



# How Facebook Has Enhanced Thailand's Ethnic Women Entrepreneurs' Community-Based Homestay Tourism Development

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## Abstract

This study inquired into a community of ethnic Lahu women in northern Thailand who utilize social media in community-based homestay tourism businesses to transform their socioeconomic statuses and negotiate traditional gender power relations. As a social construction, they have traditionally been limited to the domestic sphere, requiring them to do housework entirely, while men engage in the public sphere to generate family income. This scenario has maintained male superiority in ways that perpetuate gender inequality and the sociopolitical dichotomy of the public and private spheres. Due to technological modernity and economic development, social media has become a public sphere that these women are empoweringly using to cultivate economic and social capital. For example, as a marketing strategy, they use Facebook to promote their homestay tourism businesses locally and internationally. This space is also being used to negotiate gender power relations within their families and communities. Another notable element of this modern phenomenon is that these marginalized ethnic people, men and women alike, now transformatively realize the modern-day value of their ethnic identities. They are using social media and homestay tourism as soft-power tools for countering a national sociopolitical discourse that inaccurately portrays them as rural, uncivilized “forest destroyers.” This study underlines that the process of social empowerment includes gaining a sense of independence while taking individual and collective actions to transform discourses, institutions, and social norms to reflect a holistic understanding of traditional and modern social phenomena.

**Keywords:** social media, Facebook, gender, homestay, tourism, Thailand, community-based tourism, women entrepreneurs

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## 1. Introduction

West & Zimmerman (1987) and Butler (1990) emphasized gender as a social construction. The choices and restrictions placed on a sex category are produced, replicated, and legitimized by the powerful ideology of gender (Moloney & Fenstermaker, 2002). At the family, community, and societal levels, gender is the foundation of political relationships and power relations (Swain, 1995). Feminist political economy focuses on the domestic sphere, where production and reproduction intersect with sociocultural constructions. Women are limited to the domestic sphere, which encompasses the primary work conducted at home. This is the political dichotomy of the public and domestic spheres, and it is related to the reinforcing of male dominance and superiority over women. For instance, women are responsible for caring for their husbands, who must work outside the public sphere to support their families. Women have more space in the public sphere as a result of economic development, and they use economic conditions to negotiate gender power relations in their families or communities (Fuji, 2010; Khuntharoj, 2014; Sudprasert, 2008; Ngome, 2003; Montreevat, 1998). Economic power increases the value and status of women, as well as their socially perceived and tangible value, which they can and do use for negotiating power and transforming gender relations.

Community-based tourism (CBT) has grown to be a significant part of the socioeconomic fabric of Huay Pha CBT village (a fictitious name). Social media marketing for the community began in 2014 and has significantly increased from 2015 to the present. Social media today has a huge impact on villagers' links to the globalized world and, as a result, on the growing number of tourists visiting Huay Pha village when considering the promotion of tourism in the community.

In homestay tourism practice, Lahu women play a significant role in welcoming and taking care of guests while also taking care of their families. Lahu women interact with guests in a homestay and perform gender roles as a portion of managing the "hospitality service" impression. For instance, women participated in CBT activities, CBT-related workshops, and trainings.

As a result of globalization, the world is becoming more connected and compressed, and information technology is promoting global interactions (Giddens, 1990). Social media is not just a channel for communication. On social media platforms, people communicate with friends, coworkers, family members, neighbors, business partners, and strangers. Nowadays, Lahu people interact with others on social media platforms, such as Line and Facebook, on both local and national scales. Social media has affected CBT homestay tourism and has given women the ability to bargain with the public sphere's power relations at the family and community levels. Miller et al. (2016) argued that rather than focusing solely on what people publish on social media, we should also consider the content of their posts.

These days, social media in the public sphere has enabled Lahu women to communicate more with the outside world. Social media use in the homestay business is connected to a local scale in the larger world. To understand how Lahu women who participate in homestay tourism portray themselves and the community in the context of tourism, both text and photographs from their Facebook posts are examined. The objective of this study is to provide insight into Lahu women's online public sphere and investigate how Lahu women benefit from or are empowered by their involvement in the CBT tourism business. This phenomenon requires more research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Gender Relations in Tourism Development*

The United Nations World Tourism Organization maintains that tourism, as a market-driven initiative, has the potential to contribute to enhanced gender equality and the empowerment of women; this is in line with the Third Millennium Development Goal. Tourism could assist women in increasing their management of natural resources, as well as their economic, educational, and political empowerment (Ateljevic, 2008). In terms of gender power relations, mirroring the sentiments of liberal feminists, this can also empower women by increasing gender equality. On the other hand, Marxist feminists argue that while capitalism bolsters opportunities for women to increase their economic status, potentially cultivating more life options, capitalism as well as public duties can also create a subsequent “triple burden” for women. Thus, ‘development’ resulting from state policies and economic development (i.e., capitalism)’s cash economy influenced by globalization results in the transforming of gender relations; this is in terms of gender roles, household decision-making, and social status. This also includes women’s accumulated burdens of caring for both domestic and public work, including tourism, farming, and community service. Likewise, there are power relations related to economics that impact gender relations between men and women (Beneria et al., 2016).

The transformation of tourism development in Thailand is embedded in state policy and the market economy. The impacts have accumulated. In tourism, there are multi-level governance interactions among actors, such as the government, non-government organizations, tour operators, tourists, communities, etc. This is associated with politics as well as economic and relational power (Lattanasouvannaphonh, 2011). Tourism development bolsters economic resources, although not all people receive benefits from tourism development (Cohen, 1996; Kaosa-ard, 2007).

Tourism development impacts social power relations; it is also a politic of cultural commodification (Jatuworapruet, 2005; Paasayawan, 2011; Lattanasouvannaphonh, 2011). Ethnic culture has become a tourism commodity; therefore, ethnic people have become objects of tourism and national economic development agendas (Jatuworapruet, 2005). This often results in disempowering local communities by controlling the presentation of their cultural identities (Paasayawan, 2011). Tourism development is linked to a high number of tourists. This results in sex tourism, the degradation of natural resources, the loss of cultural identity, and the transformation of gender relations (Cohen, 1996; Kaosa-ard, 2007; Strassen, 2007; Wen, 2007; Dunn, 2007; Juan & Piboonrungraj, 2007; Choowonglert, 2012).

The most significant boost in tourism came during the Vietnam War, when Thailand became one of the primary destinations for the “rest and recreation” visits of American soldiers. These visits were significant not only in terms of the increasing number of foreign visitors but also as a principal factor in the change in Thailand’s worldwide image (Cohen, 1996).

Tourists began to be particularly attracted to Thailand in the mid-1960s (Cohen, 1996). From 1979 to the 1990s, the Thai state developed the first National Tourism Development Plan, which was formulated with the help of world organizations (Kaosa-ard, 2007). Ethnic tourism is likewise created as an authentic place to attract tourists. From the state policy of tourism development, which wanted to drive the country’s market economy growth from the 1980s to the 1990s, significant changes occurred in ethnic tourism, reflected on the local scale. The number of tourists visiting the highlands has increased enormously. “Mass tourism, of an admittedly non-conventional kind, has

penetrated the highlands” (Cohen, 1996). Homestay tourism has become an important secondary source of income for ethnic communities, primarily serving the hosts’ economic needs (Cohen, 1996). Villagers derive economic benefits from handicrafts, hosting, and diverse services (Cohen, 1996). However, Cohen argued that not all villages could benefit from tourism development. He indicates that remote or less developed villages receive few benefits from tourism. Similarly, Kaosa-ard (2007) points out that income distribution in tourism development is uneven in Thailand.

During 1998–1999, the Thai government started promoting Thailand as a tourism country under the “Amazing Thailand” campaign. The government supported the research and development of homestays with CBT management and initiated Thai homestay certification standards for community projects and service providers. This was established to ensure that homestay participants enjoy positive experiences during their stay in Thailand. The Thai government expects that CBT will have the potential to generate income, reduce poverty, ensure cultural conservation, and encourage natural resource conservation for the community (Sarobol et al., 2002). CBT development supports and bolsters local community empowerment. “It features conservation, community development, cultural exchanges between tourists and the local community, and cultivates opportunities for tourists to experience various aspects of village lifestyle” (Prachvuthy, 2006).

However, tourism development is associated with gender relations. Jatuworapruerk (1998) indicated that tourism development creates internal pressure from external conditions, which has transformed gender relations. Tourism generates income for women and transforms gender relations in terms of societal roles and statuses. Furthermore, Tao et al. (2016) state that there are relationships between tourism development and gender equality. Tourism can change Hakka women’s status, including aspects of their self-development and the division of family labor.

However, there is an interrelationship between home and work. A home is a place for women and domestic work. In tourism development, homes used for commerce blur the boundaries between the home and the workplace. In commercial home businesses, women assume responsibility for domestic tasks while playing commercial roles, such as hosting guests (Talinbayi et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Demovic (2016) and Boonabaana (2012) state that intersectionality still exists and impacts women’s oppression in tourism development. Demovic (2016) indicated that women in Tanzania cannot benefit from tourism development in a patriarchal system with a male-dominant ideology. Meanwhile, Boonabaana (2012) revealed that women in Uganda are oppressed because the Christian religion limits women from working in CBT initiatives.

In conclusion, gender inequality resulting from development affects the roles and statuses of women and men, which is transforming gender relations. In tourism development, the CBT approach has become an important element of the sustainable tourism spectrum. It is a platform for encouraging local empowerment, generating economic wealth to reduce poverty in grassroots communities, preserving culture and nature, and promoting gender equity. The increasing number of tourists also has an impact on communities’ economic, cultural, and natural resource use. Ethnic communities are likewise experiencing the primary societal impacts of culture becoming a commodity. This attracts tourists and creates pressure for cultural exchange, which also perpetuates transformations in social relations.

## **2.2 Influence of Social Media on the Tourism Business**

Globalization has influenced tourism development, both at the international and national levels. Globalization is not just an economic matter; it is also concerned with issues of cultural meaning. While the values and meanings attached to place remain significant, we are increasingly involved in networks that extend far beyond our immediate physical locations (Baker, 2006).

In a globalizing world, terms of place and space are not fixed (Massey, 1994); it compresses the world while increasing global connections and information technology provides more connections throughout the world (Giddens, 1990). Social media is a platform through which people communicate. Social media is a place within which people socialize, not just a means of communication (Miller et al., 2016). Social media platforms are places where people have interrelationships with others, such as friends, colleagues, family, neighbors, customers, and strangers.

Miller et al. (2016) argued that people are concerned that social media may cut people off from real-world interactions and lead to an increase in individualism. Social media, however, makes it possible for people to stay in touch with their friends and family, even if they move away from home. Social media has mostly made human communication more visual. Facebook is a powerful social media platform that encourages communication through images and photos. Sometimes, people merely share images, but this might increase interaction and dialogue.

In today's world, social media and cell phones are essential components of daily life. Smartphones can be produced and sold at low prices in free-market capitalism, with constant upgrades. This trend is still widely used, particularly among elderly people as well as people of the working class who previously used social media fewer times. People now have additional options for connecting with one another because of the new engagement of platforms that fill gaps between the private and public sectors (Miller et al., 2016). Additionally, plenty of applications are available; users of smartphones can simultaneously chat, text, and exchange photos. As a result, people will be inspired to use social media more in the future.

Miller et al. (2016) proposed that social media and additional digital technologies help people develop a new set of capacities. Social media is much more effective at supporting small businesses than it is at supporting large businesses. Large businesses may be concerned about data privacy, which may be important in terms of competition.

Kumari (2020) emphasized that social media has given women numerous advantages, including social, psychological, and economic benefits for women in India. There is a virtual gender gap in terms of women's digital literacy because of illiteracy. Social media marketing is a very affordable and straightforward option for female business owners. Entrepreneurs may quickly and easily receive feedback and suggestions regarding their online products or services using social media. It is frequently utilized in the corporate world since it offers quick and instant contact and feedback, and it is used to interact and communicate with friends, family, and neighbors. Using various web-based tools or applications, users are prosumers who create, share, and consume content, including information, audio-visuals, images, papers, etc.

Melissa et al. (2013) highlighted the challenges that women entrepreneurs confront in terms of social and economic capital. It becomes challenging for women to fund their enterprises because they typically stay at home and care for their families or take on lower-paying employment. By encouraging them to launch their firms, online businesses have significant potential to empower women in Indonesia. Online businesses can be seen as providing a solution to the difficulties women face in juggling their professional and familial obligations. Due to its distinctive characteristics, such as mobility and flexibility, the social capital earned via interactions on social media, the lack

of time clients must visit physical stores, and the confidence and satisfaction experienced by women because of this enterprise. Online entrepreneurship is a beneficial option for women in Indonesia. Women can access larger target audiences that are located outside their local areas by conducting business on social media. They can attract clients from other parts of Indonesia and even beyond by using social media.

International and domestic tourism development has been impacted by globalization. People can connect using social media as a platform. Social media is more than just a medium of communication; it is also a place where individuals can interact (Miller et al., 2016). Nowadays, women participate in the economy by working as vendors and traders at both the local and global levels. Women connect with their networks and communicate via information technology, such as the Internet, television, and radio (Svetamra et al., 2013). International and domestic tourism development have both been impacted by globalization. Globalization is not just an economic issue; it also has cultural significance concerns. We are increasingly a part of networks that go far beyond our immediate physical locations, even though the values and meanings associated with place continue to be significant.

### ***2.3. Women's Negotiations in Gender Relations***

Similarly, Jatuworapruerk (1998), Fuji (2010), Khuntharoj (2014), Sudprasert (2008), Ngome (2003), and Montreevat (1998) mentioned that economic development (i.e., capitalism) creates conditions that transform gender relations. Gender is fluid. Gender roles and gender performance, integrated with women's negotiations in gender relations, can create a debate on how women can be agency, which is prominently discussed among scholars. Svetamra et al. (2013) revealed that feminist scholars emphasize women's roles, social status, gender relations, and related negotiations. It realizes that women play important roles in the domestic and public spheres, although women are tied to domestic ideologies in the patriarchal system. In this argument, Marxist feminists claim that there is a relationship between patriarchy and capitalism (Hartmann, 1981).

However, women's value is hence limited to domestic work, which is a social construction. Nevertheless, women can escape from this and move into the public sphere. However, women still end up being related to production and reproduction within capitalism-based gender ideologies and cultural constructions. Nowadays, women play roles in the economic realm by being traders and vendors, which are linked to local and global scales and levels. Women use information technology, such as the Internet, television, radio, etc., to communicate and build connections with their networks (Svetamra et al., 2013).

With economic development, women have more space in the public sphere and use economic conditions for negotiating gender power relations in their families or communities (Fuji, 2010; Khuntharoj, 2014; Sudprasert, 2008; Ngome, 2003; Montreevat, 1998). Economic power increases the value and status of and for women as well as socially perceived and tangible value, which they can and do use for negotiating power and transforming gender relations.

Furthermore, Ngome (2003) indicated that women's ability to negotiate decision-making powers is dependent upon their access to independent income and choices created through literacy, numeracy, and other formal education. Moreover, Sudprasert (2008) revealed that power negotiation is fluid. Among women, for example, adjust their negotiation power when life conditions change, such as having more knowledge, economic status, etc. Thus, women in different conditions might have different negotiation powers. The issue of how intersectionality affects women's negotiation

power is explored in the studies of Sudprasert (2008), Makpun (2008), and Doncha-um (2012).

Based on the literature review, ethnic women use different strategies in different situations to negotiate gender power relations. This is related to economic, social, and cultural factors, including economic empowerment, networks, contested meanings, rituals, and information technology, such as social media. However, the norms and intersectionality that affect women's negotiation capacity have been highly discussed by scholars (Mohanty, 1984; Crenshaw, 1989; Beneria, 2016).

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Scope of the Study**

The research site was investigated in a Lahu ethnic village that has been operating homestay CBT for over 15 years in the Pang Mapha subdistrict of Mae Hongson Province in northern Thailand. The researcher has given the fictional "Huay Pha village" a name in this article.

To provide deeper knowledge of experiences, phenomena, and social contexts, this research uses qualitative methods. This research used a gender lens to conduct or analyze qualitative field research. The researcher wrote reports using both narrative and descriptive stories (Emerson et al., 2001). As for the research ethic, the researcher did not use the interviewees' real names in the report; instead, the researcher used pseudonyms. This study investigates how individual Lahu women entrepreneurs who engage in homestay tourism represent themselves and the village in the context of tourism by examining their Facebook posts, which include both text and images.

#### **3.2. Data Collection**

The key informants in this study are women who run the homestay and are members of the village CBT group, which consists of 24 households operating homestays. Nevertheless, only four of these women did not utilize social media. Visual data was gathered from the key informants to understand Lahu women's daily lives and the Facebook postings they generated to promote tourism. Regarding research ethics, the researcher requested the key informants' consent before conducting an in-depth interview and becoming their Facebook friends. Twenty Lahu women who agreed to participate in the study provided the visual data, including a Lahu woman who runs a well-known small business noodle restaurant for tourists in the village and is a former homestay member of the village CBT group, as well as 19 women who operate homestay tourism and are also members of the village CBT group. The researcher examined their Facebook posts from 2017 through 2019 to discover more about their texts, photographs, and videos. The researcher also acquired secondary information from websites and other relevant social media sites. To gain information at random, the researcher also conducted in-depth interviews with tourists who visited Huay Pha village.

#### **3.3. Data Analysis**

Regarding Facebook posts, Lahu women typically use photographs on social media to communicate messages. Images are subjects; they are created and interpreted using tacit knowledge (Rose, 2001). How do Lahu women connect with the deeper meaning of the images that they publish online to promote tourism in the research area?

Content analyses were used to examine information from interviews and two years' worth of social media engagement. For instance, the researcher collected screenshots of informants' Facebook posts. They were categorized based on frequently

used keywords, such as those about famous people who were visiting (or visited) the village.

A popular keyword used in villagers' social media posts was "fogview." This refers to a climatic phenomenon that tourists in Jabo village (and other areas of northern Thailand) can experience only during a certain time of the year (i.e., "the cold season," which is the most popular period for domestic and international tourism to northern Thailand). A primary environmental highlight, this "fogview" involves the early-morning experience of being as though on top of the clouds; it is created by warm(er) air amid the lowlands condensing during the nighttime and creating a thick, beautiful blanket-layer of fog that extends for as far as someone can see. A similar view can be seen while in an airplane while flying above a layer of clouds. This environmental aspect is a primary draw for tourists because it offers an experience that does not happen in Thailand's lowlands, particularly not in warm, dense urban areas such as Bangkok.

#### **4. Historical Context of the Study Area**

Huay Pha village (a fictitious name) is an ethnic Lahu community village comprising a Lahu subgroup called Lahu Na Sheleh. In 2016, there were 60 households, or 270 people, in the village. The villagers' religion centers on spiritual beliefs. The village is located amid a mountain ridge road in northern Thailand's Pang Mapha district of Mae Hongson Province. The Tibetan plateau and China's Qing Hai Province were the origins of the migration paths of the Lahu people. Lahu Na Sheleh was originally an independent ethnic group that immigrated to various locations, such as Myanmar, before settling in a community located in Pang Mapha, Mae Hong Son, Thailand (Strassen, 2007).

Traditionally, Thailand's highland people cultivated crops using shifting cultivation practices. They grew subsistence crops, such as upland rice mixed with vegetables and corn, for consumption and for feeding animals. They also grew opium and traded it for other crops, cash, and other goods (e.g., salt). However, 'shifting cultivation,' as part of the Thai nation-state building discourse, became considered to be the cause of widespread deforestation and forest burning. This was deemed a threat to the sustainability of ecosystems and blamed for natural disasters (e.g., landslides, flooding, etc.). A negative public image of the "hill tribe" was hence constructed by the Thai government under the guise of managing (and controlling) the natural resources of the highland areas. The related discourse is sociocultural politics resulting from the establishment of the Thai nation-state, which values territorialization more than opening space for diversity offered by and through local culture (Luangaramsri, 1998; Jatuworapruet, 2005).

Later, the Thai state implemented a top-down highland development policy to expunge opium cultivation according to the global environmentalist agenda. As a result, ethnic peoples became subject to the Thai state's national forest conservation laws and related rural highland development initiatives. The Thai-German Highland Development (TG-HDP) project came to the village in 1983 and promoted new cash crops to take the place of opium. This had a significant influence, transforming the villagers' way of life into one based on a cash economy and further promoting economic development. During 1989–1993, the TG-HDP project needed community participation in environmental conservation issues; accordingly, there was more pressure to stop growing opium and improve the physical and environmental conditions in the village (Jatuworapruet, 2005). In 1993, the environmental management network set up four districts in Pang Mapha that combined 24 villages, and Huay Pha village was part of this network.

Around 1976–1978, foreigners began to explore the various Phiiman caves in Pang Mapha, after which they became more known to outsiders. According to Jatuworapruerk (2005), foreign tourists emerged in Pang Mapha around 1977. At this time, the historical coffins that were estimated to be about 2,000–3,000 years old in the prehistoric period in Pang Mapha were published in Thai Airways magazine, which is well known among foreign tourists but not among Thai people. This led to more foreign tourists arriving in Pang Mapha who preferred trekking tours. Pang Mapha was thus promoted as a historic site for tourist attractions. Due to the major paved highway that was constructed from Pai, Pang Mapha, to Mae Hong Son, tourists could easily access Pai and Mae Hong Son. The TG-HDP project also planned training sessions and field trips for villages to help them prepare for Pang Mapha’s tourism development before the project was completed. Tourism thus became a new option for local villagers in Pang Mapha to generate income (Jatuworapruerk, 2005).

Furthermore, as Cohen (1996) mentioned, during the 1980s and 1990s, significant changes occurred in ethnic tourism. The number of tourists visiting the highlands increased enormously, and small jungle tour companies offered access to remote ethnic villages in what they called a “jungle trek.” During these treks, tourists were brought to a village, where they stayed for a few hours or a night. Several Mae Hong Son towns, such as Mae Sariang and Pai, were interested in having tour operators. Hotels and guesthouses increased in Pai during that time. Tour operators began to promote the image of ethnic tourism as a drug paradise, as opium and marijuana were easily available in the highlands. Young tourists wanted a new experience and sought to try opium (Cohen, 1996). During that time, a few households in Huay Pha village also generated income from jungle trek tours. Later, the Thai government declared the area of Pang Mapha a conservative forest region in August 2003, calling it “the wild sanctuary Pai watershed.” The forestry office collected admission fees from jungle trek tourists of about 200 baht/head. This later resulted in the decline of the jungle trek tour in the Pang Mapha area (Jatuworapruerk, 2005).

However, even after the TG-HDP ceased in 1998, tourism was still an option to generate income for Huay Pha Lahu village. CBT served as a platform for fostering community empowerment, creating wealth to eliminate poverty in low-income areas, preserving culture and the environment, and advancing gender equity (Sarobol et al., 2002; UNWTO, 2011). With the emergence of these activities in Mae Hong Son’s Pang Mapha district, the study area began to turn toward tourism development. CBT development in Huay Pha village has impacted social change at different stages.

In 2001, the Huay Pha community began addressing CBT. This was primarily supported by NGOs to help lowland “Thai” people better understand the way of life, customs, and culture of the Lahu ethnic group. The purpose of CBT development for villagers, at least openly, has been to show the public that the Lahu people live harmoniously with their forest environment. CBT serves as a soft-power policy tool for managing local culture, natural resources, and economic forces. This rural development program aims to promote national security and the economy while persuading ethnic groups to coexist peacefully with the forest region. During the initial stage, tourism income was supplemental to the income of the villagers. Most tourists were international tourist groups who visited the village via tour companies. Tourists understood the CBT tourism concept, which was explained to them by tour guides from tour companies. In this initial period, all households in the village were members of the CBT group. Some villagers realized that tourism generated little income; therefore, 60% of the members stopped being CBT members. During this period, Lahu men played important roles in homestay tourism services and tourism management, while women were shy and mainly

served support roles, such as cooking. In 2017, the Huay Pha CBT community qualified for the Thai homestay standard from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports.

In 2014, the village was promoted through social media, which significantly boomed from 2015 until today. Nowadays, when considering the promotion of tourism in Huay Pha village, social media has a significant impact on villagers' connections with the globalized world and, consequently, on the increasing number of tourists coming to the village. Both men and women have more connections to this globalized world through social media platforms. In 2014, photographs of a small, local noodle shop with a nice fogview of Huay Pha village were posted on a well-known Thai social media site. However, tourism marketing has been greatly impacted by social media. Thai tourists have started looking for additional information about Huay Pha village on social media since it has become more widely known.

Since 2015, the number of Thai tourists visiting this village has increased by about tenfold since the initial stage of CBT development. This has been a turning point in Huay Pha village's tourism growth. During this time, Thai tourists comprised about 80 percent of those visiting the village. The remaining percentage was comprised of international tourists from tour companies. In 2018, the Huay Pha CBT group had 34 households, roughly 60% of the village's total households, of which 24 households operated homestays. The Huay Pha CBT management group currently has 14 committees. About all the members of these committees are active women. Women are now more confident in their capacity to interact with tourists and provide hospitality services at homestays. However, households that run homestay businesses not only receive economic benefits but also face challenges in adapting to the diverse needs of Thai visitors. The new CBT-based economy has brought about social change as well as a change in women's economic status.

## **5. Findings**

Today's social media has a greater influence on the Lahu ethnic community in Huay Pha village. The Lahu ethnic group in Huay Pha village is increasingly interconnected with the outside world. Lahu men and women use Facebook to share images of their tourism activities, the village's attractions, and Lahu culture to promote tourism. Because it serves as both a real and a virtual space to promote tourism, it gives the CBT village an entirely new dynamic. Virtual space is part of the living space that they use to represent their tourist destination on Facebook. It is a new visual representation for CBT's ethnic village tourism marketing. The Lahu villagers are proud of the beautiful scenery in their community and want to share it on social media.

The emergence of mobile phone technology in the community occurred in 2007. This technology stimulates social interaction. The first mobile network was established close to the village by the first cell phone service provider business. The second cell phone company adopted a similar strategy in 2011 and promoted inexpensive phones. During that time, the Lahu people, especially those who had enough money, steadily used more cell phones.

After the village's tourism started booming in 2015, many locals started using innovative smartphone applications to access social media daily. Due to the lower prices of cell phones, the Lahu people in the village can now afford to purchase them. In one case, a poor Lahu woman from the community saved her own money from selling handicrafts to purchase a smartphone for herself. She requested help from her friend in learning how to utilize social media. These days, she promotes her handicrafts and homestay tourism on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Line.

Like the idea made by Miller et al. (2016), Lahu people in the working class are increasingly using social media. It is easier for Lahu women than for Lahu men to post on and use social media, particularly Facebook. Facebook is mostly used by Lahu women and men as a public social media platform for networking with individuals locally and around the world. However, their limited linguistic proficiency (e.g., in English) limits them from interacting with people in other languages. Compared to younger Lahu women, who typically have a higher education, middle-aged Lahu women have lower levels of education in Thailand. However, Lahu women can use Facebook as an effective tool for sharing images as visual content on social media.

However, Lahu women in the Huay Pha community learned to use new digital platforms, such as social media and mobile phones, to run businesses in the modern era. On social media, both men and women are free to express their identities. Males and females mostly use Facebook as a public social media platform to engage with people locally and globally. The study’s key findings on how Facebook, a social media platform, fosters and influences social changes and enhances ethnic women entrepreneurs in Thailand’s homestay CBT include the following:

**5.1. Facebook Has a Significant Influence on CBT Tourism Marketing**

Social media has had a significant impact on how Huay Pha village is marketed as a tourist destination. Due to the photographs, videos, and stories that illustrate the area’s stunning natural beauty, which have been and are still being shared on various social media platforms, tourism in Huay Pha village has grown substantially. CBT in Huay Pha village has now been recognized on both a national and worldwide scale for tourism.

However, Thai tourists started to become interested in visiting Huay Pha village when it was publicized on social media in December 2014, and they started looking for more details about its location on web search engines. The Google Trends website allows users to examine the search-volume trend of the keyword “Huay Pha.” According to data from the Google Trends website from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2017, searches for the keyword “Huay Pha” in both English and Thai increased between 2015 and 2017 (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of users searching the word “Huay Pha” from the webpage search engine between 2015 and 2017

Year	Number of users searching “Huay Pha” in Thai language	Number of users searching “Huay Pha” in English	Total
2015	641	619	1,260
2016	1,396	766	2,162
2017	1,833	1,512	3,345

Source: <https://trends.google.com> (12 November 2019)

In the past, when a CBT tour program about Lahu ways of life, trekking in the forest, was first introduced in 2012, the chair of the CBT homestay community, who is a member of the younger generation and has graduated from college, began developing the CBT group’s Facebook page to promote it, but it was unsuccessful. The CBT Huay Pha village did not attract any tourists. However, the program tour of the village gained popularity among Thai people after a photo of a noodle store set in a stunning fog scene was shared on social media.

Besides this, in the past, tour companies provided information and images to international tourists. Nowadays, people upload many images to social media, and Google makes it simple to find them. Most photos are of the sea fog; fog is fascinating.

Huay Pha village attracted many Thai tourists due to its stunning fogview. The names of the village's tourist attractions, "Kuay Tiew Lak Sib, View Lak Larn," and "Thi Pak Lak Roy, View Lak Larn," were made up of visitors. When the bloggers posted to the Pantip Thai website, these words emerged. For some examples:

Moreover, on December 10, 2015, a blogger wrote, "Korn Tai Tong Pai...Kuay Tiew Lak Sib, View Lak Larn...Kuay Tiew Chom View + (Huay Pha village) Homestay, Mae Hong Son" in Thai text and posted it on the Pantip webpage (Pantip, 2015). This translates to "You must go before you die... Tens of Baht of the Noodles, Millions of Baht of View... Noodles amid fogview, Huay Pha Homestay, Mae Hong Son."

For example, on the Pantip website, a woman wrote in Thai:

"I'm looking for sea fog elsewhere. My friend sent me a link to the "Kuay Tiew Chom View" Facebook page at Huay Pha village, and I instantly fell in love with one of the pictures there. I'd like to go. I'd like to go. We must go. If we wait a year, it might become a well-known tourist destination. I'm not sure how the village will change during that time. It might not be available if I wanted to go at that time because of capacity issues, long queues, or unavailability. We stay in a CBT group member's homestay. The meal is excellent. We talked with the host; the city does not have this environment..." (Pantip, 2015)

On December 20, 2017, a visitor who stayed with a member of the Huay Pha village homestay group wrote the title of his blog on the Pantip webpage (Pantip, 2017): "Thi Sud Khong Kham Wa. "Thipak Lak Loi...View Lak Larn". In Thai, it translates to "Hundreds of Baht for the Accommodation, Millions of Baht for the View."

After returning from the village, he wrote on Facebook:

"I am still filled with joy. I've been to a lot of places, but this is the one that gives me the most joy. I was attracted to this village by a photograph of a noodle store where a person was seated and eating noodles while looking out at a mountain, trees, fog, sun, and sky. Additionally, I want to view the sea fog there in the morning. These attractions make me want to stay in this community. First, while a homestay costs only 200 baht per night, I was concerned about the inconveniences of living there, such as an uncomfortable bed, and how clean the bathroom would be. When we get here, the toilets are clean, the bed is comfortable, and the blankets and sheets are fresh. The best terrace is in the backyard. I experienced the same viewpoint of the village in the fog as the noodle store. To get to this view, I drove across the mountains and a thousand curves to see a view like this. I'm not exhausted any longer. Before coming here, I wished I could stay in a homestay on the side with the fogview. I finally realized it. It's almost 8 p.m. The sky is covered with stars. Not just the scenery, but the noodle soup is also excellent. I purchased souvenirs from the host before returning to Pai. Many souvenirs are inexpensive. These are ethnic products." (Pantip, 2017)

Also, the author spoke with a young male traveler who stayed in the CBT group member's homestay. He lives in the center of Thailand. He records all of his travels on

camera and uploads them to his YouTube channel. Many people subscribe to his YouTube channel.

He said:

“I spent 300 baht, which included one night of accommodation and one meal, but the atmosphere gave me more than I expected. As some people have claimed, “Hundreds of Baht of the Accommodation, Millions of Baht of the View,” I had not expected to experience true nature. I fully agree with them. The view of the fog is like a “digital detox.” I usually use my phone to access social media, but I instantly put it away to appreciate the stunning view of the fog and the surrounding nature. It is authentic.” (A young Thai male tourist, personal communication, August 12, 2019)

A young woman visitor who stayed at a CBT homestay in the village said:

“I looked for information on social media; some individuals gave reviews of the village, including those of the accommodation, meals, the view of the fog, etc. A homestay contact was found via social media. I desired to stay at a homestay with a view of the fog. For one night’s stay and one dinner at the guesthouse, I spent 300 baht. I traveled by myself; I took a cab from Bangkok to the village of Mae Hong Son. Driving up to the village from the Chiang Mai-Pai route is difficult because the road is steep and has sharp corners. However, I enjoy this view since it is so natural; the beauty of nature makes me feel at peace, including the neighborhood villager’s smile. As I travel around the village, I am welcomed with open arms. In San Kamphaeng, Chiang Mai, I slept in a homestay CBT village; however, the scenery there is not as beautiful as it is in this village. I wish to return here soon. (August 13, 2019)

### **5.2 Facebook Enhanced Small Business Marketing**

Small businesses might benefit greatly from social media (Miller et al., 2016). In Huay Pha village, small businesses might also apply to local noodle shops, guesthouses, and homestays. Like large corporations, small businesses can use customers’ relationships with online audiences without incurring investment costs while using Facebook to advertise their businesses. One Lahu woman in the village, for instance, used social media to promote her business. She began by informing her Facebook friends about her business. Then, her friends liked the Facebook page, left comments, and shared the promotional post with their online friends. Social media, on the other hand, acts as a mediator to connect new online friends and spread word of mouth to small businesses by enabling the creation of social networks.

For instance, the noodle shop woman entrepreneur said:

“After I ran a noodle shop business for one year, my shop became well known. Around 2014, I constructed a private Facebook page and posted noodle shop photos with the fogview. However, I did not think anything about whether a fogview could help to promote my business or not. I just wanted to promote my business; for instance, the

promotion of buy one, get one free before 3 p.m. Because of the promotion, my friends and some customers from Pang Mapha City came to my shop. Yet, before my shop was well known, a guy who is a blogger with the Pantip webpage came and posted about my shop with the beautiful fogview in his blog.” (Nana, personal communication, January 5, 2019)

### ***5.3 Lahu Women Are Using Facebook to Acquire a New Set of Capabilities***

Today’s Lahu women have learned how to use video and photographic content to attract Internet audiences and promote their homestay services. Additionally, Lahu women share their patchwork crafts on Facebook to promote online marketing for the sale of Lahu clothing and Lahu handicrafts for income.

Lahu women gain knowledge of Facebook marketing strategies for their businesses, particularly homestay tourism. According to Miller et al. (2016) and the researcher’s fieldwork, new digital tools and social media enable women to acquire a new set of capacities. Bourdieu (cited in Miller et al., 2016) referred to three types of capital: economic capital, social capital (i.e., social networks), and cultural capital (i.e., skills, knowledge, education, cultural goods, and qualifications). These three types of capital are related to three different categories of inequality. By building greater social capital, social media serves as a medium to promote equality for marginalized people elsewhere.

To influence online audiences and tourists, Lahu women frequently share stunning geographic images on Facebook. To promote tourism, almost all Lahu women, especially the younger generations who are part of the homestay member group, posted on their Facebook sites about the views of the fog in the village, especially during the winter.

For instance, a woman from the new generation uploaded stunning photographs of a foggy sea view with brief Thai text content to promote and attract online audiences: a tourism marketing strategy.

“Where do you plan to travel this winter season? My village welcomes you. I will take you to Phu Phamork to see the sunrise and the beautiful foggy sea.”

### ***5.4 Facebook Enhances Women’s Economic Status***

It was revealed in Huay Pha village that women Lahu business owners of a noodle shop and a homestay tourism business may change their economic status by utilizing social media and other online networking tools to expand their businesses. The noodle shop’s income increased during the tourism boom, drastically changing Nana’s and her family’s financial situation. She created her noodle shop’s Facebook page in Thai in 2016. She normally posts photos of her noodle shop with a nice fogview behind it to promote the business. This especially attracted Thai tourists. Moreover, the local noodle shop owner mentioned that she also helped to promote homestay tourism for Huay Pha’s CBT group members. Tourists who visited her restaurant usually asked for homestay information, and she always referred them to Huay Pha’s CBT group homestay. Thai tourists want to stay at the homestay in the village to enjoy the morning fogview, photograph it, and share it on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, among others.

However, CBT played a significant role in the socioeconomic development of these Lahu people during the tourism boom, which led to social change and improved the socioeconomic status of women. In 2015, the number of tourists coming to this area had roughly tripled since the beginning of CBT development.

In the Huay Pha case study, it was found that Lahu women business owners who operate a local noodle restaurant and a homestay tourism business may change their socioeconomic status or financial capital by utilizing social media to grow their businesses. An “emergent class” can express this. For instance, the owner of a noodle store in Huay Pha claimed she could earn a maximum of 30,000 baht (USD 1,000) per day on some New Year’s days after tourism boomed in the village. However, she claimed that before the tourism surge in 2015, she was making an average of roughly 300 (USD 10) baht each day. Due to the economic boost in tourism, her socioeconomic status in the community totally changed, shifting from the working class to the wealthy. She could build a new house, get a new car, and purchase gold necklaces, and each year she could award bonuses to her staff that would pay for a beach vacation, among other things.

For example, the noodle shop woman entrepreneur said:

“After the video of the noodle shop with a nice fogview was launched on social media, many Thai tourists visited my noodle shop. Later, in 2016, I expanded my shop because there were many tourists. I sometimes received an overall maximum revenue of about 30,000 baht per day, especially during the New Year and long holidays. This is unbelievable for a noodle shop in a small community. During the New Year holidays, some customers wait in queues for three hours. I must manage the queue of tickets. We could not serve the noodle soup at the table. Tourists had to bring their own noodles because there were many customers during that time. My husband starts cooking the soup at 2 a.m. because we open the shop in the early morning at 6-7 a.m. Sometimes, my husband had only one meal per day because we were so busy.” (Nana, personal communication, January 5, 2019)

In another instance, a working-class Lahu woman who invested in running a homestay tourism business in 2017 would have made a substantial profit, which subsequently improved her economic status. She can now escape her working-class past, set up more homestays, buy a new motorcycle, and live a middle-class life.

Napue, a homestay member, said:

“Homestay tourism in the past generated less income than agricultural income. Currently, tourism generates a higher income than agriculture. Cash crops generated the main household income during the low tourism season (February to September). However, during the low tourism season, Thai tourists normally visit the homestay during long holidays, such as Mother’s Day and Buddhist Days. Napue stated, “We want to escape from poverty.” (Napue, personal communication, July 3, 2018)

Tourism income can change a family’s and women’s economic status. A family who runs homestay tourism can save money from tourism income to invest in agriculture and buy assets, such as a car, a washing machine, a television, and so on. The Huay Pha CBT member said, “Homestay tourism was supplemental income in the past, but it has become the main income nowadays.” She laughed. (Napor, personal communication, February 5, 2018)

Yet, it found that economic power increases the value and status of and for women, as well as socially perceived and tangible value, which they can and do use for

negotiating power and transforming gender relations. Now, homestay income during the tourism boom has accepted value from men and the community, which can negotiate gender power dynamics. This capacitates women, who now play a key role in the homestay, to negotiate power relations at the family and community levels. In the domestic sphere, women can use economic empowerment to negotiate power with men in the family to transform temporary gender roles, domestic work, and overall family decision-making.

However, it was found that homestay income from the tourism boom was recognized for its value. Economic power enhances the status and value of women as well as their socially perceived and tangible value, which they can and do use to negotiate for more power and transform gender power relations. As a result, women who now play a key role in the homestay have a greater ability to negotiate power dynamics within the family and community. Women can negotiate power with men in the family to change temporary gender roles and general family decision-making in the domestic sphere by using economic empowerment. For instance, men helped women cook or care for babies while guests stayed at their homestays. Women might agree not to work on the farm when guests stay at the guesthouse.

### **5.5. Facebook Enables Interactions Between Hosts and Guests in Real-World (Homestay) and Virtual (Online) Settings**

Visitors from Thailand who came to the village not only admired the lovely sea fog scenery but also the villagers' friendliness.

For example, they said:

“We are impressed by the locals and the atmosphere in the village. The local villagers smile. I sense a warm welcome when I walk into the village. We stay at the homestay of the community CBT group. The meal is excellent. We talked with the host; the city does not have this environment. People who love fog prefer to stay at a homestay, eat simply, and live simply. The only things present are a sea fog, a star sea, a simple way of life, and the companionship of the locals. I frequently stay at the Lahu lady's homestay. She continues to stun me with how welcoming and friendly she is. While we are walking around the village, the locals likewise smile and extend a warm welcome. Beyond the natural landscape and the view of the fog, these are my impressions of the village.” (Thai tourists, personal communication, January 11, 2019)

Additionally, some homestay hosts and visitors have made online friends. For example, Lahu women homestay members shared photos of the fog scene, and online friends and some previous homestay visitors clicked Like and left comments. Following a Lahu woman's posting of a picture of a lovely fogview, some remarks from online tourists may be seen below, along with how the woman responded to them:

On Facebook, a previous homestay visitor posted, “*I want to visit the Huay Pha village again,*” and *I'm envious of you because you live near such beautiful nature.*” Then, a Lahu woman who operated a homestay business was messaged in Thai in response to the comment, “*Come and visit us again. I miss you.*”

Yet, Lahu women responded to comments on social media and displayed hospitality to foster customer relationships in the hopes that visitors would return to their homestays; this appears to be a marketing strategy.

### **5.6. Facebook Enhances Women's Social Empowerment**

Social empowerment is the process of gaining a sense of independence and self-confidence and using it to take both individual and group action to change social relationships, institutions, and discourses. Nowadays, the Lahu women in Huay Pha CBT village have more social empowerment to negotiate power with insiders and outsiders at the community and national levels.

In Lahu culture, metaphors compare Lahu women to shy elephants. Due to a linguistic barrier, Lahu women used to be shy and uncomfortable when speaking with Thai people in the past. The tourism boom, which was driven by social media, has caused a change in this metaphor. Following a surge in social media-driven tourism, Lahu women welcomed more Thai visitors while improving their Thai language skills by interacting with them in everyday circumstances. In contrast to the past, Lahu women in Huay Pha village do not feel shy when interacting with Thai tourists and outsiders. Lahu women interact with guests at homestays by performing "hospitality services," such as gestures, speech, and acts. Today's Lahu women are confident in communicating in Thai with outsiders, including exchanging ideas in public forums. Thai language proficiency influenced the self-confidence of Lahu ethnic women.

Namee, a Lahu woman who is a member of the village CBT committee, posted about the cultural tour program, local food, local customs, and community activities, in addition to the post about the fog, to promote CBT homestay tourism in the community. She wants to illustrate both Lahu culture and her tribe's cultural worldview. For example, she shared images of herself in a Lahu costume greeting guests on Facebook. She shared images on Facebook of Thai and foreign visitors participating in Lahu traditions at her homestay while wearing traditional Lahu costumes. She also published images of herself with famous musicians, actresses, and other tourists to show how Lahu culture is represented internationally in terms of traditional Lahu costumes. Furthermore, she published an image of Miss Thailand Universe wearing a Lahu outfit while she was in France for fashion. This is a more thorough interpretation of the Lahu traditional outfit worldview. Now, Lahu villagers and Lahu women embrace and are proud of their Lahu identity.

For example, Namee, a member of the village CBT committee, said:

"When I was a child, I used to wonder why I was born on the mountain and not in the city. My parents chose to live in the highlands for what reason? Why didn't they choose to live in a lowland area? We didn't have a village waterpipe in the past. We have to carry water for roughly four kilometers. About 23 years ago, I had to walk a long distance to carry water. The lives of the indigenous people were difficult. I went to Mae Hong Son's downtown area with my parents, but I didn't have a new outfit or pair of shoes to wear. I only owned one worn-out pair of shoes, which I constantly fixed. People from the city whom I saw were dressed nicely. I was envious of them. Today, we have everything that a city has, such as a good road and power. (Namee, personal communication, October 12, 2018)

Namee added:

"Since tourism has increased, we can earn more money from it. We receive many visitors from the city, including well-known local and foreign visitors, such as Thai superstars, Thai supermodels, Miss Thailand Universe, Thai singers, Miss Universe, etc. On television, I watched them. They visited my homestay and my village. Many

visitors expressed their envy for the villagers, saying that we live in beautiful nature and have a lovely view of the fog. I no longer think like I did when I was younger. Living in my village makes me proud. Beautiful views and natural surroundings *greet us*.” (Namee, personal communication, 12 October 12, 2018)

Lahu women are now proud of and keen to display the village and the beauty of the village’s natural surroundings on Facebook.

For instance:

“I am proud of my village, and tourists envy us for staying in a nice environment.” (Nasue’s personal communication, October 10, 2018)

“In the past, my brother used to sell the Huay Pha CBT tour program to the tour operators in Pai<sup>1</sup> district, Mae Hong Son, but no one was interested in that. In the past, the Khon (the made-up name) travel operator brought most of its foreign clients to my village. But nowadays, many tour companies in Pai sell the Huay Pha tour program.” (Napa, personal communication, 20 October 2018). Nalae feels proud of that.

Yet, Lahu women are empowered by CBT homestay tourism in terms of knowledge, skills, drive for women’s self-confidence, and social empowerment, regardless of the rise in CBT tourism at Huay Pha village stimulated by social media. It strengthens the space for national negotiations that push back against national discourse that labels ethnic groups as uncivilized people and destroys foresters. Additionally, it fosters a community-level negotiation space that pushes back against the shy female identity in Lahu culture’s metaphor.

## 6. Conclusion and Discussion

Facebook and other social media platforms seem to be the Lahu women's public sphere in the homestay practice of the modern era, connected to a local level in the larger world. Facebook is a social media platform where Lahu women can communicate with friends, family, neighbors, business partners, and tourists. Lahu women who are participating in homestay tourism as part of the CBT group’s development learned how to use social media such as Facebook and Line from outsiders, such as CBT network mentors, tourists, and their friends in the village. Facebook has a significant impact on economic empowerment, CBT tourism marketing, small business marketing like homestays, giving Lahu women new skills as cultural capital, and supporting interactions between hosts and guests in both real-world and virtual settings to build customer relationships as a marketing strategy.

Lahu women not only perform as subjects on social media or consume information from social media posts, but they also learn from social networks to post photos on Facebook. Nowadays, they learn from the social value of what customers or tourists need. Women use information technology to communicate and build connections with their networks. In the modern era, a new set of capacities regarding digital

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<sup>1</sup> Pai is a locally and globally well-known tourist destination in Mae Hong Son, northern Thailand.

technology and social media as cultural capital can enable Lahu women to negotiate gender power relations and women's empowerment through homestay CBT practices. Social media is a tool to support small enterprises that help Lahu women promote tourism marketing that supports women's economic status.

In this case study, CBT has become a virtual community because of social media, which has brought it to a worldwide scale. The fogview of the CBT village has taken on new meaning as a new tourist destination. The virtual village is recreated through social media's effect on tourism promotion. Social media can support today's women's empowerment in terms of economic empowerment and social empowerment in the domestic and public spheres.

During the tourism boom, CBT played a significant role in the socioeconomic structure of the villagers, driving social change and enhancing the socioeconomic status of women. Some such Lahu people have the opportunity to improve their economic status as part of the "emerging class." However, I argue that the boom in the tourism economy empowers women who are participating in the homestay tourism business. Yet, not all women or households can profit from the tourism boom; it depends on their socioeconomic situation or intersectionality, which incorporates gender and class and is the root of gender inequality. Social identities, such as education, class, age, ethnicity, etc. tied to oppressive, dominant, or discriminatory institutions, may overlap or intersect, which is known as intersectionality (Mohanty, 1984; Crenshaw, 1989; Beneria, 2016).

In homestay tourism practice, Lahu women who are currently participating in homestay tourism use social media platforms to interact with tourists and outsiders in the public sphere. In the modern era, Lahu women now have an attachment to social media sites. Women often post their feelings and everyday activities, connecting with friends, family, and outsiders. Through the virtual world, this analysis provides access to the public sphere for Lahu women. However, with globalization, Lahu women have more connections to the global world through social media in the public sphere. Lahu women normally post on Facebook and promote homestay tourism. Modern Lahu women have learned to use new digital technology and platforms, such as smart mobile phones and social media, to manage businesses. Men and women can freely express their identities in virtual settings on social media. Facebook is mostly used by both males and females in the study area as a public social media platform to communicate with people locally and internationally.

According to Kumari (2020), there is a virtual gender gap in women's digital literacy due to illiteracy. Yet Lahu women and men are still illiterate in languages such as English and Thai, particularly the elderly and certain middle-aged people who have lower levels of literacy and education than the young. Due to this, they are limited to interacting with users on social media. However, they can post photos and videos on Facebook with great effectiveness. They typically publish images without text or images with brief Thai text that can attract online audiences. According to Miller et al. (2016), Facebook and other social media platforms are therefore useful tools for small businesses to use to market themselves without spending money on advertisements.

However, Melissa et al. (2013) emphasized the difficulties that women business owners face in terms of social and economic capital. Women find it difficult since they frequently take on lower-paying jobs or stay at home to care for their families. On social media today, Lahu women can reach larger target audiences located outside their local areas. Using social media, they can attract tourists from other local and international destinations.

Online technologies and social media have given women who own small homestay tourism businesses new abilities that can empower them. Svetamra et al. (2013) asserted that women play important roles as traders on both local and international scales

and levels of the economy. Using information technology, such as the Internet, television, radio, and other media, women communicate with one another and with their networks. Nowadays, social media seems to play a significant role in the daily lives of women in Lahu village, especially the younger generations. Nevertheless, women also read the news, watch YouTube videos, and consume information from other sources, such as travel websites and information about tourism promotions. In addition to understanding tourists' preferences, the community members now see the value of their culture and what their home area has to offer. They routinely post images of the stunning, foggy scenery in the area in an attempt to attract online viewers. These seem to be strategies for promoting tourism. To market their homestay tourism, Lahu women learn new skills from tourists and travel media about how to create social media postings that attract online audiences. Lahu women engage with clients online by leaving comments and extending hospitality in the hope that previous homestay visitors will return. As a result of this study, it has been proven that Lahu women are capable of serving as agents in online social communities by performing hospitality. Social media is a powerful tool for Lahu women to manipulate online audiences through customer relationship building and impression management as important marketing strategies. Social media, a new set of digital media skills, has become a powerful instrument for women to influence online audiences with the help of front-stage impression management (Goffman, 1959). We have skillfully prepared front-stage portrayals of who we are and the impressions we want to make of others (Goffman, 1959).

This Lahu ethnic community now has a new public meaning due to social media's popularity of CBT homestay communities. During the tourism boom, the community had numerous visits from Thai tourists and famous people, such as actors, musicians, Miss Universe, and Miss Thailand. Photos of famous people and tourists wearing Lahu native costumes were taken by women taking part in CBT homestay tourism, and they were posted on national and international social media sites. Lahu women are proud of their Lahu identity because lowland Thai people used to disparage them for belonging to "hill tribes" or being primitive people. Highland villagers were once despised by Thai society. They were derogatorily referred to as "destroyers of the forest" (Luangaramsri, 1998), who burn upland rice fields, cut down trees, and contaminate the air; in essence, they were seen as uncivilized "untamed savages" in the dominant discourse.

Even the mainstream Thai public school curriculum included these ideas. Nonetheless, in the case study, a Lahu woman expressed her early experience of being dissatisfied with the difficult life that her ethnicity leads in comparison to city dwellers. Now, the villagers are proud of and embrace their Lahu identity. Social media defends the homestay CBT village in the face of the mainstream discourse that characterizes local Thais who live in the highlands as primitive forest-destroying people. Lahu women today feel proud of being Lahu and recognize its importance, which can challenge the national discourse that characterizes this as social empowerment. The development of a sense of independence and assurance, as well as taking action both individually and collectively to transform social norms, institutions, and discourses, are all parts of the process of social empowerment. With social media, Lahu women participating in the CBT homestay tour program in Huay Pha village have the power to transform social power structures and public discourse, which has a huge impact on both the local and global levels. Therefore, the researcher argues that social media not only supports today's Lahu ethnic women's empowerment in terms of economics but also supports social empowerment in the public sphere. Facebook has transformed Huay Pha village into a virtual community that now extends throughout the world. Tourism replicates the virtual community because Huay Pha's fogview has become a new tourist destination with new significance. Women

now appreciate the worth of their Lahu identity and are proud of it, which can challenge the national discourse on social empowerment.

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