

Research Article

THE IMPACT OF SPORTS TOURISM AND DIGITAL INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION ON SPORTS TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN THE EASTERN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (EEC) OF THAILAND

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationships between the impact of sport tourism and digital integrated marketing communication on the sports tourism management in the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) of Thailand. The mixed research method was used as 1) a quantitative method sampling with 340 peoples who living in the EEC and 2) a qualitative method comprised of in-depth interviews with 15 specialists. The data-collection tool was manage by questionnaire and interview form. The data analysis was conducted using structural equation analysis (SEM) and in-depth interviews. The results were as follows: 1) the impact of sport tourism had a direct effect on the sports tourism management model at 0.48, and digital integrated marketing communication had a direct effect on the sports tourism management model at 0.37 (chi-square = 0.08, df = 1, p-value = 0.78, RMSEA = 0.00, CFI = 1.00, GFI = 1.00, SRMR = 0.01, χ^2/df = less than 0.08). And 2) the qualitative methods found that the added value of sports tourism management model had follow the POIC principle to implement strategies and use information systems, including branding a variety of activities and community involvement as sports tourism within the EEC.

Keywords: Sports Tourism; Sports Tourism Management; Eastern Economic Corridor

Introduction

Today, the tourism industry has a significant impact on the global economy. It widely is accepted that almost every country in the world has experienced rapid growth in the tourism industry as it has become a staple in the international trade system (Hritz & Ross, 2010). The tourism industries in Thailand have majority sharing of the market and projected to an important role play in increasing the country's investments of 17% GDP in 2019 (Surawattananon, 2019) and increasing Thailand's tourism revenue from 58-62 USD since 2017-2020 (CEIC DATA, 2021). However, there are many types of tourism as classified according to the purpose of

the tourism or other related factors such as ecotourism, leisure tourism, educational tourism, etc. Sport tourism is travel from a person's place of residence or place of occupation to another place for a period of less than one year that focuses on participation in sporting activities, such as visiting a sports stadium (Gibson et al., 1997; Gibson, 1998; Anca, 2008; Eurobarometer, 2010). At present, Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2018) has expanded greatly due to an increased interest in health and fitness and participation in a variety of sporting activities. This has resulted in newfound tourism opportunities that combine sporting events with recreational activities in many regions, which are then marketed through campaigns that draw on the uniqueness and identity of each city.

Recently, Thailand's government has officially "The Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) Project" on May 15, 2018 as a vital public agent aimed at encouraging investment, inspiring innovation and advanced technology, and increasing the long-term global impact of Thailand's economy. In the first phase, the Eastern Economic Corridor will be created by systematically improving three provinces of in eastern Thailand: Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao. Sports tourism marketing is a significant avenue of improvement within the EEC due to increased interest in and demand for. Over the past few years, sports tourism has become a buzzword in the sporting industry, and for good reason. Thailand was ranked as the top MICE destination among ASEAN countries in 2016. Many consider Pattaya, Chonburi to be the ideal sports tourism destination, and it is in the process of becoming "the Center of Sport tourism in the EEC". Just a and half hours' drive from the Bangkok, the region is rich in beautiful natural landscapes, which includes a long coastline, and also offers plenty of hospitality with hotel and entertainment options.

The tourism sector must be concern in all societies and cultures are changing due to their incapability of avoiding outside influence. Therefore, it could be a safe side to think tourism contributes but not only the one that impacts the culture. Now-a-days it is a common debate that whether the negative impacts of tourism on culture outweighs its positive benefits. Some people say, it is really hard to measure that how much culture is being damaged by the tourism or how much culture is being protected due to the involvement of many socio-cultural and socio-economic variables together in tourism.

Shahzalal (2016) suggests that for managing culture responsibility in a destination management needed to be developed, the local community should be empowered, priority should be given to the process of the development not the product, and finally a structural link between the formal and informal sectors in the tourism industry should be led by the government to develop a code of conducts and cultural research centres for cultural education, training, workshops, exhibitions, and performance. It will be an important factor in the planning and consideration of policies for the successful development, marketing and operation of existing and future projects.

Digital technology makes sport tourism services more accessible to more people than ever before. Whitburn, Karg and Turner (2020) explain how using digital forms of integrated marketing communication can provide sport organizations with a range of positive outcomes. Satisfaction with integrated marketing communication was shown to have a direct effect on relationship quality and behavioral intentions, including increasing revenue, expanding participation, raising awareness, and enhancing public perception, thus providing

practical and theoretical benefits. According to Perrin (2015), digital marketing has changed the way sports are consumed, packaged, and sold to consumers. It includes marketing through social media, blogging, search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click management (PPC), branding, content marketing, and video marketing as well as app creation. A recently study of Gaffar et al. (2016) found that digital promotion to be the best and most complete means of generating interest and participation in waterslide sport tourism in Asia.

This study was determine the relationships between the impact of sport tourism and digital integrated marketing communication on the sports tourism management in the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) of Thailand and can be used as a guideline for the development of sports tourism in Thailand.

Methodology

This mixed methods approach was comprised of two parts: 1) a quantitative method sampling 340 people living in the Chonburi province who represent the sport tourism of the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC). The sample size was determined by adding 10–20 peoples per variable (Hair et al., 2010). The study consisted of 13 variables, so the sample size should be 340. The simple random sampling selected three districts of Chonburi Province, namely Mueang Chonburi District, Bang Lamung District and Sattahip District. Accidental sampling was use to collect data. The second part of the mixed methods approach is a 2) qualitative method involving in-depth interviews with fifteen experts—five community leaders; five people working in sports organizations or tourism; and five people with experience in sport tourism, mass media, and sport tourism entrepreneurship. The data-collection tool was a questionnaire and interview form. The inclusion criteria required all fifteen participants to work in community and to have three or more years of experience.

Tools and Measurement

The tool used to gather the data by questionnaire. The researcher created a questionnaire based on a literature review that synthesized the variables to be used in the research. Then the quality of the questionnaire was assessed by five experts who determined the validity of the content of the questions (IOC=.90). The questionnaire consisted of 3 variables and 13 sub-variables (the impact of sport tourism variables including economy, social, culture, and environment; digital integrated marketing communication variables including digital advertising, media sales, media promotion, public relations through the media, and direct sale through digital media; and sport tourism management including differentiation, value added, creating awareness for communities, and promoting learning for communities and tourists). After completing that quality control process, the revised questionnaire was taken and tested among personnel with similar qualifications to the sample, totaling 30 people, and then analyzed for its Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, which was equal to 0.80. The researcher created an interview form for the qualitative component of the study by asking "how to manage the sports tourism in the Eastern Economic Corridor?" and using POIC management concepts as a guideline to explore the impact of sports tourism and digital integrated marketing communication in developing the sports tourism management in the Eastern Economic Corridor of Thailand.

Data Collection

Ethics of human research by the research committee of Burapha University (Sci041/2019)

1. The quantitative study used two types of battery questionnaire forms: a paper questionnaires and an online questionnaire as it collected data from populations residing in the three districts using accidental random sampling. In collecting data, the research group visiting the sample in the area solicited participation and then provided the questionnaire to the consenting individual. The questionnaire aggregation revealed a questionnaire error of 10% from the online questionnaire.

2. The qualitative study used in-depth interviews with fifteen experienced experts, and then transcription and extraction of key passages mentioned by the experts were analyzed. The interview process following question of POIC guidelines and the digital marketing and impact question for clearly issued by explain more information.

Data Analysis

The data analysis used Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis, and then key passages were extracted and transcribed so that they could be analyzed by the experts.

Result

1. Quantitative result: The sample group was had more females, 184, representing 54.12%, than males, 156, representing 45.88%. Classified by age, it was found that 108 people were aged 31–40 years, followed by 75 people in the age range of 21–30 years old. Then there were 56 people who were less than or equal to 20 years old, 46 people who were 41–50 years old, 29 people who were 51–60 years old, and 26 people who were over 60 years old, respectively representing 31.76, 22.06, 16.47, 13.53, 8.53, and 7.65 percentage of the survey. By occupation, private company employees were most represented at 128 people, followed by 78 private businesses, 56 government officials/state enterprise employees, 48 college students/students, and 30 houses working. It was found that most of people, the lived in Chonburi province for 16–20 years,

For the causal relationship model analysis of sports tourism management in Eastern Economic Corridor, the results were presented as follows:

Table 1 Correlation between 3 latent variables

	IM	DIMC	STM
IM	1.00		
DIMC	0.62**	1.00	
STM	0.71**	0.58**	1.00

p < 0.01

*IM=Impact of sport tourism, DIMC=Digital Integrated Marketing Communication, STM=Sport tourism management

From table 1 demonstrates that all latent variables were significantly correlated at the 0.01 level, with the most correlated variables being sports tourism management and secondary sports tourism effects. In order of digital integrated marketing communication has direct effect in sports tourism (0.62), Impact of sport tourism has direct effect in sports tourism (0.71)

When considering the path of the influence of variables affecting sports tourism management variables, it was found that the impact variable of sports tourism (IM) had a direct effect on sports tourism management (STM) variables at 0.48, and the variable of digital integrated marketing communication (DIMC) directly affected sports tourism management (STM) variables at 0.37 with statistical significance occurring at the 0.01 ($\chi^2 = 0.08$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.78$, $RMSEA = 0.00$, $CFI = 1.00$, $GFI = 1.00$ and $RMR = 0.01$ Remark $**p < 0.01$)

2. Qualitative result: The experts provided important information on the management principles as reflected in the key passages that were extracted from the transcription and are summarized below.

Regarding the economic impact aspect, most of the effects were positive. Villagers earn more from tourism and met people from different countries. Their responses reflected an awareness of community tourism. Economically, they mentioned income from accommodations, restaurants, and vendors. They also shared the belief that local people should benefit from tourism. Sports tourism, however, was mentioned less often, but there was still an awareness of the industry as an emerging means of income. Starting with the sale of tickets and including food vendors and accommodation providers, there is plenty of income to be earned from sports tourism as the following quote from experts demonstrates, "Tourism definitely generates income, starting with travel, accommodation, tourism in the venue or normal tourist attractions" (Expert 10). Expert 11 agrees, "Sport tourism has income, and it attracts investment to the local area as well. Investors will come to explore the opportunity to earn money." Additionally, Expert 13 spoke about income: "tourism generates income, but how do we ensure a continuous income? It will be like planning in various tourism industries because if at any point, stagnation occurs stakeholders should know how to motivate tourists to come. We also distribute and share income to the community by allowing the community to participate with the hotel."

The social impact aspect regarding the tourism encourages communities to develop themselves by sharing knowledge, and there was an exchange of language between local people and tourists that will be a social change value as demonstrated by the quotes from experts as follow below.

"I met people from different countries. There is a sharing of knowledge about community tourism whenever tourists come to visit" (Expert 1). Moreover, Expert 3 says, "it will focus on exchanges and increase the community's wisdom. Importantly, actions should be taken to reach the community. They are the real beneficiaries of the action. Expert 8 said about the social exchange value: "Tourism requires communities to develop themselves."

Regarding the cultural impact aspect: sport tourism has no effect on cultural change but will promote cultural reintroduction. Tourism helps preserve local culture. In other words, cultural exchanges can take place as the quoted experts demonstrate below.

Expert 7 said, *“Tourism helps to preserve local culture. In other words, cultural exchanges can take place because of the diversity of tourists who frequent the community”*. Finally, Expert 4 speaks about how culture will be transferred to a new generation as *“the new generation in the community will see their own value. Incentives to return to preserve the local culture again”*

Regarding the environment-impact aspect: concerns about the environment should include cleanliness. Tourism requires sanitary waste storage and disposal and environmental management systems. Furthermore, tourism can result in ecological destruction at tourist sites as quoted by the experts below.

Expert 12 says, “Maintaining ecosystems in tourist attractions involves ensuring that the issue of solid waste, water sources, rivers and canals does not affect tourism and normal living.” Expert 9 explains, “Especially if there is a competition such as a running event, the race must be cleared to deliver it back to the municipality, Sub-District Administration Organization.” Expert 7 addresses the matter of environmental management: “There must be an environmental management system. In order not to affect the way of life of the local people this includes garbage collection meeting public health standards.”

Integrated marketing communication through digital media can be summarized as marketing activities that use the Internet as a medium. These strategies combine the use of social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Line, Twitter and Instagram with advertising, resulting in sales through interaction. Promotional news releases and public relations successes are discussed in the following opinions expressed by the experts in the qualitative interviews.

Regarding advertising through digital media, Expert 1 says, *“Using the Internet to search for information about tourist attractions will help tourists make decisions about where to visit more easily. If the picture is beautiful, the more tourists are interested. Some people look at reviews rather than call and ask, but sometimes there will be the same calls to contact directly but still less than viewing on various websites on a mobile phone.”* Expert 2 discussed sales by employees through digital media, *“Now we are focusing on promoting more information about our attractions on our Facebook page. Try to take a good photo at a good angle so that tourists will be interested in opening it up or visiting our community. When tourists come, they don't ask for any information. It's as if they know from what they have read in advance. Most of them would arrive and ask us as if they had seen it or had seen it before.”* Regarding news distribution and public relations through digital media, Expert 4 says, *“Social media is important for making tourism known, so providing travel-related information is important. It can be seen that on the website or in the application, there will be information or help to make the decision of tourists to make it easier to travel: either inserting pictures, inserting videos or even using various campaigns to invite tourists' attention.”* Expert 4 addresses direct marketing through digital media: *“Using social media makes accessing information much faster and also simplifies management related to transactions and services in terms of booking, shopping and searching for information. However, it's about managing the systems of people who manage to use social media to its fullest potential.”*

Sports tourism management requires the organization of sport tourism activities that are unique to the locality and the organization of diverse and locally appropriate sports tourism activities, which adds value to sports tourism and enables learning between tourists and the community as demonstrated by the experts quoted below.

Regarding the subcategories, unique to the locality and the organization of diverse and locally appropriate sports tourism activities, Expert 6 explains, "Find activities that are suitable for each area. Where there is something outstanding, try to use it as a selling point, but if there is not, it can be shared with nearby communities, especially if they can do projects together. Collaboration in the community and with non-local residents such as local factory workers, in organizing sports and sporting events can generate tourism and income." Expert 7 says, "Organize activities that make a difference. If you are at sea, it may not be just water activities. But there may be others involved, such as adventure sports." Expert 10 states, "We can create interest in the community, but we also need to explore the readiness of the community and create activities that can be permanent and sustainable by surveying the needs of the community and providing guidelines for management in order to allow the community to continue on their own."

Regarding adding value to sports tourism, Expert 1 suggests, "Promote the craftsmanship in the community as being interesting. It is part of the base activity."

For enabling learning between tourists and the community, Expert 5 says, "Create knowledge and develop knowledge for the community continually." Expert 9 adds, "Create learning to add value to the community. Make the community aware of the importance of tourism. However, there must be someone to give advice first and find activities that are suitable for each area."

Sport tourism management need a difference in both of sports and tourism and make the community aware of the value. Additionally, the impacts of sports tourism must also be considering while planning so that sports tourism can be effective and generate income for the community and the country.

Discussion

Sports tourism has a direct influence on the factors of economic, social, cultural and environmental impact, which affect the attitudes of residents to tourism and development. This is consistent with Nunkoo and Gursoy (2012) found that residents with positive impact attitudes have a direct positive influence on sports tourism development. Pongprasert (2015) said that cultural, environmental, social and economic benefits influence the residents' contribution to the development of sports tourism. If the affected residents have a positive direct economic and cultural influence on tourism development, they will have a positive attitude towards tourism development and will more fully support cooperation in the development of tourism.

Integrated marketing communication through digital media influences sports tourism management by using social media to improve tourism. It is the use of social media for various forms of advertising that appears on the internet. Ratanarojanakool (2014) said that the current tourism industry marketing integrates marketing communications that are order to achieve the most efficient in modern behavior of tourists. Similarly, Schegg

and Stangl (2017) said that communication technology can help tourists obtain tourism information on their own.

Management systems of sports tourism for added the sports tourism value. The community is aware of the value of sports tourism, including the education and cultural exchange that occurs between tourists and communities. This is in keeping with the ideas of Getz and Page (2016) and Taleghani and Ghafary (2014) explain that people and communities should be allowed to participate in various steps of the implementation process from joint thinking to joint decision-making and joint evaluation. In order to create acceptance and maximum benefits for all parties, as Nitikasetsoontorn (2015) found, communities need to select and develop unique activities, creating stories for community tourism by creating practical conditions that ensure that activities can be carried out for all genders every day, according to the needs of tourists. This is consistent with Rattanapongthara et al. (2017) who demonstrated that the development of any community must be based on self-reliance working towards sustainable development. Therefore, it is necessary to find the strengths of the community in order to create an identity that is inherent to the surrounding society in order to push for unique activities that can generate income for the community. This expands the opportunity for the community to generate income. Other aspects of community involve making a marketing plan with continuous public relations in various channels, ensuring that sports tourism activities are suitable for the climate, and including a variety of activities. The best sports tourism is offered at a reasonable price and allows group and solo travelers to participate in the activity. Furthermore, sports tourism should be marketed in conjunction with other types of tourism. Consistent with the research of Satarat (2010) the model of ecotourism management found that local tourism groups can also be attracted by relying on social capital as a selling point. For example, the natural resources available in the community can be best utilized by allowing tourists to stay and pay appropriate compensation for accommodations.

Hujic and Salihic (2020) said that communication technology can help tourists get information about tourism on their own. Diverse media from the traditional media such as newspapers, television, radio, and flyers, which are developed to a new social media, are all channels that can communicate travel and tourism well. Tourists have more convenient and faster access to information about more tourist attractions as well. As for sports tourism management, it was found that learning activities and cultural exchanged occurred between tourists and the community. Consistent with the research of Rattanapongthara et al. (2017), who studied tourism management with an emphasis on community participation, it was found that creating learning activities between communities and tourists will create goodwill and gives tourists more opportunities to participate in activities with the community.

From the parallel data of the qualitative and quantitative studies, it is possible to determine the role of the impact factors of sports tourism support and digital integrated marketing communication in the sport tourism management in the EEC so that there are sport tourism activities that are unique to the locality, are diverse and suitable for the area, add value to sports tourism, and create learning between tourists and the community.

Suggestions for future research include expanding the study of sports tourism to each of the most prominent sports of each tourist area in order to clearly access the elements of the management of that kind of sport. There should be a study applying the sports tourism management model to other provinces of Thailand to compare if there are similarities or differences.

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