstream media news agendas in Time 3 with the online public agenda in Time 1 ($r_{\rho} = .357$; $p > .05$), in Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .333$; $p > .05$), in Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .286$; $p > .05$), in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .390$; $p > .05$) and in total ($r_{\rho} = .340$; $p > .05$). The mainstream media news agendas in total with the online public agenda in Time 1 ($r_{\rho} = .578$; $p > .05$), in Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .543$; $p > .05$), in Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .534$; $p > .05$), in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .559$; $p > .05$) and in total ($r_{\rho} = .559$; $p > .05$).

The mainstream media news agendas in Time 1 with the social media agenda in Time 1 ($r_{\rho} = .404$; $p > .05$), in Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .374$; $p > .05$), in Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .369$; $p > .05$), in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .437$; $p > .05$) and in total ($r_{\rho} = .397$; $p > .05$). The mainstream media news agendas in Time 2 with the social media agenda in in Time 1 ($r_{\rho} = .388$; $p > .05$), in Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .323$; $p > .05$), in Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .467$; $p > .05$), in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .411$; $p > .05$) and in total ($r_{\rho} = .411$; $p > .05$). The mainstream media news agendas in Time 3 with the social media agenda in Time 1 ($r_{\rho} = .324$; $p > .05$), in Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .255$; $p > .05$), in Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .367$; $p > .05$), in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .330$; $p > .05$) and in total ($r_{\rho} = .329$; $p > .05$). The mainstream media news agendas in total with the social media agenda in Time 1

($r_{\rho} = .547$; $p > .05$), in Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .489$; $p > .05$), in Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .567$; $p > .05$), in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .556$; $p > .05$) and in total ($r = .549$; $p > .05$).

As shown in Table 4-5, correlations of the *Tianya* Forum at Time 1 with Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .963$, $p < .01$), Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .957$, $p < .01$), Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .966$, $p < .01$), Time 2 with Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .966$, $p < .01$) and Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .969$, $p < .01$), Time 3 with Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .965$, $p < .01$); The Sina Micro Blog at Time 1 with Time 2 ($r_{\rho} = .978$, $p < .01$), Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .986$, $p < .01$), Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .990$, $p < .01$), Time 2 with Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .956$, $p < .01$) and Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .979$, $p < .01$), Time 3 with Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .985$, $p < .01$) were all strongly significant. It indicated that Sina Micro Blog's news agendas and *Tianya*'s public agendas were respectively consistent through all of the time periods. And the longer the time lag was, the stronger the correlation was.

Interestingly, the issue agenda of Chinese mainstream media were not consistent throughout the four time periods. Spearman r correlation coefficient showed that *China Daily* maintained a consistent news agenda only from Time 2 to Time 3 ($r_{\rho} = .899$; $p < .01$). From this perspective, the issue agendas of state-owned news media might be influenced by other factors. Between Sina Micro Blog and *China Daily*, the correlation of them were only significant in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .678$, $p < .05$), but not strong. Similarly, the correlation of *Tianya* Forum and *China Daily* in Time 4 ($r_{\rho} = .687$, $p < .05$) is significant but not so strong. It implied that the issue agenda of mainstream news media maintained few importance similarities with the two online media platforms through most of the time periods.

In terms of the Sina Micro Blog and the *Tianya* Forum, the correlation of them was strong significance throughout the four time periods, which showed from Time 1 to Time 4, the two online media kept similar importance on agendas covering the tourism issues in Thailand.

Overall, comparing the agendas of three media, Chinese mainstream news media maintained less consistent issue agendas than Chinese social media and online public media throughout the four time periods. Within media, Chinese social media and traditional media maintained few consistent agendas or importance similarity on Thailand tourism issues. And Chinese online public agenda maintained much more consistent issue agendas or issue importance similarity with Chinese social media than it with Chinese mainstream news media.



Table 4.1: Issue Agenda of Chinese Social Media (Amount of Posts on Sina Micro Blog and Rank Scores of Issues through Four Time Periods)

Social Media Agenda										
Tourism Issues categories	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3		Time 4		Total	
	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank
Fraud (group tour)	23	1	17	1	31	1	21	1	92	1
Food satisfaction	9	2	5	2	15	2	9	2	38	2
Transport convenience and safety	8	3	3	5	14	3	7	3	32	3
Accommodation satisfaction	8	3	5	2	12	4	6	4	31	4
Shopping experience	6	5	4	4	10	5	5	5	25	5
Social issue influences	3	7	3	5	8	6	4	6	18	6
Health care	4	6	2	7	5	8	3	7	14	7
Culture shock	3	7	1	8	6	7	3	7	13	8
Irresistible incident	1	9	0	9	2	9	0	10	3	9
Political reasons	0	10	0	9	0	10	1	9	1	10
Total (N)	65		40		103		59		267	

Table 4.2: Issue Agenda of Chinese Mainstream Media (Amount of Coverage on *China Daily* and Rank Scores of Issues through Four Time Periods)

Chinese Mainstream Media Agenda										
	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3		Time 4		Total	
	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank
Fraud (group tour)	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	7	1
Transport convenience and safety	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	5	2
Shopping experience	1	2	1	1	2	1	0	4	4	3
Social issue influences	0	5	0	4	1	2	0	4	1	4
Health care	0	5	0	4	1	2	0	4	1	4
Political reasons	1	2	0	4	0	7	0	4	1	4
Culture shock	0	5	0	4	1	2	0	4	1	4
Irresistible incident	0	5	0	4	0	7	1	2	1	4
Food satisfaction	0	5	0	4	0	7	0	4	0	9
Accommodation satisfaction	0	5	0	4	0	7	0	4	0	9
Total (N)	5		3		9		4		21	

Table 4.3: Issue Agenda of Chinese Online Forum (Amount of Posts on *Tianya* Forum and Rank Scores of Issues through Four Time Periods)

The Online Public Agenda										
Tourism Issues categories	Time1		Time 2		Time 3		Time 4		Total	
	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank
Fraud (group tour)	11	1	8	1	16	1	10	1	45	1
Accommodation satisfaction	5	2	3	2	5	2	5	2	18	2
Transport convenience and safety	4	3	2	3	4	3	4	3	14	3
Food satisfaction	3	4	2	3	4	3	3	4	12	4
Shopping experience	2	5	2	3	4	3	3	4	11	5
Health care	2	5	1	7	3	6	3	4	9	6
Social issue influences	2	5	2	3	2	7	2	7	8	7
Culture shock	2	5	0	8	2	7	1	8	5	8
Irresistible incident	0	10	0	8	2	7	1	8	3	9
Political reasons	1	9	0	8	0	10	0	10	1	10
Total (N)	32		20		42		32		126	

Table 4.4: Rank-order Correlation among Three Media through the Whole Time Span
(from December 27, 2016 to February 27, 2017)

			<i>Tianya forum</i>	<i>China Daily</i>	Sina weibo
Spearman's rho	<i>Tianya forum</i>	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.197	.939**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.790	.000
		N	10	10	10
	<i>China Daily</i>	Correlation Coefficient	.197	1.000	.263
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.790		.756
		N	10	10	10
	Sina weibo	Correlation Coefficient	.939**	.263	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.756	
		N	10	10	10

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.5: Rank-order Correlation Matrix among Three Media through the Four Time Periods

	Micro Blog T1	Micro Blog T2	Micro Blog T3	Micro Blog T4	Micro Blog total	Tianya T1	Tianya T2	Tianya T3	Tianya T4	Tianya total	China Daily T1	China Daily T2	China Daily T3	China Daily T4	China Daily total
Micro Blog T1	1	.978** .000	.986** .000	.990** .000	.996** .000	.968** .000	.964** .000	.977** .000	.968** .000	.983** .000	.404 .247	.388 .268	.324 .362	.703* .023	.547 .102
Micro Blog T2	.978** .000	1	.956** .000	.979** .000	.983** .000	.959** .000	.987** .000	.982** .000	.952** .000	.984** .000	.374 .287	.323 .363	.255 .476	.678* .031	.489 .152
Micro Blog T3	.986** .000	.956** .000	1	.985** .000	.992** .000	.945** .000	.950** .000	.940** .000	.944** .000	.957** .000	.369 .294	.467 .174	.367 .297	.666* .036	.567 .088
Micro Blog T4	.990** .000	.979** .000	.985** .000	1	.996** .000	.958** .000	.958** .000	.957** .000	.934** .000	.965** .000	.437 .207	.411 .238	.330 .352	.678* .031	.556 .095
Micro Blog total	.996** .000	.983** .000	.992** .000	.996** .000	1	.964** .000	.970** .000	.968** .000	.957** .000	.978** .000	.397 .256	.411 .239	.329 .353	.686* .029	.549 .100
Tianya T1						1	.963** .000	.957** .000	.966** .000	.984** .000	.477 .163	.423 .224	.357 .312	.680* .030	.578 .080
Tianya T2							1	.966** .000	.969** .000	.986** .000	.390 .265	.405 .246	.333 .347	.674* .033	.543 .105
Tianya T3								1	.965** .000	.989** .000	.388 .268	.333 .347	.286 .423	.767* .010	.534 .112

(Continued)

Table 4.5 (Continued): Rank-order Correlation Matrix among Three Media through the Four Time Periods

Tianya T4		1	.987** .000	.359 .309	.406 .245	.390 .265	.687* .028	.559 .093
Tianya Total			1	.409 .240	.390 .266	.340 .337	.721* .019	.559 .093
China Daily T1				1	.592 .071	.488 .153	.592 .071	.763* .010
China Daily T2					1	.899** .000	.545 .103	.922** .000
China Daily T3						1	.449 .193	.869** .001
China Daily T4							1	.776** .008

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Conclusion

For decades, the government mostly controlled Chinese media and the mass media was used as tool to manufacture the public agenda, and determining what the public know and how they think about the issues. However, nowadays, since the development of the Internet providing various information channels, Chinese netizens are able to participate in public affairs and express their opinions more freely, in some degree; new media is a powerful competitor to the traditional media in the agenda setting process. Through the content analysis of news coverage and online posts, this research studied the first-level agenda setting effects among Chinese social media, Chinese mainstream media, and online public agenda- *Tianya* Forum, when they covered the tourism issues in Thailand during the Chinese New Year period. The findings suggested that Sina Micro Blog and *Tianya* Forum have a bidirectional effect on the issue agenda. Across most of the time periods, there was neither significant agenda setting effects between Chinese social media and the mainstream news media, nor between mainstream news media and the online public agenda.

5.2 Findings and Discussion

5.2.1 Agendas in New Media Era

According to the result of content analysis, the top important issues were various from the three selected media. For the social media platform, the top three categories were “Group tour fraud”, “Food satisfaction”, “Transport convenience and safety”,

“Group tour fraud” was a dominant issue in the Sina Micro Blog. It showed that the concern of social media users in China, of which the number was at least 154 million about the Thailand tourism. Chinese tourists cared most about the basic needs during the journey like food, accommodation, and transportation. In the category of “Group tour fraud”, Sina’s users posted a lot about the fraud existing in the group tour especially the so called “zero dollar tour”, such as forced shopping, travel contract treat, and extra unreasonable charge.

As for the Chinese mainstream news media, the most covered issues were “Group tour fraud”, “Transport convenience and safety”, and “Shopping experience”. Same as social media platform, mainstream media paid great media attention on “Group tour fraud”. But the rank of other two most-covered issues of mainstream media agenda was different from social media platform. *China Daily* published a considerable number of news coverage on what tourism issues the related authority needs to pay more attention to. Most of them implied that these issues would influence the destination image of one country. For the mainstream news media, it was a way to show the government’s concern to some social issues related to the human interest. On the commercial-oriented *Tianya* Forum, the top three categories were “Group tour fraud”, “Accommodation satisfaction”, “Transport convenience and safety”. It did not consist with the mainstream news media agenda but shared similar importance of issues with the social media platform. On the Sina Micro Blog, the most covered issues are about food, accommodation, and transportation. Issues emphasized by the *Tianya* Forum and Sina Micro Blog reflect the current conflicts and problems existing in the Thai tourism industry related to the Chinese group tours service, which should be highly concerned by the related government department.

Previous researches (e.g., Lee, Lancendorfer, & Lee, 2005) have provided the evidence of the interaction or interplay between the online public agenda and the media agenda. In the era of new media, the Internet users in China are able to acquire and discuss the issues which were excluded by the traditional media. Instead of accepting the information in passive way, Chinese Internet users have become more actively participating in information production and distribution through the path of online media (Gang & Bandurski, 2010).

There was no obvious agenda setting effects were found between the mainstream news agenda and the online public agenda in this research. In some degrees, it can imply that Chinese tradition official media no longer has the absolute power to control most of the Chinese media. The apparent difference between the mainstream media agenda and online public agenda in this research reveals that the media environment in China is at its turning point. Different from those stated-owned media, which serves as a propaganda tool for promoting social ideology and government policy, the new commercial online media that granted more freedom has the responsibility to change the practice of media and meet the growing demands of citizens. For example, human interest stories or social issues are emphasized more than the political news in the Sina Micro Blog in order to satisfy the taste of the audience (Tai, 2006).

The Internet has also changed the ways that traditional media used to do. The finding in my research that there was no significant agenda setting effect existing between the online public agenda and the news media agenda showed that the Internet has challenged the agenda setting process of traditional media in the new media era. Even though most of the online expression is still monitored or supervised by the related authority, there is a hint that Chinese government has started to lose its absolute control over the access of acquiring information, and can no longer completely manufacturing and shaping public

opinion as it is used to do (Hung, 2005). Exposed to the various social media platform, Internet users are more capable of pushing the issues that they concerned about to the media, even setting their own media agenda on the traditional media. On the other hand, traditional media now pay more attention to online topics in order to get news sources and gain insight into the attitudes of online public opinion of an issue (Fu, 2013). Under the competitive pressure, the traditional media are prone to cover the issues with vast discussion volume on the Internet. For example, some commercial-oriented newspapers usually publish editorial articles to explore the issues heatedly discussed by the netizens.

5.2.2 Influence of Social Media on Destination Image

When people searching information about their target tourism destination, they usually consult with other travellers' experiences or reviews which help them to solve the questions or decrease the uncertainty during the trip. In this way, the online media has played more and more important role in information searching since it provides a platform where people interact freely and easily exchange information (Buhalis et al. 2011; Fotis et al. 2012; Yoo et al. 2009). This new trend implies that the tourists are having more power to do their own travel decision making and exerting an influence on tourism related businesses to take new trends into account (Cox et al., 2007).

The tourism platform is becoming increasingly popular on the Internet today, which is crucial because tourism is an information-based and information-intensive industry (Chen & Xie, 2008). The social networking allows people to easily share opinions and experiences online in the form of text, audio, images or videos, which can help people find information that satisfies their needs (Chen & Xie, 2008). In the field of tourism, the online posts, or reviews which is so called "word of mouth online" is playing an increasingly important role in shaping the presentation of a destination. At the preparing

process of travelling, tourists generally seek to gather more detailed and specific information about the destination in order to reduce the uncertainty that may arise later. Meanwhile, more detailed and useful information about destination destinations can increase tourists' confidence in the decision-making process and help them make their best decisions to improve the quality of the entire trip (Marchiori, 2012; Gretzel et al., 2007).

Tourism destinations are accessible through search engines online, and it is possible to find official destination and attraction websites as well as online communities, blogs, personal websites and so forth. (Thevenot, 2007; Xiang et al., 2009). Due to development of the Internet and the variety of Information and Communication Tools (ICTs), tourists have more opportunities to access such information that they need (Marchiori, 2012). Providing wide range of possibilities, social media fundamentally changed the way of tourists' information search behavior and travelling decision making (Ráthonyi, 2013). The Internet is offering lots of travel stories or reviews produced by common people as well as the information provided by the official institutions. Social media enable tourists to share their travel experience and some important tourism information in a form of online posts including texts, images, or videos, which are more likely to offer rich information, and to have an impact on the image of a tourism destination.

5.2.3 Direction for the Thai Tourism Industry

Since the power of agenda setting effects - social media posts, and “Word of Mouth” online - the online posts of which the content is negative on Sina Micro Blog and *Tinaya* forum somehow did affect the image of Thailand as a popular tourism destination perceived by the most of the Chinese tourists. Like the “zero dollar tour” incident has a negative impact on the business that related to the tourism of which the main target

audience is Chinese tourists. The economic benefit is the dominant consideration of both Thai government and local companies. Therefore, appropriately deal with the negative tourism issues and improve the satisfaction of tourists is a key process in attracting more Chinese tourists in the future.

The most concerned issue mentioned on Chinese social media and online forum like the “Group tour fraud” did cause dissatisfaction of Chinese tourists. Zero-dollar Chinese tour agents use proxy operators in Thailand, bringing Chinese tourists to stay at hotels and restaurants in their networks. Moreover, they have souvenir shops contracted through them. Chinese tourists were reportedly abandoned on the roadside after refusing to go on optional tours, while many said they were forced to buy very expensive goods. Chinese travel agents subsequently stopped selling tour packages to Thailand due to worries they would be affected by the crackdown.

The zero dollar tours somehow raised the quantity of Chinese tourists but actually has caused some other problems like the incidents of group tour fraud, Chinese tourists misconducting and unlicensed tour guide, which has caused dissatisfaction of the local community. Prab (2014) and *Pattaya One* (2015) reported that there are excessive number of unlicensed foreign tour guides in Thailand, which is lack of policy monitoring or the industry standard. The tour guides play an important in informing the tourists, while those unlicensed tour guides is more likely to provide misinformation to the tourists even caused the group tour fraud happened.

At present, Thai authority is crackdown on unlawful action happened in tourism industry and trying to get more “quality” tourists rather than “quantity”, but the “quality” means the spending power of tourists. TAT is aiming to increase the high-end Chinese tourists who can contribute more to the tourism revenue of Thailand (Chinmaneevong, 2015). Government insisted that actions against the illegal tour operations will be

beneficial in the long run, as the so-called zero-dollar tours, which mostly attract Chinese visitors, generate little revenue. The Tourism and Sports Ministry and the Tourism Authority of Thailand moved swiftly to support the crackdown, saying that it was appropriate and its impact would be short-lived and vowed that the government would move forward to solve the illegal tour service problem. The Thai government said it is trying to make travel agents in China better understand that the country is undertaking serious efforts to protect Chinese travellers from poor tour services. The TAT then organized roadshows to four big cities in China like Chengdu, Chongqing, Beijing, and Guangzhou to convince tour agents in the mainland to understand the reason behind the crackdown and resell their packages to Thailand.

In summary, negative tourism issues affect the quality of tourists' travel experience and prevent them from sponsoring certain local businesses. It further caused the negative impact on the destination loyalty of Chinese tourists towards Thailand. The current measures taken by the Thai government may not be sufficient and effective to address the problems. Some negative tourism problems reported in the Chinese media and discussed in the online forum are still visible in Thailand. In addition, many tourists and locals were not satisfied with what the Thai government has done up to now.

Take the advantage of social media is a practical way to solve the problems. As the findings showed, Chinese social media now has more and more power to influence the online public opinion. Thus the stakeholders of Thai tourism industry ought to pay more attention to Chinese social media and use this channel to know more about the thoughts of Chinese tourists – enhance the good part and improve the insufficient part based on what the customers concern and what they need. Building a good media relation with Chinese partner and cooperate with Chinese tourism-related organizations to further promote the Thailand tourism in Chinese market.

5.3 Limitation of the Research

This study has several limitations. First, it is noticed that during the four time periods, the mainstream news media agenda was focus on the certain topic so that some other issues received no coverage at all. The uneven distribution and the lack of variety could influence the correlations between social media agenda and the mainstream news media agenda, so as the agenda of online public opinion and agenda of mainstream media. Second, each unit in content analysis process was coded into only one issue category according to its main theme. However, during the coding process, the coder found that most of the news coverage from *China Daily* were often quite long and contained more than one theme, which caused the difficulty for the coder to determine the main theme. Coding each news article into only one theme might result in neglect of other important information mentioned in the story. On the contrary, those posts from Sina Micro Blog and *Tianya* Forum were quite short and concentrating because of the 140 characters limitation. And this limitation may also influence the results of statistical analyses.

Third, in my research, the research only chose one online forums in China- *Tianya* Forum to surrogate the online public agenda. It is difficult to cover a complete online public agenda because of the various online forums and the vast volume of online posts. In addition, the collection of data was influenced by the network supervision in China. It was difficult to follow up and retrieve those messages that were deleted by the censors. Similarly, in this research, Sina Micro Blog and *China Daily* were selected to create the social media agenda and the main media agenda. However, the inclusion of other traditional media such as broadcast, television, and magazines would increase the validity of the measurements. Another problem is that the time frame of content analysis is too

short to examine the long-term impact of the traditional mainstream media agenda on the online public agenda. A longer and more consistent time frame would be more comprehensive to study the long-term impact of traditional media.

5.4 Recommendation for Future Study

The study reveals some topics of future research. For example, the finding in this research was unique to the context of China. Future studies can focus on the democratic countries where more free media environment have.

First, this study only explored the first-level agenda setting. Although the social media agenda influenced the online public agenda on the aspect of salience, when the different attributes of the issue involved the results might be different. From this perspective, even be focus on the same issue, the emphasizing, tone and type of issue description on the social media platform and online forums may totally different. Also the study object, this research only focused on the online public opinion rather the general public opinion. Therefore, the power of social media on the offline public opinion needs to do the further examination.

Second, the social media agenda might be manipulated by the government. The content that can appear on the platform would be filtered by the government. Since China is regarded as a country that has controlled or censored media strictly and the media environment is lack of freedom, it is possible for the government to manipulate the hot postings and hot topics on social media. In fact, sometimes sensitive messages on the social media platform might be defined as “not appropriate for publishing” and then filtered out. A previous statistical analysis (Bamman, 2012) showed that 212,583 messages out of 56 million messages from Sina Micro Blog had been filtered. However, though Sina Micro Blog indicates that the social media to some degree allow the speech

freedom, this single example cannot accurately define the freedom on all social media platforms in China.

The final point is that in this research, the study object is tourism issue which more related to human interests, if the object changed to the politics, the result may be totally different. Further research could focus on this angle and examine whether the significant agenda effects exist between the mainstream news media and the social media as well as the online public agenda, when they covering other types of issues.



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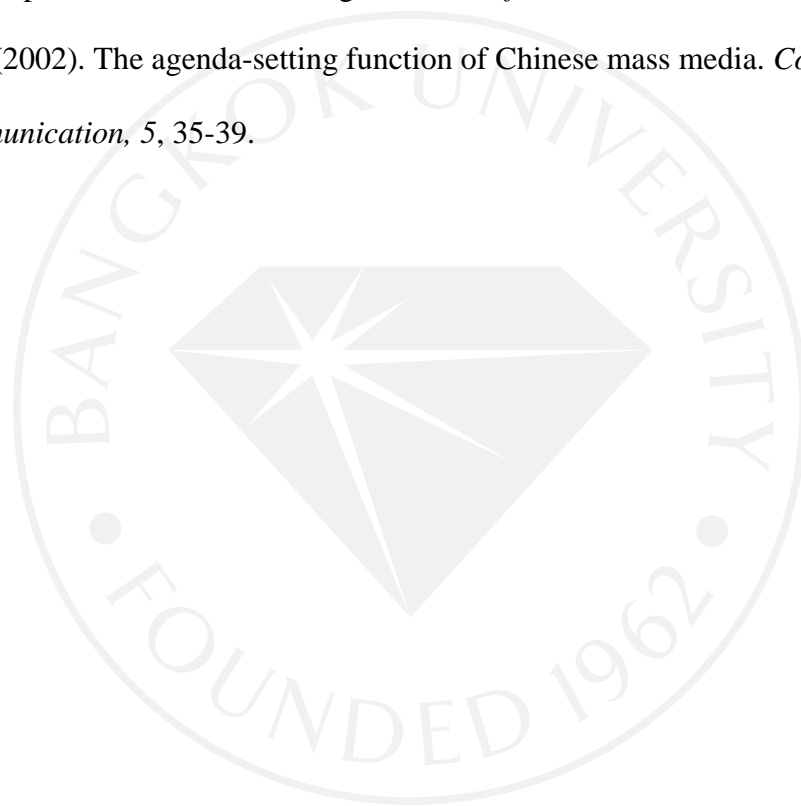
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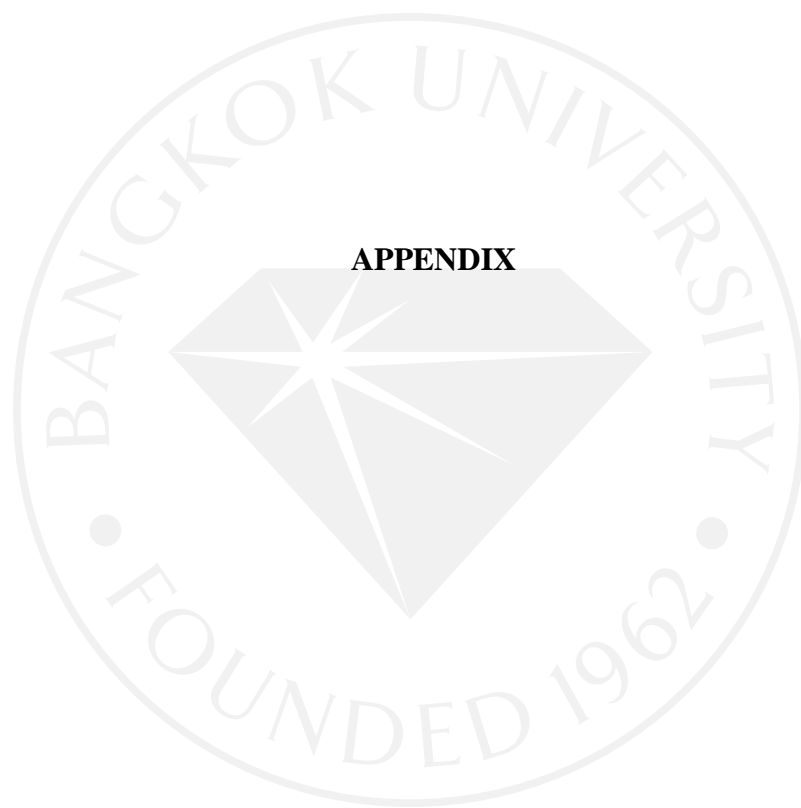
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APPENDIX

Table 1: Example of posts about Tourism Issues in Thailand on Sina Micro Blog

Date	Issue	Poster	Source
January 8, 2017	Chinese tourist robbed of gold necklace on road in Pattaya	Shiliufan-Travel Suggestions	Citizen journalist
February 7, 2017	Chinese group tour fraud – unreasonable charge and bad service supplying on food and accommodation	Dalian Breaking Shandong, China	Citizen journalist
February 9, 2017	Chinese tourists were fined 5,000 bath by the tour guide for absence for one-day group tour itinerary due to the illness	Hello Beijing Beijing, China	Beijing Evening News
February 26, 2017	Shade deal of riding elephant in Thailand	Ifeng Information Beijing, China	China Newsweek

Table 2: Example of News coverage on Tourism Issues in Thailand on *China Daily*

Date	Issue	Section	Source
January 2, 2017	25 people dead after minibus crossed central reservation and slammed into pick-up truck near Bangkok tourist hotspot	International news	Xinhua News agency Beijing, China
January 9, 2017	Thai airport workers were dismissed for allegedly reviled Chinese tourists	International news	CCTV News Beijing, China
January 15, 2017	Chinese tourist drowns at Phuket beach	International news	CCTV News Beijing, China
February 6, 2017	Thailand cracks down on ‘zero-dollar’ tour groups	International news	Huanqiu News Beijing, China

Table 3: Example of Posts about Tourism Issues in Thailand on *Tianya* Forum

Date	Issue	Section	Poster
January 16, 2017	Be cheated in Phuket for one-day motorbike tour	Tourism	Individual
January 19, 2017	Thai boil the gum as “bird’s nest” and sold to Chinese tourists	Social	Individual
January 1, 2017	Suffered from forced shopping in Thailand	Tourism	Individual
February 6, 2017	Hotel in Phuket refused to be responsible for the missing property	Tourism	Individual

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