



Event marketing as an appropriately integrated marketing communication for promoting tourism of Ko Lad E-Tan, Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to create a model of integrated marketing communication for supporting community tourism in Ko Lad E-Tan, Nakhon Pathom Province. Grounded theory was used to collect the data from two sample groups. The first group consisted of stakeholders and locals. The second sample group was tourists. It was found that a wide variety of integrated marketing communication types were not run by government offices. All marketing and communication plans were based on previous plans which were thought to be ineffective. This research found that the local population in the sample group were interested in the use of integrated marketing communications. This study explains the potential of the local population for carrying out integrated marketing communications. These resources consisted of local human resources, local stories, communication channels and tourists. Moreover, this research has shown that event marketing is an appropriate model of integrated marketing communication which can be used effectively to support community based tourism. This is because it can respond the needs of the local population and it can solve tourism problems in this area. At the same time, the model can be used to communicate directly with tourists. This model can be used to boost the image of tourism and create loyal, revisiting, tourists. Finally, the research identified key factors for the success of community-based integrated marketing communication management in long term. It found that communications should be based on the local uniqueness as well as responding to needs and potentials of the local population. Importantly, it should also be focused on local budget, local human resources and should respond to tourists' needs.

Keywords: Event marketing, integrated marketing communication, agro tourism, Nakhon Pathom Province

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1. Introduction

One of the challenges for community-based tourism management in Thailand is its marketing communication [1]. In the study of Srisawang and Buaban [1], it was found that local people in community based tourism projects often lacked the knowledge and experience required to do marketing communication effectively. They particularly had problems with creating interesting marketing tools and how to reach the target tourist groups. Moreover, local people also faced a lack of budget and staff to adequately promote tourism in the long term. Marketing and communication through local participation was found to be incapable of presenting the destinations' true and authentic image. Moreover, the information provided about the destination did not meet the needs of tourists.

Pongsthapon [2] studied the growth of information technology and its effect on the marketing and communication in tourism. They found both positive and negative impacts from tourist receiving a variety of information from different sources. Receiving information from a variety of information sources was also found to confuse tourists. They were found to find it difficult to identify which information they can be confident in before they decide to travel. Government organizations have funding available to carry out marketing communication programs for supporting community-based tourism in Thailand but many projects are not innovative and are simply a replication of the previous program. There is often no local participation process in developing such projects. For these reasons these projects do not adequately respond the needs of the local population in the tourism areas and tourists. This has a direct impact on the num-

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ber of tourists in the community tourism destinations. Keller [3] indicated the importance of carrying out a participatory process when carrying out a marketing and communication project. This participatory process should include experts in the tourism products, customers and all relevant stakeholders so that it leads to the development of an adequate marketing and communication plan.

Integrated communication marketing is one solution for accessing and responding to the direct need of customers. It also responds to the needs of locals to promote destinations based on authenticity. It ensures that tools of communications and the message delivered are linked together. Keller [3] discovered that there is a positive relationship between the tools of marketing communications and organizations' success. Integrated communication marketing can be used to deliver huge benefits. At the same time, it can help tourists by giving reminders, information which can be updated in real time and special offers. Moreover, it can differentiate tourism products from others by adding value and supporting the participation process for all [4]. Srisawang and Buaban [1] found that integrated communication marketing is important for the long-term marketing of community-based tourism. They found that this was because communities often lack the money, staff and knowledge to do the marketing themselves. Integrated marketing communication provides many appropriate tools for the local population and can response the needs of tourists. It is important to note that, in a truly authentic destination, the local population will have their own occupations and so do not have adequate time to promote tourism themselves. It is, however, easy for them to collaborate with other stakeholders or organizations which support tourism to carry out integrated marketing communications.

The community of Ko Lad E-tan, in Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand has promoted agro tourism for more than 10 years. It has a variety of tourism resources such as an outstanding green environment, agriculture and local wisdom. There are other traditional tourism destinations near to the area which is situated around one hour from Bangkok. Local people have needed the additional income from tourism due to the extensive flooding in 2011 which destroyed their main income. The core products the area produced were; pomelos, bananas, jack fruits and local fruits. Many of these trees were destroyed by the flooding. The trees have since been replanted but took time to recover. During this period tourism provided a much needed second income source for the community. Tourists visit the area and pay for tourism activities such as cooking classes, field trips, tram rides around the community, boat trips, cycling and creative activities which focus on co-creation processes. Four years later, tourism has become one of the main routes to market for their agricultural prod-

ucts which are bought directly from the community by the tourists. Despite this the community have not received the economic benefits from tourism that they anticipated. Buaban and Srisawang [5] found that the number of tourists has actually decreased over the last two years. One of the reasons that was identified for this was that tourists did not feel receive what they expected from their visit based on the information they obtained prior to their visit. The area has a low tourist revisit rate. Meanwhile, marketing communication tools developed by local government offices do not appear to be reaching new tourists. Buaban and Srisawang [5] also found that locals do not want to do marketing communication for community-based tourism because they think it is not their work. Importantly, they also do not have time to do it because they have own occupations. At the same, there are local conflicts among stakeholders who work more directly relates to tourism. Some of them say they cannot participate with the tourism route because they do not have enough time to welcome tourists at their tourism point. Meanwhile, there are many tourism sites for welcoming tourists and their marketing communication is done in different ways. The information about tourism in the area therefore does not work together in harmony. This makes tourists' confused with the information when they would like to visit this area. Finally, the information that is provided often not up to date and consistent. One of reasons for this is a lack of community expertise in marketing communication. Buaban and Srisawang [5] concluded that this area requires an appropriate use of integrated communication for long-term marketing to sustain tourism in the area and to support its economic growth.

Until now, there has not been a study that has presented the appropriate use of integrated communication through local participation for long-term marketing in community-based tourism sites. The aim of this research was therefore to study and develop a model of integrated marketing communication for promoting tourism in Ko Lad E-Tan, Nakhon Pathom province, Thailand. Grounded theory was used in this research because it is a strong interpretive tool for in-depth understanding of quantitative data. It can be used to focus on people's experiences and interpret the active roles of actors [6]. The research results developed could improve the attraction by developing a model of integrated marketing communication which will be used to promote community-based tourism management in the long term.

2. Research Objective

To study and develop event marketing as appropriate use of integrated marketing communication model for promoting community based tourism in Ko Lad E-Tan, Nakhon Pathom province, Thailand

3. Literature Review

3.1. Integrated marketing communication

Belch and Belch [7] defines integrated marketing communication as: “the process develops and sustains brand identity and brand equity, and also increases long-term customer relationships”. Some organizations use only marketing strategies to promote their products or their organization’s image. Typically their methods include as public relations exercises, special events and advertisements. Integrated marketing communication requires a unified strategic plan with an expert working under a single strategic planner. Integrated marketing communications are thought to be essential for use in businesses due to the complex needs of today’s customers. In addition to other complexities, today’s customers have access to far more knowledge about the product or service they are interested in purchasing. For these reasons it is necessary to find new methods and tools for communication, as well as to combine new and existing tools and methods. Integrated marketing communication leads to the delivery of consistent news and provide a high sales impact. It also requires the creation of a product image. It can increase the company’s ability to communicate to the right news to the right customers at the right time and place. When choosing the tools and methods to be used for an integrated marketing communication several considerations must be made. These relate to the specific situation, which methods of communication are most relevant to the product, service or customer group, which messages should be sent, or which groups of consumers should be targeted. It should use the most appropriate communication methods rather than those that are just most familiar to the project’s manager.

Keller [8] explained that integrated marketing communications first involves determining the target audience. It then formulates a combination of marketing promotion programs to match the needs and responses of the target audience. Today, most marketing professionals turn their attention to communication as a tool for managing customer relationships. They pay attention to a specific target group as a small group of customers with similar needs or individually, identifying the needs of each specific customer.

Concluding, integrated marketing communication is a concept of creating a marketing communication plan in order to increase the overall value of the plan. It includes the planning and evaluation of strategies of various types of communication which in turn creates clarity reliability and the most effective from communication integration [9].

3.2. Tourist behavior

Cohen et al [10] stated that tourist behavior refers to all actions of tourists, regardless of whether they are aware or unaware of it. Nobody may notice their

actions that they themselves are unaware of however people can easily observe tourist’s overt behavior. On the other hand, tourist ‘covert’ or non visible behavior is more difficult to observe. Non visible behaviors include the thoughts and emotions that are held within. These are often interrelated with overt behavior in which internal behavior determines the external behavior of tourists. It is therefore possible to find a solution to change the tourist’s behavior for buying services. Importantly, it can help to develop the market and develop tourism products continuously. This behavior that is shown by tourists is their reflection to the environment they find themselves within. Because of this it is important to understand the feeling, knowledge and understanding of tourists in order to meet their needs and to satisfy their demands. Moreover, tourists’ behavior means that people who seek to buy, use, and evaluate tourism products or services are expected to meet their needs. Therefore, studying the behavior of tourists can lead to a deeper understanding of their decision making patterns. It can help to understand what travel services they would like to buy, why they choose to buy the services they do, when they like to buy services, where they like to buy services and how often they buy services. In addition to this tourist’s behavior allows an understanding of how they evaluate those services that they have purchased. This is one issue that that is critical for businesses to know about in order to satisfy their customer’s needs. The service provider must learn everything related to their target tourists, such as studying their needs, ideas and how they work, and spend their leisure time. It is important to understand both personal factors and group factors that affect tourists’ decision to buy services.

Reanthong [11] studied about tourist behavior. Some behavior is easily observable such as the words they use, their actions, facial expressions, or gestures while visiting tourist spots. Taking pictures, eating food and purchasing items are also behavior characteristics that can be used to indicate a tourist’s inner thoughts. These behaviors may be based on individual characteristics or needs or may be similar for groups with similar needs. They also may depend on the environment or experience of the individual tourists themselves.

It can be concluded that tourist behavior acts that expresses the inner thoughts and feelings of tourists, whether or not they are conscious or not. Expressions while traveling may be delivered through speech, actions, facial expressions or gestures. The expressions of tourists can be divided into two key types. These are external and internal behaviors. The external behavior is that which others can easily notice while internal behavior is more difficult to understand. Internal and external behaviors are interrelated and can be used to determine the overall external behavior of tourists. Therefore, to study the tourists’ behavior is so important for develop or create integrated marketing com-

munication. It is one of factors to create interesting tools for attract tourists or customers.

3.3. Event marketing

Miyazaki and Morgan [12] suggests that event marketing is marketing activities that involve the use of special activities or events. Belch and Belch [7] explained that marketing activities or activity marketing is a way to let consumers know about their products and allow them to appreciate their products through activities involving the product. The overall aim of this is to increase sales of the company's products. In recent years event marketing has become more popular. Marketing communication can motivate consumers to participate in the activities themselves. Success can be measured by the number of people who attend the activity and are interested in the company's products following the activity.

Companies arrange special events to create a good image for the company or reinforce the selling point of specific products. Companies can also be a sponsor of special events held by others if they fit in with their brand image. They can gain the interest of target consumers through sponsoring sporting events, exhibitions or concerts. There are also ways of getting involved with activities that others have already done. This can be particularly successful if the activity is already popular with consumers. Supporting special activities may be done on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly or ongoing basis. This creates more opportunities for customers to become familiar with products and can help to emphasize the key selling points of products [13].

Therefore, one of the key factors when arranging event marketing is to understand the objectives which emphasize the relationship between activities and product benefits. Marketing activities must be clear and meaningful. All activities should convince, attract and stimulate the interest of target customers.

4. Method

The purpose of this research was to study and develop the appropriate integrated marketing communication model for promoting tourism in Ko Lad E-Tan, Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand. This area was chosen for the study because at the time of the study they were experiencing marketing communication problems. The area has a variety of tourism resources such as outstanding green areas and engaging local wisdom. As well as this it has a strong and structured community who are cooperative with research projects of this nature.

Grounded theory was applied to collate information obtained during the study. It was applied by constructing and interpreting empirical material through in-depth interviews. Charmaz [13] and Lindroth et al

[14] found that grounded theory is an effective methods in obtaining detailed information from participants and a deep understanding of the subjectivity and diversity of a community. This method is suitable for this research which focuses on the people's social experiences, especially in the tourism industry that needs an understanding of subjective variations of tourists and stakeholders.

Meeting with various stakeholder groups can lead to obtaining in-depth data [15]. The participants in this research were stakeholder groups who were related to tourism management and local residents. As part of this study, 40 participants were interviewed. These were from public organizations or were government officials, private organizations/entrepreneurs and local residents. They were chosen based on their knowledge, roles, experience and influence in tourism. Interviews and focus groups were carried out over a period of three months.

Data analysis was conducted using a systematic data coding process. Coding processes are the key to analysis in grounded theory, however, it is also necessary to compare themes with extant literature to validate the theory for development. Stern [16] explained that the process does not strictly follow a fixed step by step process from open coding through axial coding to selective coding. It depends on what actually takes place during the fieldwork. Questions or new issues are identified during the course of the research which can change its direction. This often requires researchers to go back to the field to collect further data from other participants. The process is continued until it is considered that data saturation is reached. The answers from participants lead to the construction of the concept. Finally, the concept would also compare with extant literature to validate theory.

5. Results and Discussions

This research found that event marketing is an appropriately integrated marketing communication strategy for promoting tourism in Ko Lad E-Tan in the long-term. It was found to be able to deal with the present challenges in the area. At the same time, it was identified that the community has the potential to develop various tools for carrying out integrated marketing communication and which could reach a wide variety of tourists. The model of event marketing through local participations that was developed can integrate various tools of marketing communication which are based on local authenticity.

5.1. The situation of marketing communication of Ko Lad E-Tan

At the time of the research there were marketing communication projects in place for promoting Ko Lad E-Tan tourism. It was found, however, that all tools were not aligned to the same objectives and were

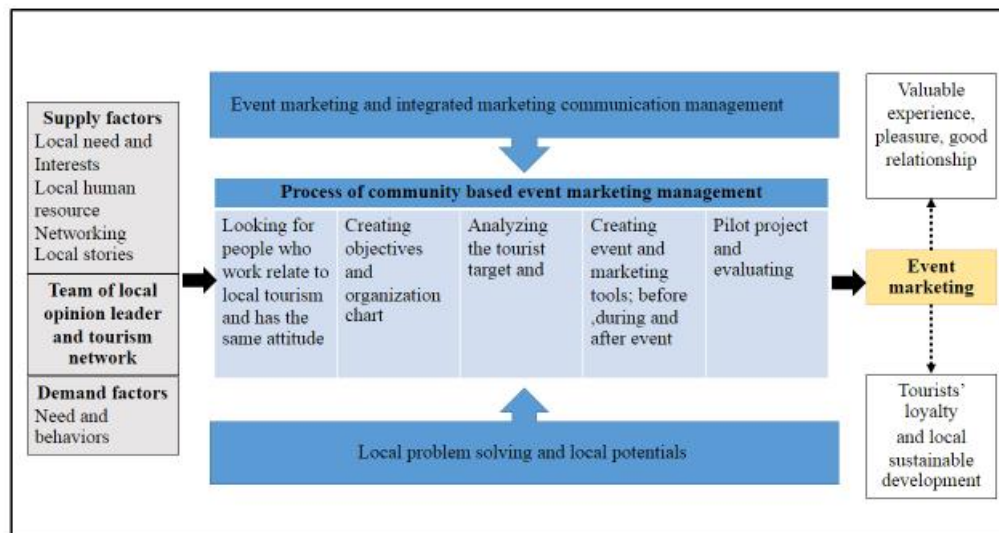


Figure 1: A model of event marketing based on local participation (Author, 2019)

inconsistent. The local government offices or private stakeholders were found to be the key people for carrying out marketing communication projects. Historically these had been carried out as public relations exercises using staff or through the villagers who take care of the various tourism spots in the area and various signs produced by organizations such as Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University. The community also has a website which is run by Ko Lad E-Tan community group.

The marketing communications challenge in this area is one that relates to the development plans of local government organizations. It was found that there was no clear marketing communication plan to promote tourism in Ko Lad E-Tan. Most of the plans that were identified focused on tourism resource development such as creating tourism routes and activities and developing tour guides. Any marketing communication projects that were undertaken were similar to the ones that preceded them. None of the plans studied the demands of the tourists who visited Ko Lad E-Tan. Meanwhile, the private stakeholders focused only on promoting their individual products rather than promoting the area as a tourism destination as well. Consequently, the marketing communication tools that have been used to promote tourism have not been able to achieve their goals. In fact, the number of tourists of Ko Lad E-Tan has actually decreased over the past 2 years.

5.2. The community potentials to develop an integrated marketing communication

In the focus groups, the participants brainstormed about the potential of the local community to do integrated marketing communication for supporting tourism management in the long term. They identified

four key areas which they believed could be used to develop the appropriately integrated marketing communication in Ko Lad E-Tan.

1) The community has local human resources who are able to tell the story of the community to tourists. The local human resources should be local experts with good standing in the community, have main occupations in this area and be interested in tourism management. Importantly, these people should be interested in marketing communication for tourism.

2) Local authenticity and stories which can attract tourists can be developed by the community. Ko Lad E-Tan has a distinctive identity with regards to it being one of the best areas for fruit farming in Thailand. Pomelo which are grown in the area has been registered as Geographical Indication, GI products in Thailand. Moreover, there is a large amount of local wisdom in agriculture in the area. It has a distinctive topography that looks like a horseshoe shaped island and is surrounded by river. It is for this reason that it is known as 'Ko' or Island in English.

3) The community has a network of communication channels through which they can reach their target audience. The area has tourism infrastructure that could be used to promote the community. This includes tour companies, hotels and agencies. In addition to these communication channels the community has existing customers or tourists and local government offices including academic organizations which could help to promote it.

4) The target groups for the communication are people who receive the information about the community and decide to visit Ko Lad E-Tan. This research found that Ko Lad E-Tan has key tourist groups which it is keen to attract. If the community clearly specifies its target groups, it will lead to visits from tourists with

the correct interests for the destination. Tourists who visited Ko Lad E-Tan were interviewed as part of the research. In their responses, they focused on tourism according to specific interests in agricultural tourism. They stated that they were seeking meaningful experiences, pleasure and fun. They also wanted to have good relationship with the local people they met during their visit.

5.3. Event marketing: the integrated marketing communication for promoting tourism in the long term

This research found that the event marketing is a suitable form of integrated marketing communication for Ko Lad E-tan. It can directly communicate with consumers. The community agreed that this approach would reduce the marketing communication problems that it faced at the time of the research. In particular problems relating to a lack of budget and human resources in marketing communication. This research showed that a model of event marketing should be based on local participation. It should focus on the need and behavior of tourists, their demands and what the community can supply. Firstly, identifying people whose work relates to local tourism and people who have the same attitude is the first key step. Secondly, all actors must learn and share knowledge together in order to create objectives and an organization chart. Thirdly, the tourist target market must be analyzed and an appropriate group or groups of tourists must be selected. Fourthly, an event must be created which should be based on local authenticity. In this step the various marketing communication tools should be used to promote the event. Finally, a pilot project should be carried out and thoroughly evaluated. It is hoped that this model can help build the tourists' loyalty and enhance the local economy in a sustainable way.

This research identified key benefits of integrated marketing communication through event marketing. These were: low cost budget, up increasing sales of local products, reaching tourists directly and increasing tourist loyalty. The community is able to obtain income from arranging the event. They should not need to spend a large amount of money to do the marketing communication as they can promote it through their existing network. During the event they can also promote their tourism or products and create a "tourism image" for memorizing though suitable activities during the event. The local community believed that regular events will grow organically and steadily. During the events tourists can test the products or communicate with the product owner, it will lead to build the loyalty tourists and consumers. In this research, it was found that the process for doing the marketing communication had three key phases. These were; before event, during event and after event. Importantly, event

marketing can integrate various marketing communication tools and can reach to the target tourists.

From the analysis of the potential of the community of Ko Lad E-Tan, the participants created the "Wan Chiva Event". This presented local stories and responded the needs of the community and the present tourists of Ko Lad E-Tan. This research found that tourists wanted to have a holiday break with a feeling of pleasure, that they desire green space for relaxing and like to look for and purchase organic products. They focus on healthy tourism styles and appreciate a positive relationship with the local population they meet. The name of the event was derived from these needs "Wan" is the distinctive flavors of fruit which has a good taste (Many fruits from the area have won the national flavor awards in Thailand.) and "Chiva" meaning of the local way of life that is both physically and mentally happy.

The schedule for the event responded to the needs of the community and the tourists. It gave a chance for the community to bring their products to show to tourists through friendship and smiles. As well as, tourists have the opportunity to get involved the production process through creative tourism activities. The event was divided into 3 zones.

Zone 1: Local food and beverage service area. 90% of the products were from Ko Lad E-Tan community and the 10% of products were from outside the area in Nakhon Pathom Province. This zone promoted local food and beverages. Zone 2, Creative activity area. This area provided workshops for tourist who desired a valuable creative experience. All of the activities were co-creation workshops and provided inspiration.

Zone 3, Guest Speaker area. Community invited guest speakers for sharing, discussing about around a monthly theme. The guest speaker area provided informative views and interesting insights for the tourists and local community alike.

The local community in Ko Lad E-tan designed three tools for promoting their event. All of these tools were based on local potentials and were present in the same event theme.

1) Advertising via media at the tourist information points in the Rai Khing Temple and Don Wai Floating Market. The challenge with this type of advertising was to create interesting media such as images, text or video clips for attracting tourist decision to visit Ko Lad E-Tan. Timing is also important to make tourists interested and decide to travel at a time when they can.

2) Public relations and news through local media such as radio, newspaper and travel books. The local community used their network to promote the event with local organizations relate to tourism in the area. All if these tools can present tourism image, news, information of Ko Lad E-Than Event. In the future, there will also be long-term marketing communications.

3) Direct marketing through the internet. This was

used to directly communicate with specific groups of tourists. Most of the target population are people who are already interested in the area so the goal of this is to persuade them to participate the event.

This research found the similar result of the study's Belch and Belch [7] that the event marketing is a way to let consumers know about their products and allow them to appreciate their products through activities involving the product. This study found more information that integrated marketing communication in long-term through event marketing of the Ko Lad E-Tan community should be based on local human resources, their authenticity and should respond to the needs of tourists. Various local people and organizations are important for the long term management of such projects. These include students in local schools, government officers and all stakeholders. In addition, this work has to consider the return on investment from different marketing strategies. The community does not currently have sufficient funds to set up marketing communications to reach the target tourists. Networking is important for success in integrated marketing communication and particularly vital for this community.

6. Conclusion

Event marketing was found to be an appropriately integrated marketing communication model for Ko Lad E-Tan. The local community believes it can promote tourism and solve community problems. Event marketing can communicate directly with consumers by arranging special events and using them as a platform to promote tourist destinations and community products. At the same time, it can enhance the tourism image of Ko Lad E-Tan, Nakhon Pathom Province. Moreover it can create strong emotions and memories in tourists about agro tourism which focuses on health. Importantly, this model is able to integrate a variety marketing communication tools. It does not require a large amount of funds and also brings various groups who work in tourism together. This study found that the local community should have strong potential for skills which could be used for event marketing. These are local human resources, local stories and communication networks. Moreover, the needs and behaviors of tourists are important for choosing the most appropriate communication tools. Advertisements through media are likely to attract some groups of tourist whereas

using the internet is likely to attract others. In this project, the stakeholders and locals organizations were encouraged to work together. This included the temple, school, local community and government officers. It can be concluded that integrated marketing communication through event marketing requires careful planning and a long-term plan in order for it to be successful. Training local human resources in event marketing is important for it to have maximum benefit.

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