

A Community-Based Tourism Framework for Value Co-Creation of the Sea Salt Community in Samut Songkhram Province and the Areas around Thai Gulf

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Abstract

This research aimed to: (1) assess the existing levels of marketing innovation, community-based tourism (CBT) potential, product and brand storytelling, and value co-creation within sea salt communities and the Areas around Thai Gulf; (2) analyze the influence of marketing innovation, CBT potential, and product and brand storytelling on value co-creation; and (3) propose a sustainable framework for value co-creation in sea salt community-based tourism. A mixed-methods approach was adopted. Quantitative data were gathered from a sample of 400 stakeholders, including government officials, private tourism operators, community leaders, and tourists, via a structured questionnaire. Qualitative insights were obtained through in-depth interviews with 20 key informants with expertise in community development and tourism. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings indicated that all principal variables—marketing innovation, CBT potential, product and brand storytelling, and value co-creation—were perceived at a high level. The revised structural model showed a strong fit with the empirical data ($\chi^2 = 35.21$, $df = 40$, $p\text{-value} = 0.651$; $RMSEA = 0.008$; $CFI = 1.00$; $GFI = 0.98$; $AGFI = 0.97$). The analysis revealed that marketing innovation directly and indirectly influenced CBT potential and product/brand storytelling, which subsequently had a significant positive impact on value co-creation at a 0.05 significance level. Based on these results, the “CBTV Model” was developed, centered on four pillars: Community-Based Tourism Potential, Brand Storytelling, Technology-Driven Marketing Innovation, and Value Co-Creation. This model provides a strategic roadmap for stakeholders to foster sustainable economic growth in sea salt communities by integrating authentic local experiences with effective market strategies, thereby aligning economic, socio-cultural, and environmental objectives within a sustainable tourism paradigm.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Value Co-Creation, Marketing Innovation, Brand Storytelling, Sea Salt Products, Sustainable Tourism

1. Introduction

Globally, tourism is shifting towards more authentic, sustainable, and community-centric models. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a powerful approach for achieving sustainable development, empowering local communities to manage tourism resources while preserving their cultural heritage and natural environment (López-Guzmán et al., 2021). CBT offers tourists unique opportunities to engage with local cultures and lifestyles, creating a more meaningful travel experience that generates direct economic benefits for the host community (Rodjam et al., 2024)

Thailand's extensive coastline is home to numerous communities whose livelihoods have been intertwined with sea salt farming for centuries. These "sea salt routes" possess rich cultural narratives and unique local products that hold immense potential for CBT development. However, these communities often face challenges in translating their cultural assets into compelling tourism products that can compete in the modern market. The core issue lies not in the quality of their products, but in the capacity to innovate, create value, and effectively communicate their unique story to a wider audience (Suttikun, 2024).

While previous research in Thailand has examined aspects of sustainable tourism and local product development, a specific gap exists in understanding how to systematically integrate marketing innovation and brand storytelling within a CBT framework to foster value co-creation for niche products like sea salt. Value co-creation, where value is mutually created by both the community (producer) and the tourist (consumer), is critical for the long-term success and sustainability of CBT initiatives (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Therefore, this study aims to develop a holistic framework that connects the drivers of innovation and storytelling with the ultimate outcome of value co-creation in the context of sea salt CBT along the Gulf of Thailand. This research seeks to answer the question: How can marketing innovation and brand storytelling be leveraged to enhance value co-creation within a community-based tourism model for traditional sea salt communities? The findings are expected to provide a practical and theoretically grounded model for policymakers, community leaders, and tourism operators to build resilient and competitive local economies based on the principles of sustainable and community-led tourism.

2. Objective

1. To assess the existing levels of marketing innovation, community-based tourism (CBT) potential, product and brand storytelling, and value co-creation within sea salt communities and the Areas around Thai Gulf.
2. To analyze the influence of marketing innovation, CBT potential, and product and brand storytelling on value co-creation.
3. To propose a sustainable framework for value co-creation in sea salt community-based tourism based on the empirical findings.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, specifically a sequential explanatory design. This approach was chosen to leverage the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The initial quantitative phase provided broad, generalizable insights into the relationships between the core variables, while the subsequent qualitative phase offered deep, contextual understanding to explain and enrich the statistical findings. This two-phase process ensures a more comprehensive and robust analysis of the complex dynamics within community-based tourism.

For the quantitative phase, A sample of 400 respondents was selected through multi-stage random sampling. The participants comprised 100 government agency officials, 100 private sector entrepreneurs, 100 members of tourism and community networks, 50 community leaders from sea salt enterprises, and 50 tourists. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. Population and Sampling: The target population for this study consisted of all stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in the sea salt tourism value chain and the areas around Thai Gulf such as Phetchaburi, Samut Sakhon, and Samut Songkhram in Thailand. A multi-stage random sampling technique was utilized to ensure a representative sample.

Stage 1: The three provinces were purposively selected due to their historical and economic significance in sea salt production.

Stage 2: Within each province, districts with active sea salt community enterprises were randomly selected.

Stage 3: From these selected districts, individual respondents were randomly chosen from stakeholder lists provided by local administrative offices and tourism associations.

The final sample consisted of 400 respondents, comprising 100 government agency officials, 100 private sector entrepreneurs, 100 members of tourism and community networks, 50 community leaders from sea salt enterprises, and 50 tourists. This sample size was determined to be sufficient for achieving statistical power in the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, based on established guidelines (e.g., Hair et al., 2018).

Data Collection Instrument: The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to measure the study's latent variables. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering demographic profiles and a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess perceptions of marketing innovation, CBT potential, product and brand storytelling, and value co-creation.

In the qualitative phase, In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 purposively selected key informants. The selection criteria were designed to identify individuals with extensive knowledge and experience, including: (1) a minimum of five years of direct involvement in tourism policy, (2) a leadership role in a community enterprise, or (3) academic expertise in cultural tourism development. This method ensured that the qualitative data would be rich, relevant, and insightful, as supported by the principles of qualitative inquiry (Marshall, 1996). Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This format allowed for consistent questioning across key themes while providing the flexibility to probe deeper into emergent ideas and specific experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes, was audio-recorded with the informant's consent, and was subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis: The qualitative data from the interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. The identified themes were then used to interpret and provide a deeper context for the quantitative results from the SEM analysis.

3.1 Population and Sample

The sample used in this study consisted of 62 individuals, including both faculty members and support staff, divided into: 1) 45 faculty members and 2) 17 support staff. In this study, the researcher used simple random sampling from the population of personnel at the Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, employed during the 2024 fiscal year.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was developed following an extensive literature review. It contained three sections: demographic information, a five-point rating scale to measure the levels of the core constructs (marketing innovation, CBT potential, product and brand storytelling, and value co-creation), and open-ended questions for additional suggestions. The instrument's content validity was confirmed by a panel of five academic experts. A pilot test with 50 participants yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.96, indicating excellent internal consistency and reliability. The measurement properties were further validated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), with all constructs meeting the required thresholds for Composite Reliability (CR > 0.60) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Reliability and Validity Analysis of Latent Variables (n=400)

Latent Variable	Factor Loading (λ)	Variance Extracted (ρ_v)	Composite reliability (ρ_c)
Management Innovation (MAIN)	0.25 – 0.32	0.75	0.92
CBT Potential (CBTP)	0.27 – 0.31	0.74	0.86
Product & Brand Storytelling (PBS)	0.18 – 0.40	0.72	0.89
Value Co-Creation (VCC)	0.27 – 0.35	0.73	0.88
Criteria		$\rho_v > 0.50$	$\rho_c > 0.60$

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, S.D.) and inferential statistics. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the causal relationships proposed in the research framework.

4. Results

1. Levels of Key Variables: The analysis revealed that all four latent variables were rated at a high level by the respondents. Value Co-Creation received the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.88$), followed by Product & Brand Storytelling ($\bar{x} = 3.85$), Marketing Innovation ($\bar{x} = 3.81$), and CBT Potential ($\bar{x} = 3.79$), as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 Mean ($\bar{x}$), Standard Deviation (S.D.), and Interpretation Levels of the Studied Variables (n = 400)

Latent Variable	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
Management Innovation (MAIN))	3.81	0.65	High
CBT Potential (CBTP)	3.79	0.61	High
Product & Brand Storytelling (PBS)	3.85	0.62	High
Value Co-Creation (VCC)	3.88	0.68	High

From Table 2, it was found that the mean scores of the latent variables ranged between 3.79 and 3.8. Among these, the latent variable “Value Co-Creation (VCC)” had the highest mean score, followed by “Product & Brand Storytelling (PBS),” “Management Innovation (MAIN)),” and “CBT Potential (CBTP) Value Enhancement,” respectively.

2. Structural Model Analysis: The initial hypothesized model did not adequately fit the empirical data ($\chi^2 = 155.42$, $df = 61$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$, $RMSEA = 0.075$). Therefore, the model was modified based on theoretical justification and modification indices. The modified model demonstrated an excellent fit with the data, with all fit indices surpassing the required thresholds: $\chi^2 = 35.21$, $df = 40$, $p\text{-value} = 0.651$; Relative $\chi^2 = 0.88$; GFI = 0.98; AGFI = 0.97; RMR = 0.007; RMSEA = 0.008; and CFI = 1.00. This confirms that the modified model is robust and consistent with the collected data. The standardized path coefficients of the final model are presented

Table 3 Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Dependent Variable	R ²	Effect	Management Innovation (MAIN))	Product & Brand Storytelling (PBS)	Value Co-Creation (VCC)
CBT Potential (CBTP)	0.75	Direct	0.86*(15.22)	-	-
		Indirect	-	-	-
		Total	0.88*(15.14)	-	-
		Effects			
Product & Brand Storytelling (PBS)	0.88	Total	0.53*(5.51)	0.47*(4.34)	-
		Effects			
		Total	0.42*(4.45)	-	-
		Effects			

		Total Effects	0.93*(17.71)	0.47*(4.34)	-
Value Co-Creation (VCC)	0.85	Total Effects	0.35*(4.89)	0.52*(2.53)	0.53*(1.97)
		Total Effects	0.03(0.18)	0.25*(2.08)	-
		Total Effects	0.95*(15.52)	0.77*(7.00)	0.53*(1.97)

The results in Table 3 show that Marketing Innovation (MI) has a significant positive direct effect on CBT Potential, Product & Brand Storytelling, and Value Co-Creation. Furthermore, CBT Potential (CBTP) and Product & Brand Storytelling (PBS) also exert significant positive influences on Value Co-Creation (VCC), confirming all hypothesized relationships.

3. Development of the "CBTV Model": Based on the empirical findings, the study proposes the "CBTV Model" – a framework for value co-creation in sea salt community-based tourism. The model consists of four interconnected components:

C - Community-Based Tourism Potential: Leveraging the authentic cultural, environmental, and social assets of the sea salt communities as the foundation for the tourism experience.

B - Brand Storytelling: Developing compelling narratives around the product's heritage, production process, and community identity to create an emotional connection with consumers.

T - Technology-Driven Marketing Innovation: Adopting modern marketing strategies, including digital platforms and creative management approaches, to reach target audiences and enhance operational efficiency.

V - Value Co-Creation: The ultimate outcome, where tourists and communities collaborate (consciously or unconsciously) to create unique, mutually beneficial experiences and value.

This model illustrates a systemic process where Marketing Innovation acts as a catalyst, enhancing the community's intrinsic CBT Potential and enabling powerful Brand Storytelling. Together, these elements drive the process of Value Co-Creation, leading to sustainable competitive advantage.

5. Conclusion And Future Work

This study successfully developed and validated the "CBTV Model," an integrated framework explaining the mechanism for enhancing value in sea salt communities through a community-based tourism approach. The SEM analysis confirmed the model's excellent fit with the empirical data, demonstrating that Marketing Innovation is a fundamental driver that positively influences CBT Potential and Brand Storytelling, which in turn are crucial antecedents to Value Co-Creation.

The findings emphasize that for traditional communities to thrive in the modern tourism landscape, they must move beyond being mere producers and become active curators of experiences. By innovating in their management and marketing, leveraging their authentic potential for community-based tourism, and weaving compelling brand stories, they can engage tourists as partners in the value creation process.

From a practical standpoint, the CBTV Model offers a strategic guide for government agencies, NGOs, and community leaders to formulate policies and initiatives that support holistic development. It suggests a shift from siloed interventions to an integrated strategy that nurtures innovation, builds storytelling capacity, and empowers communities to take ownership of their tourism development. Future research should explore the application of this model in

other types of craft or agricultural communities and investigate the role of specific digital technologies in accelerating the value co-creation process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for its invaluable support throughout the conduct of this research. My heartfelt thanks also go to the College of Innovation and Management, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, as well as to the experts in tourism and community sea salt around Thai Gulf, for their kind cooperation in completing the questionnaires and their significant contribution to the successful completion of this research report.

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