

## Marketing to Thailand's elderly with social media

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[Research](#)

This article explains how brands can best connect with Thailand's aging consumers, including consumer trends and social media habits (LINE).

- The Foundation for Older Persons' Development predicts that by the year 2030, the aging population will reach 26.3% of the total population and by 2040 it will reach 32.1% of the total population.
- 70% of those surveyed use cash when they go shopping; 27% use credit cards – the latter group is senior citizens that are still in the work force.
- The top three concerns for senior citizens are: health (60.9%), financial security (30.2%) and future security of their offspring (28.9%).
- Brands should help make the elders feel that they are still relevant and important to the family by using LINE to provide easier sharing services and reminders to family members to interact with their aging parents and other elderly relatives.

### Thailand 2020: Principles for Marketing Success

This article is part of a series of articles on marketing success in Thailand. [Read more](#).

### From aging to aged

It may surprise many but as we write this article and looking toward the next two to three years, Thailand is steadily shifting from an Aging Society to an Aged Society.

The term Aging Society refers to a society that has a population over 60 years of age equal to or more than 10 percent of the total population or a population over 65 equal to or more than seven percent of the population, while the Aged Society refers to the society that has a population over 60 years of age equal to or more than 20 percent of the total population or a population over 65 equal to or more than 14 percent of the population.

According to the United Nations report *World Population Ageing*, 2017 marked the first time in history that

Thailand has more senior citizens than children. At this rate, The Foundation for Older Persons' Development predicts that by the year 2030 the aging population will reach 17.6 million or 26.3 percent of the total population and by 2040 it will reach 20.5 million or 32.1 percent of the total population. However, according to predictions from the Foundation for Research and Development for Thai Senior Citizens Thailand will enter the Aged Society as soon as the year 2021.

This trend has prompted both the government and the private sector to expedite their work on promoting the welfare and well-being of the aging population. Before we look into the future, it might be a good idea to take a brief look at the senior population in Thailand at present.

## Getting to know Thailand's silver population

A 2015 nation-wide survey by the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) which studied 1,254 senior Thai citizens aged 60 upward included the following results:

- **Hobbies:** reading (54%), sports (41%), traveling (33%), music/ dance (14%) and volunteer work (11.48%)
- **Social Network Use:** LINE (21%), Facebook (13%), email (4%) and Twitter (2.39%)
- **Social Activities:** religious group (45%), professional group (18%), sports/ music and cultural group (13%), volunteer group (13%), political group (6%), other groups such as senior citizen group (4%)
- **Self-Reported Health Condition: Physical health:** excellent (18%), good (43%), relatively ok (25%), not so good (12%) and not good at all (0.8%)
- **Mental health:** excellent (22%), good (53%), relatively ok (18%), not so good (5%) and not good at all (0.3%)

## Active aging

Many studies have been done on how one can prepare for the aging society. Emphasis has been put on the quality of life of senior citizens in Thailand. Many terms have been coined such as "Active Aging", "Productive Aging" and "Successful Aging".

A 2011 study by Watcharaporn Paorohit, titled Living Longer: Living as Active Aging, came up with the following suggestions.

### 1. Preparation on physical and mental health

1. consuming nutritious food: less meat and fat, more vegetables, fruits and fish,
2. exercising regularly,
3. sleeping adequately,
4. abstaining from alcohol, tobacco and other toxic substances,
5. taking good care of one's mental health by meditating.

### 2. Preparation on finance and housing

The study suggests that one plans ahead how one would like to spend the senior years. For example, start on a

saving plan for housing, health insurance and living expenses. This is especially important for people with no pension or no one to depend on financially.

### **3. Preparation on participating in social life**

This includes social activities with friends and family and participation in activities with organizations of one's own choice.

## **Analyzing the trends and spotting opportunities**

The Office of Knowledge Management and Development (OKMD), a public organization, has done extensive studies on Thailand's Aging Society and came up with the following three crucial factors that will affect the social outlook of Thai society in the long-term are: 1) lower birth rate, with less people planning to marry and start a family; 2) healthier population; and 3) increasing life expectancy.

As for short-term catalysts for socio-economic change, the OKMD has identified the following factors as being important for aging Thais:

- extended retirement age, meaning increasing income and purchasing power;
- flexible working conditions, meaning senior citizens can work from home;
- rising need for senior citizens' specially-trained nurses and caretakers;
- rapid improvement in medical technology;
- a better, more comprehensive welfare system;
- an abundance of choices in saving and investment.

To ensure they have quality of life, senior citizens will need: products and services tailored especially for them; the ability to live independently; long-term health security; financial security; the ability to shop conveniently for quality products; the ability to explore new life experiences; the ability to stay in the work force long after retirement age; and the ability to become an entrepreneur.

Naturally, the OKMD discovered that there will be a growing need for the following professions: nurses and caretakers that are specially-trained to take care of senior citizens; fitness trainers; financial advisors specializing in retirement planning; and professionals specializing in customizing homes for senior citizens.

## **Noteworthy stats relating to senior citizens**

A 2015 poll, titled "Behavior and Attitude of Thai Senior Citizens in the Year 2020," which surveyed 378 Thais aged 50 years old upward found that:

- If they have more income, they would like to save it first. Their savings of choice is saving accounts at banks. After saving, they would like to spend their money on traveling.
- A troubling discovery: 19.4 percent of those surveyed have no savings.
- Seventy percent of those surveyed use cash when they go shopping. Twenty seven percent use credit cards. The latter group is senior citizens that are still in the work force.

- Top three concerns for senior citizens are: health (60.9%), financial security (30.2%) and future security of their offspring (28.9%).

In addition, the OKMD noted that well-to-do senior citizens with high purchasing power are a sizable market in Thailand. Now that we know that senior citizens are the growing group we should watch for, the question is: How best to reach them and communicate with them?

It was not only the 2015 NIDA's poll cited above that discovered LINE application is the social media of choice of Thai senior citizens, many other surveys also came up with the same result. LINE is the dominant social platform in Thailand. LINE is a freeware app for instant communications on electronic devices such as smartphones, tablet computers, and personal computers. Line users exchange texts, images, video and audio, and conduct free VoIP conversations and video conferences.

## LINE in Thailand

According to a Nielsen survey, the average time a Thai person spends on his/her smartphone per day is 234 minutes, a third of which or 70 minutes is spent on using the LINE application.

In the beginning of 2016, the number of LINE users in Thailand hit 33 million, second to only Japan's total. Earlier this year (2017), LINE Corporation announced that it has reached 83% of Thailand's population. The latest number of Thailand's population according to Mahidol University's Thailandometers is 66 million. That means LINE users in Thailand have now reached 54 million, and are most likely growing. At present, LINE has moved far beyond its original purpose of texting. Its main incomes now are from online advertising, sticker (stamp) sales, content such as games, and loyalty fees from products based on its characters.

### Key statistics on LINE in Thailand:

- There have been more than 500 million downloads of LINE's sticker sets.
- Three million Thais read LINE WEBTOON every month.
- More than two million Thais use Rabbit LINE Pay, an E-Wallet system.
- There have been 12 million downloads for LINE TV, which was first launched in Thailand in October 2014.
- There are more than one million LINE@ users. Line@ is a business account that one can use to communicate with clients via broadcast messages, 1:1 chat, and Timeline posts. Any LINE users can create an account for free.
- Compared to users in other countries, Thai LINE users send out the most images.
- Another two LINE services that quickly caught on and became number one in the market are LINE MAN (food/ messenger/ convenience store/ post office delivery service) and LINE TODAY (online content).

### LINE and Thai senior citizens

There are several studies about the use of LINE application among Thai senior citizens. One worth noting here is from NIDA, titled, The Study of Communication Behavior in LINE Application Data Sharing of Elderly People by Kirana Somwatasun and Kultip Sastraruji, Ph.D.

The study, which surveyed 400 Thai senior citizens, found that the majority of elderly LINE application users are females with a Bachelor degree whose career are either in state enterprise or government sector. Their monthly

average income is more than 30,000 Baht. They learned how to use LINE application on mobile phone from their off-spring, relatives and siblings.

The senior citizens surveyed use LINE daily to contact with their friends and family for approximately 30 minutes each session. They have been using LINE for more than two years. Their most favorite activity is to send “Morning Greetings” images or stickers to their family and friends. The images could be nature views or mood expression stickers. They are unlikely to send voice message or to shop online. However they are more likely to send news or funny clips in an embedded format, not a video link from YouTube.

The senior citizens surveyed feel that using the LINE application somehow makes them a trendy and updated person. Another research in 2017 from Khonkaen University titled Elderlies’ Experience in Using LINE Application: A Phenomenological Study, by Witsapat Chaichuay, discovered that Thai senior citizens use the “Morning Greeting” images to convey their care for others and to communicate that they themselves are still doing well.

## **Thai senior citizens as influencers**

In Thailand, senior citizens are clearly the influencers for the whole family. They love to share what they know to their children, siblings, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Younger Thais generally respect their elders and try to accommodate their needs as best as they can, the elders always influence restaurant choices, where to go for a family holiday, which hospitals to go to, etc.

The Knorr brand once did a campaign where they published recipes on their Line@ accounts so that mothers and grandmothers could cook for their loved ones. This was paired with a successful YouTube clip that went viral.

With the advent of LINE, especially the use of LINE group chat, Thai families are brought closer together, with the elders at the heart of it. And let’s not forget that the elders themselves also belong to many or the same-age group chats: classmates, ex-colleagues, etc. This means many new business opportunities that can be further explored.

## **Three things you need to consider:**

1. Brands that target families would benefit from having easy-to-share clips and images that the elders would love to share.
2. Brands should help make the elders feel that they are still relevant and important to the family by using LINE to provide easier sharing services and reminders to family members to interact with their aging parents and other elderly relatives.
3. Through LINE, brands may try to create a “hang-out space” for the elders as they still wish to “remain young.”

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