Effects of Travel Intention, Organizational Response, and Perception of Control Due to COVID-19 on Thai Tourists' Behavior

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Abstract

The present research paper is an attempt to assess the situation of tourism industry of Thailand faced various challenges due to pandemic that has devastatingly affected the all aspects of human life. The spread of corona virus has negatively affected the all industries including education industry, retain industry, health sector, airline industry, agriculture industry, oil and petroleum industry but the worst hit is observed for travel and tourism industry. The current study examined the Thai tourists' behavior influenced by travel intention and organizational response towards COVID-19. The current study incorporated the impact of corona virus due to its seriousness and large-scale damage to economy. The travel and tourism industry faced significant decrease in number of visitors and contribution to the economy. The data was collected through questionnaires based on simple random sampling technique and was analyzed through Smart-PLS. The results of the study demonstrate that hypothesis H1, H2 and H3 the direct relationship was significant statistically and accepted. The study investigated the moderation effect of perceived control towards COVID-19 and reported that hypothesis H4 as significant, however hypothesis H5 rejected on statistical grounds.

Keywords: COVID-19, Travel intention (TI), Organizational response towards COVID-19, perception of control, Thai tourists' behavior

Introduction and background of the study

The rapid spread of corona virus around the world affected all the aspects of the human life, since the first case of corona virus detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019 that lead to significant reduction in tourism due to travel restrictions. The people around the world cancelled day trips, holiday plans, foreign trips, flight were cancelled, hotel bookings were cancelled, cultural events were postponed, educational activities were suspended, sports activities were cancelled, and family events were delayed. The movement control restrictions on regional, domestic, and international level affected the economies and almost all industries specifically travel and tourism, the transportation, accommodation, restaurants, festivals, meetings and sports events were delayed or cancelled due to increased risk of corona virus spread in many countries. The various countries seal their borders, restricted the entry from outside, introduced the quarantine period and as

per consequences international, national, and domestic tourism declined significantly. The countries scrambled the visitors and travelers to return to their home countries that considered as most important outbound involvement and people got back to their hometowns (Sultana, Islam & Islam, 2020).

The main cause of corona virus spread is due to personal touch and closeness of general public, as if someone touch the surface that contains virus and touch eyes, nose or mouth the virus will transmit to the person and affect the lungs seriously and may be to the death. If the carrier of the corona virus cough or sneeze it also caused the spread of virus through droplets and as it falls on surface that another person may touch and gets affected. So therefore, governments of various countries imposed the lockdown to prevent the rapid spread and restricted people to their homes in order to prevent the firms adopted the new patterns of conducting business to operate from home.

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While people maintain social distance during market visit, offices, banks or any other public places (Sultana et al., 2020). All the sectors striving to recover from the situation of crisis through online services, however tourism destinations are still closed. The tourism industry requires the physical presence for visiting destinations and it cannot be transferred anywhere or visit virtually. It's being the one year of corona virus spread and affected areas and people have increased all over the world, but in case of decreased cases government decided to reopen gradually. The standard operating procedures (SOPs) to wear mask during travel or moving around and usage of sanitizers have become compulsory (Bakar & Rosbi, 2020).

The current situation of pandemic of COVID-19 that likely to extend to the foreseeable future and further earth shattering event occurred previously such as world wars, 9/11, SARS, MERS and financial crisis that had long lasting negative impacts on economy and financial environments (Chang, McAleer & Ramos, 2020). The various previous devastating situations negatively impacted the economy and caused economic crisis, but current corona virus had the most intensive hit on all industries specifically decline in international and domestic movements. The current global change and pandemic situation affected the travel industry due to health security and tourists cancelled their plans to avoid any kind of suspect as retail and tourism industry found to be most affected. The British airline reported lay-offs and various firms announced bankruptcies according to Business Insider (2020). The Scandinavian airline, Singapore airlines, Virgin airline and German TUI airline requested for financial aid packages due to lockdown and travel restrictions in billions for survival (Sultana et al., 2020).

The Kingdom of Thailand as one of the popular destinations for tourists and it plays important role in economy of the country as it contributes to the GDP of 12 trillion baht range from one trillion baht (2013) 2.53 trillion baht (2016), the equivalent of 9% to 17.7% of GDP. Current pandemic situation has worst hit on tourism sector and it has been projected that global travel and tourism industry will face record job loss in year 2020, the significant decline in economic indicators and GDP, the losses are estimated as 2.7$ billion or higher if the situation gets longer (Mekharat & Traore, 2020). The research studies have highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on tourism industry that current novel crisis with higher magnitude has affected the all aspects of human life and tourism is considered as worst hit. The current situation may get prolong due to delay in vaccine and situation may remain uncertain for longer than expectations. The uncertain situation about corona virus spread in future has devastating and long lasting effect on various industries, but it is confirmed that nothing will be the same again (Romagosa, 2020). The tourism observed to be decreased by 22% in early 2020 as compare to 2019, the figures show that 67 million fewer international tourists arrived that depicted the loss of 80 billion US $s in exports. It has been reported by UNWTO that significant declines have been observed as decline in international arrivals in current year, may restore gradual opening after relaxation in movement control restrictions. The UNWTO highlighted three possibilities that in July 2020 58% decrease, in September 70% decline and in December 78% decline may be expected as the situation continues. The other analysis from United Nations Development program (UNDP) forecasted that approximately US $ 02 trillion to 03 trillion drops in commodity export in next two years. The current recession situation caused by pandemic may eliminate 50 million tourism jobs worldwide and devastating effect economically worldwide. The tourism sector is interconnected to other industries such as air transport, oil industry and production, hospitality; retain sector and sales of various commodities. The decline in international air transportation that expected to shrink by 5% in 2020 as it was the worst year in the history of airlines with the loss of 84.3 billion US $s and loss will continue in 2021. The jobs provided by airline industry approximately 32 million jobs are on risk due to current pandemic (IATA, 2020). The secretary general of UNWTO commented that pandemic has worst effect on tourism industry that caused millions of job losses as its most labor-intensive sector as it is the hardest hit sector. The current situation has become challenge for tourism development because all regions around the world are facing the same situation with job loss and declined income that ultimately negatively affecting the economy of the country. The several setbacks have been identified due to this current pandemic situation such as poverty inclination, hunger, health and well-being of general public is affected due to crisis all around the world and that is more likely to expand in near future (Cardoso, 2020).

The severe implications have been identified as countries have closed their borders to control the human traffic for preventing the spread of virus.

So therefore tourists faced ban on traveling and tourism industry got hit sharply due to current crisis as 56% drop in international arrivals was observed that had significant impact on economic cycle (Jamaludin, Zuraimi & Valeri). The various destinations were planning to reopen for tourism service but second wave of COVID-19 proved to be more severe than first and tourism industry seeking for financial survival due to devastating crisis (Valeri & Baggio, 2020). The communication and media coverage play vital role in shaping the intention of tourists to visit the destination and equip with awareness about COVID-19 risk that affect the intention of tourist to visit. The rapid awareness encouraged people to take preventive measures against virus spread and accurate information availability also minimize the risk of wrong information that causes anxiety and stress among general public. The previous studies have reported positive significant influence of media coverage on information dissemination and intention (Chemli, Toanoglou & Valeri, 2020).

The current study intends to determine the Thai tourists' behavior in pandemic COVID-19 situation influenced by travel intention and organizational response COVID-19 perspective. The study also intends to determine the moderation effect of perception of control from spread of corona virus.

Literature Review

The international tourism generally very sensitive to undesirable events such as terrorism, natural disasters, or epidemic diseases that may transported from one to another human in case of contact, the corona virus pandemic affected the all aspects of human life due to its higher level of contagious capabilities (Jafari, Saydam, Erkanlı & Olorunsola, 2020). The tourism is considered as leisure activity that influence the economy and desirable in all generations around the world, the Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia are attractive destinations for international tourists. The current era and generation are not responsive towards traditional marketing efforts but relay on technology-based information and application such as access through smart phones, social media, digital influences and online information for tourism activities. The current pandemic situation has negative impact on the tourism and it is expected that situation may not be same again like previous normal specifically in tourism sector as it received worst impact and faced significant decline (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020). The COVID-19 diminished the hospitality industry as consumers' demand have been changed and may

be remain same in foreseeable future due to health and safety issues and hygiene precautions (Dube, Nhamo & Chikodzi, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) recommended social distance rules for operational functions to reduce the social and physical contact for preventing the spread of disease. The new rules and regulations have reduced the profitability of hospitality sector and affect the traditional business patterns. The studies have highlighted that there are expectations of significant shrink in tourism sector due to pandemic outbreak that will negatively impact the current and future potential investors in the sector (Filimonau, Derqui & Matute, 2020).

Travel Intention and Tourist Behavior (COVID-19 perspective)

This section of the study demonstrates the relationship and influence of travel intention on tourist behavior under COVID-19 perspective. The previous literature has embarked on the tourists' behavior and referred tourist as consumer that responses to the tourist market developments according to the general consumption theory. The literature argues that the issues faced by tourism industry affect the behavior of tourist may be in either way constructive or destructive, the current pandemic situation has worst impact on tourism industry so therefore behavior of tourist is influenced in response to the uncontrollable factor since the outbreak initiated in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (Jafari et al., 2020). The previous literature has highlighted the effect of images on decision making of tourists that further influence the tourists' behavior for consuming the service or decision related to avail the activities, further it has link with economical aspect that tourism activities has strong influence and contribute in economic conditions of the country (Cai, Feng & Breiter, 2004). The environmental uncertainty affects all firms or sectors that potentially linked with the tourism sector and receive impacts from the experiences from various crisis, so the response of the firms or organizations investigates the reasons of the crisis and develop strategies to manage the unexpected events or crisis such as currently pandemic COVID-19 has diminished almost all industries around the world with most affected travel and tourism industry. The current crisis has unexpectedly affected the well-being of the tourism structure and its related or supportive industries, the unplanned and unexpected situation caused the damage of entire structure that will take longer than usual to restore the economy and tourism activities.

The uncertain and ambiguous situation caused massive risk and resulted negatively on the activities due to large scale spread of corona virus, the studies conducted on crisis management focused to organizational system and decision to take appropriate initiatives to influence the tourists' behavior that is essential in current era (Ivanova, Ivanov & Ivanov, 2020).

The several travel agents providing services online initiated campaigns to maintain the tourism market towards the desired attractions of tourists. It has been highlighted by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) that 10-35 months are required to return to normal situation for tourism industry. The mindset of the tourists also plays vital role in sustainability of the industry to take step forward and participate in the tourism activities while focusing on precautions and preventive measure to wear mask and use sanitizers with appropriate SOPs. The previous studies have highlighted the role of tourist behavior and their intention to travel in pandemic situation with preference of travel. It is more likely that stress and anxiety influence the intention and behavior of tourists (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020). The research scholars have referred intention to travel with the desire or intention of tourists to make a tour. The intention to travel as personal will to travel and available information considered as driving forces for tourism. The studies have stressed upon the information sources and accuracy of information more significant as compare to personal wish to travel for forming a tour that may match with the expectation of tourists. The intention of travelling also highlighted as influenced by risk factors and the perception of tourists towards safety and health security. The risk factors are directly related with anxiety of tourists that also affect the decision of tourist to make a tour (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020).

The following hypothesis is derived to assess the relationship between travel intention and Thai tourists' behavior:

H1: Travel intention due to COVID-19 positively influences Thai Tourists Behavior

Organizational Response to COVID-19 and Tourists Behavior

The COVID-19 pandemic caused large scale negative impact on all aspects of the life and significant detrimental influences on international movement of tourists that affected the hotel and tourism industry at large. The cash inflow to the sector was based on the number of tourists visiting the spots interrupted and caused sudden business closures due to initiatives of the governments to impose the lockdown as prevention measure against corona virus spread (Hall, Prayag & Amore, 2017). The closure of businesses of hotel industry slashed the revenues and disintegrated the supply chain that was established long time ago in response to the pandemic (Nicola, Alsafi, Sohrabi, Kerwan, Al-Jabir, Iosifidis, Agha & Agha, 2020). The negative implication of COVID-19 on hotel businesses reduced the attractiveness of hospitality sector for the tourists as government imposed the lockdown. The hotels also followed the government guidelines for lockdown no-contact policies to avoid spread of corona virus that impacted the employment and significant decline in growth and revenue (Filimonau et al., 2020), it further discouraged the potential workforce to join the hotel jobs in future. The recruitment and selection have become major challenge for hotel industry due to pandemic issue that due to problem it is discouraged to join that it may affect the health of employees in future. Moreover, attractiveness of hospitality sector has decreased sharply, on the other hand, demand has increased for staffing at hotels but majority of the people are not willing to join the sector (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). The studies have highlighted that organizational commitment of managers observed to be negatively affected due to current situation that causes reduction in salary. The previous studies have investigated the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on organizational commitment of managers that observed to be reduced. The organizational response of hotels towards the pandemic situation affected the practices of normal routine; another factor perceived job security has been examined to examine the organizational commitment of hotel managers and reported significant results (Filimonau et al., 2020).

Previously, organizational response during COVID-19 is investigated with the employees commitment with the effect of job security among hotel managers, that found to be influence the commitment level (Filimonau et al., 2020). The current study intends to investigate the relationship between organizational response in COVID-19 and tourist behavior. The study argues that organizational response most likely to be important factor in influencing the behavior of Thai tourists to plan the tour. Based on the above literature review, the following hypothesis was developed to evaluate the relationship between organizational response to COVID-19 and Thai tourists' behavior:

H2: Organizational Response due to COVID-19 positively influences Thai Tourists Behavior

Moderating Role of perception of Control (COVID-19 perspective)

The most important factor in current situation is control measures towards the COVID-19 and moderation effect of perception of control between exogenous and endogenous constructs of the current study. The literature depicts that perception and behavioral responses influence the change due to pandemic of corona that spread worldwide, the negative consequences can also be observed by assessing the behavior of individuals (Michie, Rubin & Amlot, 2020). The most visited and attractive tourist destination for Chinese is Thailand that got affected due to corona virus in January 2020, this situation negatively affected the Thai market and economy (Stevenson, 2020). The literature focused on various factors including awareness about disease that may be helping for emerging virus, the level of anxiety that may be faced by patients that influence the behavior of an individual. The outbreak of corona virus also found to be causing psychological distress and incline the anxiety after the reporting of cases in Thailand. The other factor that influences the behavior of general public is considered as spread of information about emergence of virus and epidemic and the number of affected people and mortality rate. The social networks and close social interaction likely to play major role in spread or outbreak of corona virus, the previous studies have examined the association between mood such as anxiety, trust, and behavior towards control of disease through implementation of SOPs that may be helping in preventing the spread. The literature previously published about pandemics contains that general public trust the data provided by government follow the precautionary measures recommended by government that influence the behavior of individuals (Bults, Beaujean, de Zwart, Kok, van Empelen, van Steenbergen, Richardus & Voeten, 2011). The previous epidemic situations and virus outbreaks caused anxiety due to social distress and disruption in Thailand, during spread of SARS and influenza (swine flu) the population become strained and suffer discrimination that caused behavioral changes that influence the decisions of individuals (Goodwin, Wiwattanapantuwong, Tuicomepee, Suttiwan & Watakakosol, 2020).

The current study contributes to the body of knowledge and examines the moderation role of perception of control towards COVID-19 to assess the Thai tourists' behavior. The following hypotheses are derived from above literature and assumptions.

H3: Perception of Control due to COVID-19 positively influences Thai Tourists Behavior

H4: Perception of Control moderates the effects of Travel intention due to COVID-19 on Thai Tourists Behavior

H5: Perception of Control moderates the effects of Organizational response due to COVID-19 on Thai Tourists Behavior
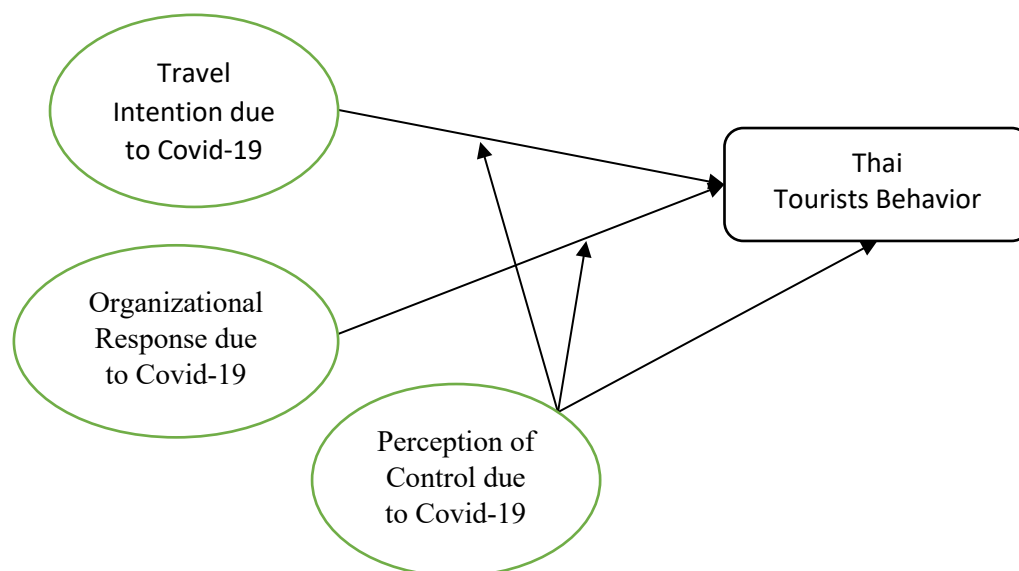
Research Framework

Figure 1: Research Framework

Research Methodology

The current section of the study entails the research methodology and measurement scale used for data collection, the present study is quantitative in nature and data was collected through questionnaire from the tourists in Thailand. The measurement scales for each construct were adopted from the previous studies and was examined on 5 points Likert scale. The measurement scale for travel intention was adopted from the study of (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020), the measurement scale for organizational response towards COVID-19 was adopted from (Filimonau et al., 2020), to measure the tourists' behavior the scale was adopted from the study of (Jafari et al., 2020), and the measurement scale of perception of control towards COVID-19 was adopted from the study of (Goodwin et al., 2020). The data was collected from the tourists of Thailand from different places based on simple random sampling through (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) table and sample size drawn was 385. Initially, 500 questionnaires were distributed for data collection and 309 complete responses were received.

Analysis and discussion

The current section entails the analysis of collected data through Smart-PLS; the analysis section has two phases including measurement model assessment to check the reliability and validity of the constructs. The second section of analysis consists of structural equation model (SEM) to investigate the relationship between constructs of the framework.

Measurement Model assessment

The first section of analysis consists of measurement model assessment for construct validity and reliability, the current section determines the Cronbach alpha, composite reliability and average variance extract (AVE) to examine the reliability and validity. The Cronbach alpha must remain higher than 0.70 for acceptable alpha, the composite reliability must remain higher than 0.70 and AVE must remain higher than 0.50 for validity according to (Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Hopkins & G. Kuppelwieser, 2014). The table 1 below demonstrates the values for Cronbach alpha, composite reliability and AVE; the figure 2 presents the measurement model.

Table 1. **Construct reliability and validity**

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
PoC	0.808	0.873	0.634
TB	0.807	0.863	0.528
TI	0.910	0.943	0.847
orgRes	0.945	0.961	0.859

The above table demonstrates the Cronbach alpha, Composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE); the Cronbach alpha for each variable was determined and observed that perception of control (COVID-19) was found to be 0.808, the tourists' behavior was observed as 0.807, the Cronbach alpha for travel intention was observed as 0.910 and for organizational response towards COVID-19 was observed as 0.945; that shows acceptable statistically and all constructs are reliable. The composite reliability is also determined and found that perception of control was observed as 0.873, the tourists' behavior was observed as 0.863, the composite reliability for travel intention was observed as 0.943 and organizational response towards COVID-19 was observed as 0.961; the average variance extracted for perception of control was found as 0.634, the tourists behavior was observed as 0.528, the travel intention was observed as 0.847, and organizational response towards COVID-19 was fond to be 0.859 that shows acceptable validity and reliable constructs based on criteria of (Hair Jr et al., 2014).

Discriminant Validity

The PLS-algorithm method determines the discriminant validity of the constructs as shown in the table 2 below. The discriminant validity compares the square root of AVE with correlations of other constructs. The intersection value in table shows the square root of AVE and it must remain higher than the correlation values of same column (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2: **Discriminant Validity**

	PoC	TB	TI	orgRes
PoC	0.796			
TB	0.546	0.727		
TI	0.623	0.533	0.920	
orgRes	0.652	0.546	0.714	0.927

The above table 2 shows the discriminant validity of the constructs; the square root of AVE for the construct of perception of control found to be

0.796 that is higher than the all values of same column. The square root of AVE of Thai tourists behavior was found to be 0.727 that is higher than the remaining correlation values, similarly the square root of AVE of travel intention was observed as higher as compare to correlation values with other variable, and square root of AVE of organizational response towards COVID-19 found to be 0.927 and higher than the remaining correlation values and fulfills the criteria recommended by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).
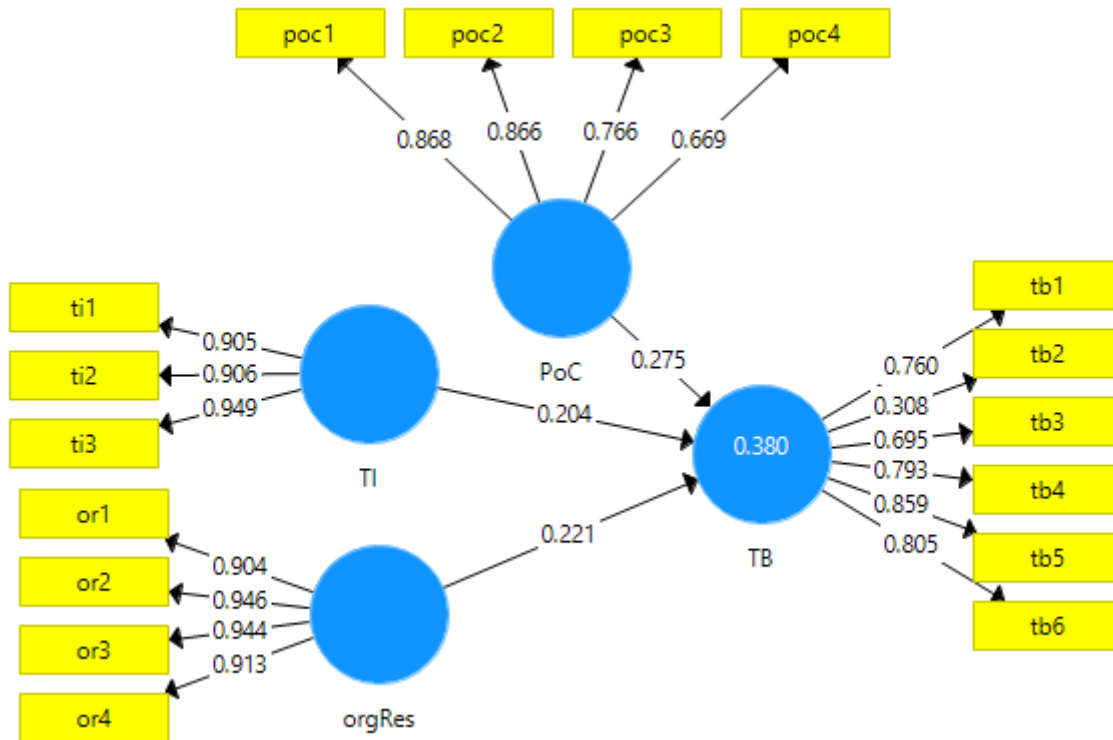
Measurement Assessment Model

Figure 2. Measurement model

Structural Equation Model (SEM)

This section of the study entails the investigation of hypothesized relationship; it is determined through the bootstrapping method of PLS. The relationship between constructs is assessed on the base of β value, t-statistics and p value; the significance of the hypothesis is determined on the base of t-value that must remain higher than 1.96 with 5% error margin and p-value must remain lower than 0.05 for acceptable relationship (Hair Jr et al., 2014). The following table 3 demonstrates the results of direct hypothesized relationships. The first hypothesis H1 investigates the relationship between travel intention and Thai tourists' behavior in COVID-19 perspective; the result of H1 shows that (β = 0.204; t-statistics = 2.354; p value = 0.019) and found that t-statistics and p value are according to the acceptable significance criteria. The hypothesis H2 investigated the relationship between organizational response towards COVID-19 and Thai tourist's behavior; the results of the H2 shows that (β = 0.221; t-statistics = 2.362; p value = 0.019); so therefore, H2 is significantly accepted based on t-value and p value. The direct hypothesis H3 investigated the relationship between perception of control COVID-19 perspective and Thai tourists' behavior COVID-19 perspective; however, the perception of control is moderating variable, but direct relationship is also tested. The result of the hypothesis H3 shows that (β = 0.275; t-statistics = 2.933; p value = 0.004); so therefore, hypothesis is accepted on statistical grounds. In nutshell, all three hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 found to be significant statistically.

Table 3. **Direct relationship**

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Poc -> TB	0.275	2.933	0.004
TI -> TB	0.204	2.354	0.019
orgRes -> TB	0.221	2.362	0.019

Moderation effect

This section determines the moderation effect of perception of control between exogenous constructs including travel intention and organizational response towards COVID-19 and endogenous construct Thai tourists' behavior. The table 4 demonstrates the moderation effect and assessed on the base of t-value and p value, the t-value must remain higher than 1.96 for acceptable significance.

Table 4. **Moderation effect**

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Moderating Effect 1 -> TB	-0.162	1.953	0.051
Moderating Effect 2 -> TB	0.053	0.554	0.580

The above table 4 shows moderation role of perception of control; the hypothesis H4 investigates the moderation effect between travel intention and Thai tourists' behavior, the results show that (β = -0.162; t-statistics = 1.96; p value = 0.05); this clearly moderates the relationship between travel intention and Thai tourists' behavior by changing the direction of relation and t-value shows its significance. So H4 is accepted statistically. The hypothesis H5 investigates the moderation effect between organizational response and Thai tourists' behavior; the results (β = 0.053; t-statistics = 0.554; p value = 0.580) shows that no moderation is reported as t-value found to be lower than cutoff point. So therefore, no moderation is reported and H5 is rejected on statistical grounds.
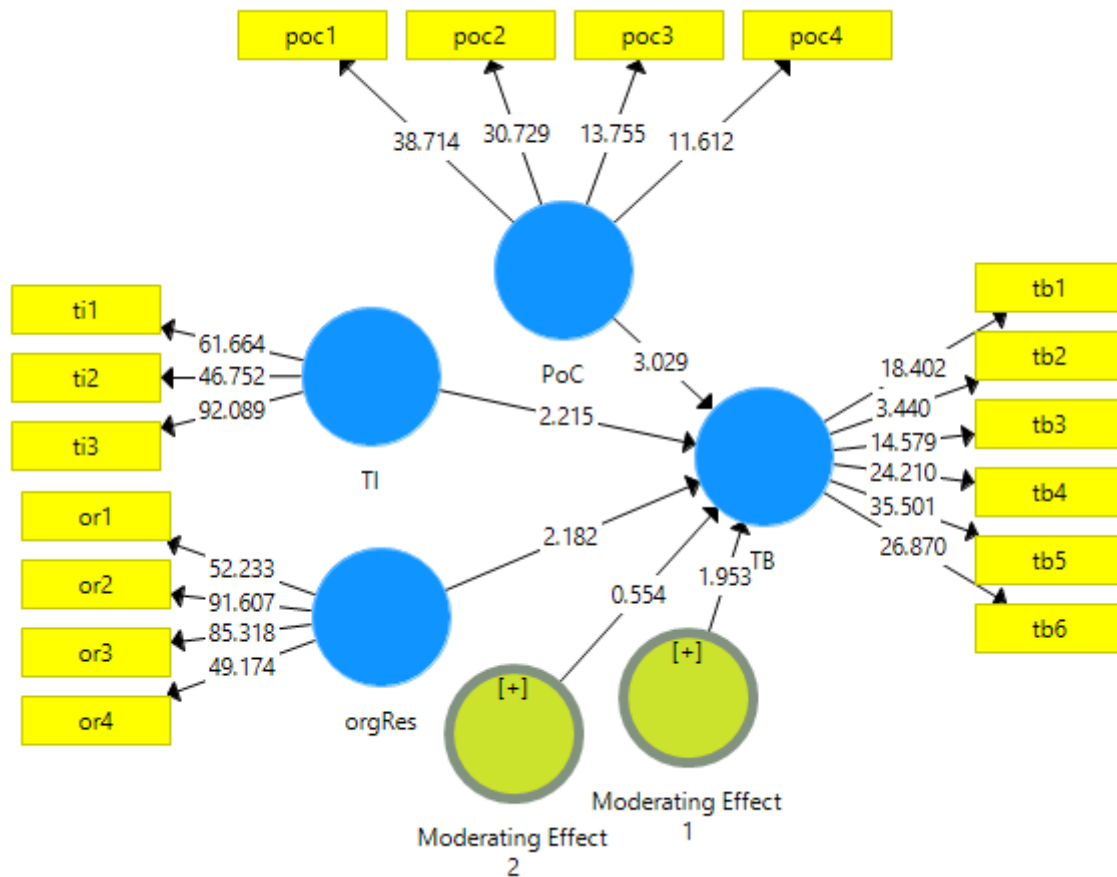
Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Figure 3. **SEM**

Conclusion

The study addressed the current pandemic COVID-19 phenomenon in detail that has devastatingly affected all aspects of the life. The rapid spread of corona virus negatively impacted the businesses of almost all industries, but tourism sector is worst hit due to imposed restrictions on movement and close social contact. The current

effort examines the Thai tourists' behavior in COVID-19 perspective influenced by travel intention and organizational response towards COVID-19 spread. The study also incorporated the moderation effect of perception of control towards COVID-19 between exogenous and endogenous constructs. The data was collected through structured adopted questionnaires from tourists of Thailand and was analyzed through Smart-PLS. The results of the study demonstrated that travel intention significantly influence the Thai tourists' behavior that if the intention is to make the trip while adopting preventive measures and based on accuracy of information available for the destination. The organizational response towards COVID-19 also found to be significant in explaining the Thai tourists' behavior that generally organizations follow the government rules and regulation and avoid social contacts so therefore it influences the behavior of Thai tourists. The direct relationship between perception of control COVID-19 and Thai tourists' behavior was also examined and found statistically significant results that show that perception of tourists to prevent the disease influence the behavior. In the second phase moderation effect was examined between independent and dependent variables. The results of the study reported that perception of control towards COVID-19 fully moderate the relationship between travel intention and Thai tourists' behavior; but no moderation is reported between organizational response towards COVID-19 and Thai tourists' behavior. In short, the direct hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 reported the statistically significant in explaining the Thai tourists' behavior, further moderation effect with H4 was statistically significant but hypothesis H5 was rejected on statistical grounds. The negative consequences of COVID-19 are expected to be long lasting and it may take longer than expectations to get back to normal and re-emergence of the Thai tourism industry. So therefore, it is recommended that future studies should be conducted more details and social distancing aspect in determining the psychological negative behaviors of individuals.

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