

The development of competencies among grassroots entrepreneurs in the production of processed durian products in Bukit Subdistrict, Cho Airong District, Narathiwat Province

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Abstract The objectives of this research were to 1) study the development of competencies among grassroots entrepreneurs involved in producing processed durian products, 2) investigate a structural equation model of the development of competencies among grassroots entrepreneurs in the production of processed durian products. The research methodology includes a quantitative research approach, using questionnaires to collect data from a sample group of 110 entrepreneurs engaged in processed durian product production in Bukit Subdistrict, Cho Airong District, Narathiwat Province. The statistical methods employed in this research include frequency distribution, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for data analysis. The findings indicated that 1) The development of competencies for market competitiveness among grassroots entrepreneurs producing durian processed products is generally high. The area with the highest mean value is the development of competitive advantage, followed by management, and the lowest is business network development; 2) The structural equation model for fostering the competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs of processed durian products provides a path model of causal relationships in terms of marketing mix management, there is a relationship in the form of a positive direct cause from management, business network development, and entrepreneurial competency. Further, marketing mix management has a positive indirect causal relationship through management, competitive advantage development, and business network development.

Keywords Competency development; Grassroots entrepreneurs; Processed Durian products

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Introduction

The agricultural sector is an integral part of the Thai economy, with approximately 24 million people dependent on it. However, agricultural development has faced several challenges, including improving production capacity, maintaining product price stability, and enhancing quality standards. Furthermore, organizations have made efforts to elevate the quality of life for farmers. The goal of the country's development strategy for the next 20 years is to elevate the nation from middle-income status to a developed country. This underscores the importance of enhancing the agricultural sector's competitiveness while ensuring food security and increasing income for the country. Consequently, the expansion of adding value to agricultural products with local identity includes agricultural products and agricultural products that have distinctive characteristics specific to the area, especially products from local Thai wisdom, arts and crafts, One Village, One Product, and Geographical Indication Products. In this context, the production and marketing of agricultural products with high added value, particularly products with recognized geographic indicators, make use of the advantages of local identity and local knowledge. Thailand, for example, in each area that is unique and combined with local wisdom, is a group of Geographic Indications products that help create market opportunities, careers, and income for farmers, community enterprise groups, and local entrepreneurs, with a market value of more than 4,000 million baht (Department of Intellectual Property Ministry of Commerce, 2018).

On the contrary, processing durians is an additional method for supporting farmers. Suppose researchers conduct a thorough analysis of consumer demand for various goods. This can be observed in the consumption patterns of Thai people who predominantly enjoy eating especially a variety of snacks, with each individual has varied tastes. As a result, producers need to be aware of market and customer demands since some consumers like sweets, while others prefer fruit or processed fruit. If research is conducted to determine suitable criteria, agricultural product processing will add value to agricultural products and benefit farmers in other ways. Fruit can be processed in several ways, with crispy frying and stir-frying being the most commonly used techniques for processing durian due to their widespread commercial appeal. The fruit tree durian has the potential to increase exports dramatically and offers relatively high economic rewards. As a result, officials have listed as a factory needing intensive improvements in production efficiency for export. Even though durian farmers have experienced various production and marketing issues, durian remains a flourishing fruit tree if you have the necessary management skills efficiently to efficiently run the garden Plan's production and marketing (Preechawet, 2004).

Due to the durian's economic significance scholars have conducted further studies to supplement this one. In 2024, Methajarassinthavee et. al. (2024) conducted a study on the potential of farmers, digital marketing strategies, and management improvements that enhance the success of durian farmers exporting in Thailand. The survey found that durian farmers' potential, market orientation, competitiveness, and success in exporting their products to Thailand was exceptionally high. Durian farmers in Thailand succeeded in exporting largely due to their potential, market orientation, and competitive advantage. The researchers developed a model for the success of durian farmers exporting in Thailand, named the PMCS, where P = Potential, M = Market Oriented, C = Competitiveness, S = Success of durian farmers exporting with a 13.33 percent decrease, producing money for the province worth 162.83 million baht, a 153.91 percent decrease. Rangae District, Si Sakhon District, and Su-ngai, thereby increasing their competitiveness in the Thai durian export market. Furthermore, the qualitative research findings revealed that for durian farmers to succeed in exporting durian, entrepreneurs must prioritize sales and logistics via e-commerce platforms. Employing contemporary technologies is essential to improving the effectiveness of public relations efforts to inform farmers about managing the production process and preserving the caliber of durian

fruits to fulfill export requirements. The research results can be applied as a guideline for policymaking in business operations to promote the sustainable success of durian exports in the country.

Furthermore, Narathiwat Province has 33,651 rai of durian growing, a 7.21 percent growth over the previous year. The total work area is 29,499 rai. Overall production in the province is 15,801 tons, up from 11,718 tons last year, or 286.99 percent per rai, or 645 kilograms. Farmers' average selling price in the province is 13 baht per kilogram, a 2 Baht reduction from the previous year. With a 13.33 percent decrease, they are producing money for the province worth 162.83 million baht, a 153.91 percent decrease. Rangae District, Si Sakhon District, and Su-ngai Padi District are the districts in Narathiwat Province with the largest durian growing (Narathiwat Provincial Agriculture Office, 2013).

Besides, durian is regarded as the dominant fruit tree of the southern region, having the most extensive planted area compared to other fruit tree varieties fruit trees. In the past, people considered durian a crop that provided growers with significant revenues. The average annual durian production is between 1,000 and 1,200 kilos per rai. Farmers may expect to earn between 10,000 and 20,000 baht per rai, depending on the price of durian. Meanwhile, per-rai manufacturing expenses range from 5,000 to 6,000 baht. The southern area produced 258,957 tons of durians in 2013, most domestically consumed. Thailand is the world's largest durian producer, producing over 800,000 tons annually. With major export markets including Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Singapore, and Japan, Thailand shipped fresh and frozen durian totaling 55,590 tons in 2013. Most products are exported between March and June each year with the majority being durians from the eastern part of the world. Most of the durian shipped is from the southern area for the remaining months. The price at which to purchase a durian changes every month according to the availability of the fruit and consumer demand. Prices are typically lower from July to September, the durian harvest season in the south, and from April to May, the durian harvest season in the east (Agricultural Research Development Agency, 2013).

However, the researcher believes it is crucial to study the competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs of processed durian products in Bukit Subdistrict, Cho Airong District, Narathiwat Province based on the difficulties above. This is because the processed durian products are One Tambon One Product (OTOP), which serve as a basis for regional economic growth and, in turn, as the national economy's primary engine.

Objective

1. Study the development of competencies among grassroots entrepreneurs involved in producing processed durian products.
2. investigate a structural equation model of developing competencies among grassroots entrepreneurs in the production of processed durian products.

Literature review

Management

Management refers to the collaborative effort of leaders and employees to achieve shared goals effectively and efficiently. The executives must take all necessary steps to collaborate fully, make the best use of available resources, and maximize benefits by organizing, leading, planning, and controlling (Raksato, 2005). Additionally, a set of functions known as management is responsible for directing the effective and efficient use of resources to meet the organization's objectives. The term "efficient" refers to the economical and wise use of resources. Adhering to the predetermined plan and making the appropriate decisions constitute effective decision-making. Thus, efficacy and efficiency are essential for management success (Griffin, 1999). Furthermore, it is accomplishing organizational objectives by collaborating with people and other resources, or creating and maintaining an environment where individuals collaborate in groups to achieve established goals efficiently (Certo, 2000).

Networking

Networking is when companies collaborate to enhance competitiveness by sharing resources, knowledge, skills, and experiences. This collaboration aims to develop competitive capabilities in product and service development, marketing, or joint distribution (Kuglin & Hook, 2015). In other words, networking is a collaboration between two or more business organizations, referred to as a business alliance, and must include three key characteristics. Firstly, organizations must work together to achieve common objectives in the future. The partners in the alliance must have aligned goals to plan and operate collectively in the future. Secondly, there must be a sharing of responsibilities in the operations and the sharing of benefits among all partners. Lastly, the partners must exchange resources, knowledge, skills, experience, and expertise to facilitate mutual learning and development within the alliance (Watanasupachok, 2015). Besides, when companies agree to collaborate on specific activities, it is often to meet their own needs that they could not achieve due to resource limitations (such as manpower, capital, technology, etc.). They may also believe that forming a business alliance will give them a better chance of success than operating independently (Rakthai et. al., 2014).

Marketing mix

The marketing mix, or the 4P's, refers to the controllable marketing variables a company uses together to satisfy the target audience. It represents a set of controllable marketing factors that a company combines to meet customers' needs in the target market (Kotler, 2000). These are the direct components related to the product or service offered to consumers. The marketing mix includes four marketing factors commonly referred to as the "4Ps" (Kundolbutra, 2014). Conversely, the marketing mix, or 4Ps, refers to the controllable marketing variables a company uses to satisfy the target audience. It is a tool used collectively to achieve the organization's communication objectives (Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2015). Otherwise, the marketing mix, or 4Ps, refers to a set of controllable marketing tools that are a company's marketing strategy to make the target audience respond to its products and services. It encompasses everything a company uses to influence demand for its products. The 4Ps are well-known, including Product, Price, Place, and Promotion (Rattanasomchok, 2015).

Advantage

A competitive advantage involves comparing an organization's capabilities with those of other organizations in economic operations or generating returns from operations. Experts consider an organization to have competitive capability if it performs better than others in comparison, with its products and services recognized as effective tools for creating an efficient resource society (Schwab, 2014). Likewise, competitive advantage refers to an organization's ability to perform better than its competitors and maintain that superiority over the long term. This sustainability has no specific time limit and does not imply that it will last forever. An organization with a competitive advantage can sustain its competitiveness and perform well (Tukker, 2015). Moreover, the existing capabilities include wisdom, experience, and expertise embedded in various aspects, ready to be expressed or demonstrated, and can be developed to surpass competitors. This includes creating the best quality products, consistently excellent customer service, lower operational costs than competitors, and advantageous locations, among other factors (Khunthongchan, 2009).

Entrepreneur

A capitalist economy values entrepreneurs as key players. It is a person who generates fresh concepts and business prospects, gathers funding to launch a company, sets up the company's internal structure, and oversees business operations to deliver products and services to the general public (Halloran, 2006). Furthermore, entrepreneurs are those who establish a small business with the purpose of prospering. Entrepreneurs should seek opportunities and work hard to establish

profitable firms (Hiransomboon, 2014). Further, entrepreneurs are examples of risk-takers. Moreover, he is a person who seeks profitable opportunities in order to support business growth. Developing a vision and an inspiration that inspires others to follow is also important. As a result, entrepreneurs are more valuable resources than inventions or other factors, and they obtain expertise through business networks (Wingwon, 2011). Additionally, entrepreneurs are critical players in today's business landscape. It is an innovator in both domestic and international markets, as well as an innovative manufacturer. It acts as a catalyst for economic progress in other areas. Entrepreneurs use all of their power and talent to accelerate business growth by managing risk and uncertainty. Every year, a large number of entrepreneurs start their businesses. This strategy has boosted economic development and national competitiveness (Teerawanich, 2010).

Research hypotheses:

1. The component of developing entrepreneurial competencies has a direct influence on the component of the marketing mix.
2. The component of developing entrepreneurial competencies has a direct influence on the component of entrepreneurial competence.
3. The component of the marketing mix has a direct influence on the component of entrepreneurial competence.
4. The component of entrepreneurial competence directly influences the component of developing entrepreneurial competence.

Conceptual framework

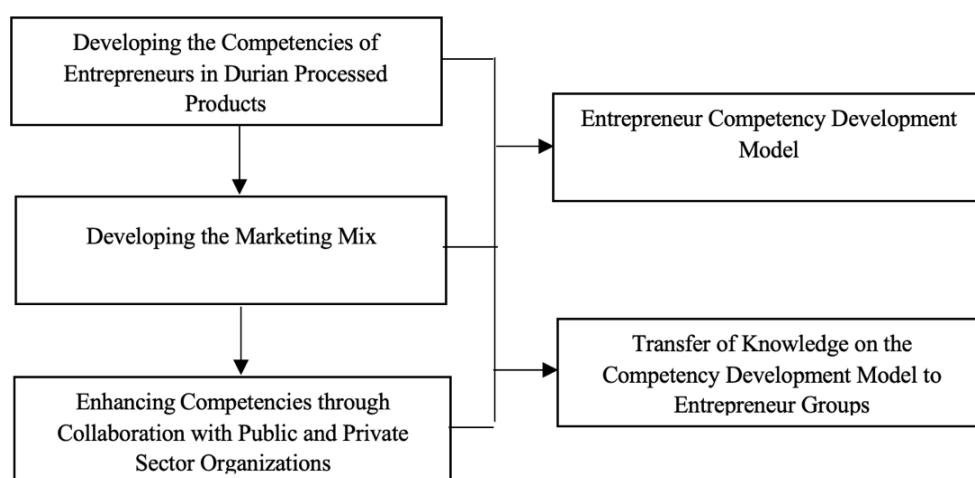


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Research methodology

This research is a quantitative study with a sample group of entrepreneurs in durian processed products from Bukit Subdistrict, Joairong District, Narathiwat Province, totaling 110 individuals. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling method, specifically choosing only entrepreneurs involved in durian-processed products operating in Bukit Subdistrict, Joairong District, Narathiwat Province. The researchers conducted data collection was conducted using a questionnaire divided into four sections as follows: 1) General information of the respondents; 2) The competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in processed durian products; 3) Marketing mix for processed durian

products; 4) The competency of grassroots entrepreneurs of processed durian products. The questionnaire was multiple choice and used a Likert scale. The researchers subsequently delivered the questionnaire to 110 informants, entrepreneurs of processed durian products in Bukit Subdistrict, Cho Airong District, Narathiwat Province. The researcher tested the validity of the questionnaire instrument by five experts using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) approach to assess the instrument's quality. This allowed the researcher to determine the instrument's validity and reliability. It is allowed to employ questions with IOC scores ranging from 0.6 to 1.00. Therefore, researchers will consider IOC values below 0.6 for question improvement or deletion. However, in assessing the questionnaire instrument's quality, every question had an IOC score higher than 0.60. Moreover, using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, the confidence level of the entire questionnaire was 0.8, indicating that the questionnaire is trustworthy and may be utilized in investigations. Lastly, data analysis and statistics employed in the research include assessing causal effect routes (Path analysis), observing structural equation models for competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in processed durian products, and employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

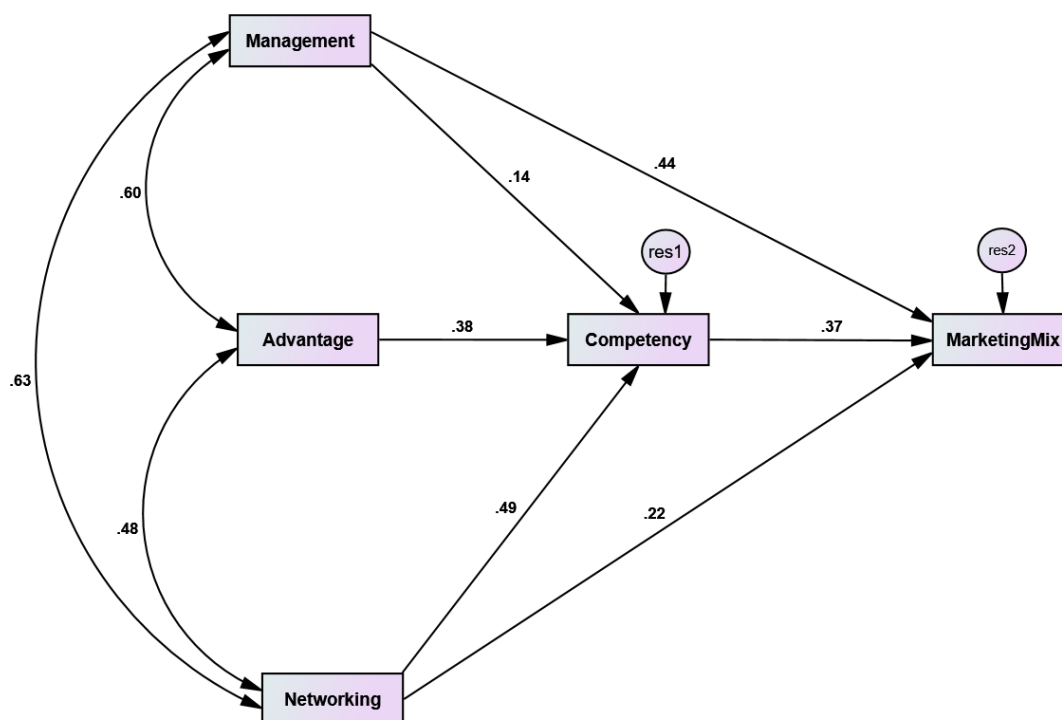


Figure 2 Path model of causal relationships in competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province

Results

1. The competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province.

1.1 The competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province. Overall, it was at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.71$). The element that contributed to competitive advantage had the highest average ($\bar{x} = 3.77$), followed by management ($\bar{x} = 3.71$), and business network development was at the bottom level ($\bar{x} = 3.65$).

1.2 The competency development of marketing mix in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province. Overall, it was at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.69$). The element that contributed to

packaging had the highest average ($\bar{x} = 3.90$), followed by price ($\bar{x} = 3.71$), marketing promotion was at the bottom level ($\bar{x} = 3.54$)

1.3 The competency of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province. Overall, it was at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.73$). The element that contributed to attitude had the highest average ($\bar{x} = 3.88$), followed by skills ($\bar{x} = 3.81$), and knowledge was at the bottom level ($\bar{x} = 3.53$).

2. Path model of causal relationships in competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province.

Table 1 displays the overall influence, direct influence, and indirect influence

Result variable (dependent variable)	Causal variable (independent variable)				
		Management	Advantage	Networking	Competency
Competency	direct influence	0.14	0.38	0.49	0.00
	Indirect influence	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Overall influence	0.14	0.38	0.49	0.00
Marketing	direct influence	0.44	0.00	0.22	0.37
	Indirect influence	0.05	0.14	0.18	0.00
	Overall influence	0.50	0.14	0.40	0.37

According to Table 1, marketing mix management has a favorable direct causal association with management, networking, competency, and marketing mix management. The following area positive indirect causes from management, including establishing competitive advantage (Advantage) and growing company networks (Networking).

3. The results of the hypothesis testing to examine the causal relationship between the latent variables in the structural equation model for fostering the competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province include four hypotheses, which are as follows:

3.1 Elements of entrepreneurial competence development had a direct influence on marketing mix elements, statistically significant at the 0.001 level, by the research hypothesis.

3.2 Elements of entrepreneurial competence development directly influenced entrepreneurial competence elements, with statistical significance at the 0.001 level, by the research hypothesis.

3.3 Elements of marketing mix directly influenced elements of entrepreneurial competence, statistically significant at the 0.001 level, in accordance with the research hypothesis.

3.4 Elements of entrepreneurial competence directly influenced the element of entrepreneurial competence development, statistically significant at the 0.001 level, by the research hypothesis.

Discussion

The competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province. Overall, it was at a high level. The element that contributed to competitive advantage had the highest average, followed by management; business network development was at the bottom level. Besides, the competency development of marketing mixes in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province. Overall, it was at a high level. Price was the element with the second-highest average value, followed by packaging; marketing promotion was the least effective. On the other hand, grassroots entrepreneurs' competency in processed durian products in entrepreneurs' competency in Narathiwat Province. Overall, it was at a high level; The attitude element had the greatest average, followed by the competency element, while the knowledge element had the lowest average. This is because durian-processed products are unique and in high demand in the market since Narathiwat durians are renowned for their outstanding taste and quality. Entrepreneurs have developed a diversity of products to offer a variety of forms and flavors to meet the different preferences of consumers. Some entrepreneurs may incorporate innovations in production, such as developing new recipes or using advanced technology, making the products more appealing and unique. Additionally, some entrepreneurs might establish their brands, enhancing product credibility and consumer recognition. On the contrary, the Path model of causal relationships in competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province. The management element had a connection to the management of the marketing mix through direct and indirect influences, with a weight of direct impact equal to 0.44 and an indirect effect through the entrepreneurial competency equivalent to 0.05 (0.14×0.37). Similarly, creating competitive advantage (Advantage) had a relationship in the form of an indirect cause to the management of the marketing mix with a weight of direct influence equal to 0.14 (0.38×0.37). Correspondingly, the management of the marketing mix was influenced by the networking element in a direct as well as an indirect manner, with the direct influence holding a weight of 0.22 and the indirect result having a weight of 0.18 (0.49×0.37) due to the entrepreneur's competence. Entrepreneur's competency (Competency) had a direct causal relationship to marketing mix management, with a weight of direct influence equal to 0.37, respectively. It was consistent with Jiankul (2016) research, which studied the behavior and factors in choosing to buy Thai processed fruits Chinese teenagers. The results revealed that price was the factor in that interested them the most when buying Thai processed fruits. They mostly agreed that a quality certification mark influenced their buying Thai processed fruits. The study showed that social and attitudinal variables, with an Adjusted R² of 0.854, significantly impact teens' decisions to purchase processed fruit in Thailand at the 0.05 level. Likewise, this is consistent with the findings of Taikha (2017), who investigated the processed fruit market and the variables influencing Chinese visitors' decisions to buy processed fruit. According to the study's findings, the marketing mix and decision model represent the causal factors and marketing communications that influence the decision of Chinese tourists to purchase processed fruit in Thailand. The aspects with weighted elements sorted from highest to lowest in each area's marketing mix model analysis include product, distribution channel, pricing, marketing promotion, and marketing communication factors. When researchers examined the decision-making factors for purchasing processed fruit in each aspect, they discovered that the factors with weighted components arranged from highest to lowest were alternative evaluation factors, (which included post-purchase behavior factors), purchasing decision factors, need recognition factors, information seeking factors, and marketing communication factors. At the 0.01 level, the elements above strongly influence Chinese visitors' choice to buy processed fruits. The association between Chinese tourists' purchase decisions for processed fruit with packaging and product introductions at the point of sale in Chinese was significant and trending in the same direction. In addition, the association between distributing promotional flyers or billboards at points of sale and advertisements online or on social media was moderate. The market for processed fruit in Thailand

offers various fruit varieties, processing traits, and brands. Numerous businesses are selling processed fruit, which increases competitiveness. In addition, researchers have divided the market for buyers into middlemen and consumers, further separated into low-, middle-, and high-end sectors. Therefore, a variety of factors affect the selling price. Entrepreneurs' marketing mix methods comprise, in order of importance, standard manufacturing quality, packaging or packaging, and product quality development. Similarly, online media, public relations, and advertising are the marketing communication tactics employed by business owners in descending order.

Conclusions

1. The competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province. Overall, it was at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.71$). The element that contributed to competitive advantage had the highest average ($\bar{x} = 3.77$), followed by management ($\bar{x} = 3.71$), and business network development was at the bottom level ($\bar{x} = 3.65$).

2. Analysis of structural equation model for fostering the competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province. A path model of causal relationships in competency development of grassroots entrepreneurs in the processed durian products in Narathiwat Province. The management element had a connection to the management of the marketing mix through both direct and indirect influences, with a weight of direct impact equal to 0.44 and an indirect effect through the entrepreneurial competency equivalent to 0.05 (0.14×0.37). Similarly, creating competitive advantage (Advantage) had a relationship in the form of an indirect cause to the management of the marketing mix with a weight of direct influence equal to 0.14 (0.38×0.37). Correspondingly, the management of the marketing mix was influenced by the networking element in a direct as well as an indirect manner, with the direct influence holding a weight of 0.22 and the indirect result having a weight of 0.18 (0.49×0.37) due to the entrepreneur's competence. Entrepreneur's competency (Competency) had a direct causal relationship to marketing mix management, with a weight of direct influence equal to 0.37, respectively.

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