



# CONSUMER RESEARCH FINDINGS ON IVORY AND TIGER PRODUCTS IN THAILAND

## BACKGROUND

This consumer research is part of the USAID Wildlife Asia activity\*. It aims to provide information on the attitudes and practices of the general population in Thailand related to purchasing and using ivory and tiger parts and products. The research probes perceptions, beliefs, motivations, and other influencing factors that drive the desire for ivory and tiger products in Thailand.



### The research study has two components:

1. Quantitative **online baseline survey** representing the general population (n=1000 representing the general population with an added (booster) sample of n=550 users of ivory and/or tiger).
2. Qualitative research comprising **focus group discussions** of ivory consumers and **Individual In-Depth Interviews** of tiger consumers in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Surin provinces, Thailand.

\*The USAID Wildlife Asia activity works to address wildlife trafficking as a transnational crime. The project aims to reduce consumer demand for wildlife parts and products, strengthen law enforcement, enhance legal and political commitment, and support regional collaboration to reduce wildlife crime in Southeast Asia, particularly Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. USAID Wildlife Asia focuses on four species: elephant, rhinoceros, tiger and pangolin.

**DISCLAIMER** The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.



## KEY FINDINGS: BASELINE SURVEY

### CONSUMER PROFILES

- Among the general Thai population, two percent own or use ivory parts or products and one percent own or use tiger parts or products. While the proportion is low, this consumer segment significantly drives the local market.
- The typical consumer of ivory and tiger products tends to be affluent and older (40 years and above). Many are business owners or merchants. Ivory receivers and interested buyers are likely to be female, while tiger purchasers/users are likely to be male.
- Only 10 percent and seven percent of the general population, respectively, perceive ivory and tiger trade as socially acceptable. On the other hand, a large majority of ivory consumers (90 percent) and tiger consumers (82 percent) think that purchase or trade of these products is socially acceptable.
- A small proportion of the general Thai population (three percent) intend to purchase either ivory or tiger in the future. The population found to be the most likely to purchase ivory or tiger in the future was age 25- 29 years compared to other age groups.
- Among actual consumers, there is still a large proportion of ivory purchasers (75 percent) and tiger consumers (69 percent) who plan to repeat their purchase in the future.

### MOTIVATION

- The main reasons for purchasing ivory are because ivory “brings good luck,” “wards off harm” or is “spiritual” (total 78 percent). Other significant reasons for purchasing ivory are because it “shows success” or “improves status (total 39 percent).

- For tiger, 86 percent of consumers said that the main reason for purchasing tiger is because it “wards off harm/provides protection” or is “spiritual.” Other significant reasons for purchasing are tiger “shows success” or “improves status” (total 43 percent).
- The most common ivory products purchased or owned are accessories or jewelry. For tiger, the most popular products are spiritual items and amulets.

### PURCHASING CHANNELS

- The main purchase channels for ivory and tiger products are physical stores such as jewelry stores, amulet markets and temples.
- To a lesser extent, purchases are also made through relatives, friends and acquaintances.
- Online platforms are popular channels to find and exchange information with like-minded people or traders. Once information is exchanged, the purchase is done either offline or online (e.g., Facebook groups or Line).

### CONNECTING WITH CONSUMERS

- Seventy-one (71) percent of Thais are aware of anti-consumption ivory communication messages while 59 percent are aware of tiger messages. The messages consumers cite are focused on the illegality of the trade and the killing of animals.
- Consumers believe that journalists are the best avenue to convey messages about ivory and tiger. Aside from journalists, celebrities, entertainment personalities and politicians are also mentioned.
- Social media, television, and the internet are perceived to be the most effective channels.

## PERCEPTIONS ON LEGALITY

Thais are generally confused about the legality of the ivory and tiger trade.

- Eight out of 10 Thais are not aware that trade of ivory from domesticated elephants are legal and eight percent think that ivory from Africa is legal.
- Three out of 10 Thais believe that it is legal to trade in tiger parts if the tiger is domesticated while nine percent believe it is legal if the tiger parts come from other countries.
- An overwhelming majority of Thais (92 percent) are in favor of a domestic ban on all trade in ivory.



## COMMON THEMES FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AMONG IVORY CONSUMERS

### PERCEPTION OF IVORY OWNERSHIP

- For Thais, the elephant has a unique history, is tied to the monarchy and the pageantry of war. It also symbolizes Buddhism and religious practices.
- Elephants and ivory are believed to protect the owner, assist with overcoming obstacles, create goodwill and enhance one's appearance.
- Ivory items are perceived as a good investment.

### IVORY USE

- In general, Ivory items are used as:
  1. Amulets;
  2. Accessories for beauty; and
  3. Decor items.
- Ivory items are also used for health reasons, but this is rare.
- Of all the ways in which ivory is used, "amulets" and "accessories for beauty" emerge as the most common and familiar.

### IVORY AS AMULET

- As an amulet, ivory is believed to reflect "white and pure power," which brings the owner positive effects as long as the ivory is obtained from elephants that died naturally.
- The belief in the power of ivory is influenced by information from the internet (discussions and articles online) or by family.

### IVORY AS ACCESSORIES FOR BEAUTY

- Ivory accessories reflect the attributes that females say they want for beauty.
- Apart from being white and shiny, ivory is believed to have protection/positive powers and is considered superior to other materials.

### IVORY AS HOME DECOR ITEMS AND MEDICINE

- Only few respondents own ivory items as home decoration since these items are very expensive. Ivory décor items are perceived to be in the homes of the very rich as well as in museums and temples.
- A few respondents referred to some elderly people who believe in the curative properties of ivory, e.g., that ivory removes toxins from the body and enhances blood circulation.



## COMMON THEMES FROM INDIVIDUAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS OF TIGER CONSUMERS

### PERCEPTION OF TIGER OWNERSHIP

- The tiger is perceived as an elusive, mysterious, strong, ferocious and powerful animal. These are the perceived characteristics that give power to tiger parts and products.
- Tiger parts and products are perceived to enhance charisma, bring good fortune and provide protection from evil or harm.

### TIGER PRODUCT USE

- There are three types of tiger products:
  1. Amulets;
  2. Tiger products for health or medicinal treatment; and
  3. Decor items.
- Of these three types of products, amulets are the most familiar and commonly owned.

### TIGER AMULETS

- Tiger amulets are believed to give power, confidence or protection.
- The belief in the power of tiger amulets comes from many sources. However, the most influential sources are people whom the consumers trust.
- When the tiger amulet goes through rituals and incantations, the spirit of the dead tiger is “awakened,” which makes the amulet more powerful.
- Wild tigers are believed to be more ferocious than captive tigers. Hence, amulets from wild tigers are seen as more powerful.

### TIGER PARTS AS MEDICINE

- Tiger parts are also believed to strengthen the body, and the power of the tiger will live on in the person who has ingested or applied it.
- Different tiger parts are believed to have different medicinal benefits:
  1. Bones relieve aches and pains, and nourish the blood.
  2. Fangs heal wounds.
  3. Tiger oil helps to relieve allergic reactions.
- Knowledge about tiger parts as medicinal treatment is very limited, and sources of information include family stories, childhood experiences and documentaries.

### TIGER PARTS AS DECOR ITEMS

- In general, only the very rich or those in positions of authority are perceived to own tiger décor items that are displayed on walls or spread on the floor.
- Tiger décor items are perceived to be too expensive and possibly illegal.
- Consumers believe that demand for tiger parts as amulets will not diminish over time.
- On the other hand, the demand for tiger parts as medicine will not increase given that tiger parts for this purpose are hard to find, and users belong to an older generation.
- Some consumers report that there have been crackdowns on physical stores selling illegal wildlife products. Instead of going underground, the trade has moved to online channels.

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