

***Marketing Mix to Promote Tourism in the Nature Education Center for
Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism in Chonburi Province***

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Abstract

This study specifically aims to investigate appropriate marketing mix model to promote tourism in Chonburi province. It consists of three main objectives: (1) to explore the components of the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Ecotourism in Chonburi; (2) to study marketing mix in order to promote tourism; and (3) to study a model of marketing mix specializing for sustainably development. The techniques used for data collection were In-depth questionnaire and survey questionnaire. The data were analyzed by using t-test, f-test, and content analysis.

The results of the study revealed that: (1) this natural attraction consisted of four significant components of a tourist attraction which are place, management, participation, and activities in the attraction. (2) attraction, facilities and publicity of this natural attraction were the main factors which should be renovated and improved.

The recommendations are as follows: (1) Local government should renovate deteriorated building structures for visitors' safety and convenience such as pathway pavilion, toilets, interpretation signs, wayside exhibition concerning biological diversity, observatory tower, and boardwalk. In order to accommodate visitors and provide knowledge about the different ecosystems, the auditorium or lecture hall renovation and expansion is needed. Landscapes and clear trail signs should be redesigned. (2) Local government should properly and constantly publicize this natural attraction through press release and effective media such as leaflets, brochures, and websites. (3) Visitors and local people to appreciate nature in mangrove forest should be educated and increased awareness in protecting environment so as to conserve the natural attraction sustainably.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism; Eco-tourism; Marketing Mix; Mangrove; Conservation; Tourist Attraction

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Introduction

Thailand is one of the countries possessed a variety of natural resources, culture heritage, and historical sites which have been accumulated and transmitted from generation to generation. In Thailand, domestic tourism is popular among a number of tourists, both Thais and foreigners. As domestic tourism has brought a large exchange revenue and major income for developing the country, Thai government sectors and private sectors support this kind of tourism by promoting tourism, using public relations as a tool of tourism marketing, taking part in tourism development as well as promoting tourism as a tool for conservation and sustainable development. Located in suitable area, Thailand gains an advantage among neighboring countries because of its location. Tourists can commute conveniently when they desire to travel in Thailand. In addition, Thai government and concerned government sectors (e.g., Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Tourism Authority of Thailand, and etc.) realize the important of tourism so they establish tourism development policy and planning to support better quality for domestic tourism. The government and concerned business sectors have wisely planned tourism strategies targeting on sustainable development. They pay attention to promote sustainable tourism as well as cultural tourism. As you can see from tourism campaigns, they focus on 'Thainess' as a selling point. These are the reasons why domestic tourism in Thailand is popular for both international tourists and domestic tourists.

The Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism in Chonburi is located at Moo 3, Bang Muang district in Chonburi province. With an area of 30 Rai (118.5 acres), the nature education center is the last and the most plentiful mangrove forest or intertidal forest in Chonburi. Operated in cooperation among the Department of Forestry, Chonburi Provincial Administration Organization, and regional agency of Department of Forestry, the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism has been established as a center for mangrove conservation as well as a learning center for public. Along 2,300 meters-length trails, the longest wooden bridge trails in Thailand, visitors can see natural diversity of mangrove such as mangrove forest and aquatic animals. Along the way, there are a pathway pavilion which visitors can learn about biological diversity, a rope bridge, and wayside exhibition board. Visitors can get knowledge and enjoyment in this natural learning center as it is rich in various kinds of mangrove such as Red Mangrove (*Rhizophora Mucronata* Poir), *Rhizophora Apiculata* Blume, *Xylocarpus Moluccensis* Roem, *Xylocarpus Granatum* Koenig, *Avicennia Alba* Blume, Grey Mangrove or Olive Mangrove, Tagal Mangrove, Yellow Mangrove, Cork Tree, and many other species of plants. It is not only fish farming, but also a natural habitat of various fish such as shrimp, black tiger shrimp, oysters, clams, crabs, fiddler crabs, mangrove crabs, small-scale mud carp (*Cirrhinus microlepis*), white seabass, and blenny.

In the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism, there is also a bird observatory tower for visitors who desire to see and learn about numerous species of birds in the mangrove forest (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2013). Although the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism is regarded as the last and the richest mangrove forest in Chonburi province, it has not received much attention from tourists as expected. One of the problems is the lack of funds to support the development of this natural

attraction. Financial supports are necessary in several ways: marketing to promote this destination, destination management, natural attraction conservation, and etc. According to Li, M. et al (2007:308-317), problems of tourism development compose of three main factors: 1) too many tourists, over tourism carrying capacity, could deteriorate tourist attraction, 2) local economic development policies are ineffective, 3) the lack of financial support from government sectors to develop tourist destination to be more attractive and interesting for tourists. In addition, the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism has neither arranged efficient marketing promotion nor an ongoing public relations strategy. From the above problems, the researcher is interested to study the marketing mix to promote tourism in the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism in Chonburi province. In this study the researcher aims to investigate appropriate marketing mix model to promote tourism, encourage, and persuade travelers to visit this natural attraction. Meanwhile, the main goal is to increase awareness in protecting the environment so as to conserve the natural attraction sustainably.

Objectives

This study aimed: (1) to explore the components of the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism in Chonburi province; 2) to study appropriate marketing mix in order to promote tourism in Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism in Chonburi province; and 3) to study a model of marketing mix specializing for sustainably development in Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism in Chonburi province.

Literature Review

Ecotourism is responsible travel in areas containing natural resources that possess endemic characteristics and cultural or historical resources that are integrated into the area's ecological system. Its purpose is to create awareness among all concerned parties of the need for and the measures used to conserve ecosystems (The Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1997).

According to Kotler, P. (1994) marketing is a process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and exchanging products and value with each other. Similar to general marketing activities, Recharadson (1996) indicates that the designing of plans is important. They should be flexible and dynamic documents. He also point out that marketing is to establish, develop and commercialize long-term customer relationships so that the objectives of the parties are met. It is done by a mutual exchange and keeping of promise. Gronroos, C. (1989) according with Misiura, S. (2006) state that to prepare marketing research to identify target markets, understand opportunities, determine strengths and weaknesses, develop strategies for increasing tourism and prepare marketing strategies, collaborative marketing packages and cross-marketing program to maximize the impact of the sector is the significant process of marketing resources. Seaton and Bennett (1996) point out the procedure of marketing plans divides into six elements: 1) A situation analysis; 2) A review of the organization is mission; 3) Objectives and strategies for both financial and non-financial goals; 4) An action plan; 5) A budget; and 6) Evaluation of its effectiveness.

Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher use both qualitative and quantitative method. The target population were divided into three groups; tourists, government officers, and local people. Using Convenience Random Sampling, the samples of tourists were 400 Thai tourists traveling in Chonburi province. The second group of samples were five people; the director, head officer, and officers, working in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in Chonburi. The other samples were 10 people including community leader and local people in Samed district. The second and the third group were selected by using Probability Method.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

The instruments used in this study were survey form, survey questionnaire and interview questionnaire.

The survey form was designed to explore the components of the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Ecotourism in Chonburi province. It was based on concepts of significance and concerned theories such as Bornemeire et al. (1991) and Fennel (1999). The questionnaire was verified using the IOC (Items Objective Congruence Index) evaluation to ensure the content validity and appropriateness of the issues in the survey form. The data collection was conducted on 5th January, 2014 - 12th January, 2014. The researcher explored and inspected the sites in order to evaluate the potential of the natural attraction. The destination survey was analyzed by using Content Analysis.

The semi-structured and in-depth interview questionnaire was utilized for interviewing the participants about personal information, tourism SWOT analysis, marketing mix, tourism marketing promotion, and guidelines for promoting the natural learning center. The data collection was conducted on 27th February, 2014 to 12th March, 2014. The in-depth interview questionnaires were used to interview the concerned government officers and local people in the community nearby the natural learning center to investigate the opinion of toward marketing promotion of the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation in Chonburi province. The data from the interview was analyzed by using Content Analysis. The data were analyzed from in-depth interview by using Content Analysis. Concerning the interview questionnaire, the main questions about marketing mix to promote tourism in the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism in Chonburi province was constructed from the empirical studies and concerned documents. After that, the questionnaire was verified using the IOC evaluation form to ensure the validity and appropriateness of the questions.

The survey questionnaire was used to investigate 400 Thai tourists' opinion toward marketing mix of the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation in Chonburi province. The designed questionnaire based on concerned theories, concepts, and the results of the interview questionnaire. The questionnaire was verified using the IOC (Items Objective Congruence Index) evaluation. It was composed of open-ended and close-ended questions using five-level-Likert Scale to grade respondents' opinions toward marketing mix. There were three parts in the questionnaire: (1) Personal Information; (2) Tourists' behavior in the Nature Education Center for

Mangrove Conservation in Chonburi province; (3) Tourists' opinions toward marketing mix of the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation in Chonburi province. The data collection was conducted on 20th May, 2014 - 30th June, 2014. The designed questionnaires were distributed to the tourists traveling in the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation in Chonburi province to investigate the opinion of toward marketing mix of the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation in Chonburi province. The statistic used to analyze the data is Cronbach's Alpha. The SPSS software was employed to analyze the data using descriptive statistics to produce statistical output for each question. In the first part of questionnaire and the second part of the questionnaire, the data was analyzed by using frequency and percentage. In the last part of the questionnaire, the tourists' opinions toward marketing mix of the Nature Education Center for Mangrove Conservation in Chonburi province, means and standard deviation were used to determine the tourists' opinion toward marketing promotion.

Results

From the survey study, the results founded that this natural attraction consisted of four significant components of the tourist attraction which are ecotourism site, management, participation, and activities.

The results of from the questionnaire were: The quantitative analysis of Tourists' personal characteristics and behavior. It was found that most travelers were female (56 percent), single (87.3 percent), the average age under 20 years (43.5 percent). Most of them have a bachelor's degree (34 percent) and graduated in high school (32 percent). Their professionals are university students and high students (63.3 percent). Most of them have no income (56 percent) and only 16 percent of tourists have revenue around 10,001-20,000 baht per month. It was found that the primary purpose to travel in the Nature Education was for nature study (69.2 percent), followed by recreation purpose (21.3 percent). Most of tourists traveled in group (69.7 percent) and 51.6 percent traveled to the Nature Education by bus charter.

The results from in-depth interview found that there were four groups of tourists visiting this natural attraction: 1) students and university students, 2) employees, 3) government officers, and 4) general public. They were mostly visited the Nature Education from Monday to Friday during office hours (around 9am - 4pm). The purpose of visiting was to learn about the mangrove ecosystems. Furthermore, it was found that the budgetary supports from the government were not enough for tourism promotion and development. There was no clarity on fiscal matters in order to develop tourist attractions in the country. Based on the interview with stakeholders, it was found that visitors did not pay much attention to the attraction or the Nature Education due to the fact that there was no improvement of this tourist attraction. In addition, relevant governors, concerned stakeholders and local community should involve or take part in natural conservation as well as marketing planning in the natural attraction. Besides, a number of tourism promotions and marketing activities should be provided continuously. Also, above the line advertising such as brochures, leaflets, and online media such as website also should be improved

A proposed model of the marketing mix to promote tourism in the Nature Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism

Four significant components which are ecotourism site, management, participation and activities should be conserved and sustained.

- In term of tourism product, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and local governors should help improve facilities in the natural attraction.
- In term of price, visitors should pay for the entrance fees with reasonable price.
- In term of place, visitors could contract the organization directly.
- In term of promotion, there should be efficient advertisements and public relations. In addition, the organization should continuously develop effective online media and arrange interesting activities in the Nature Center for Mangrove Conservation and eco-tourism.

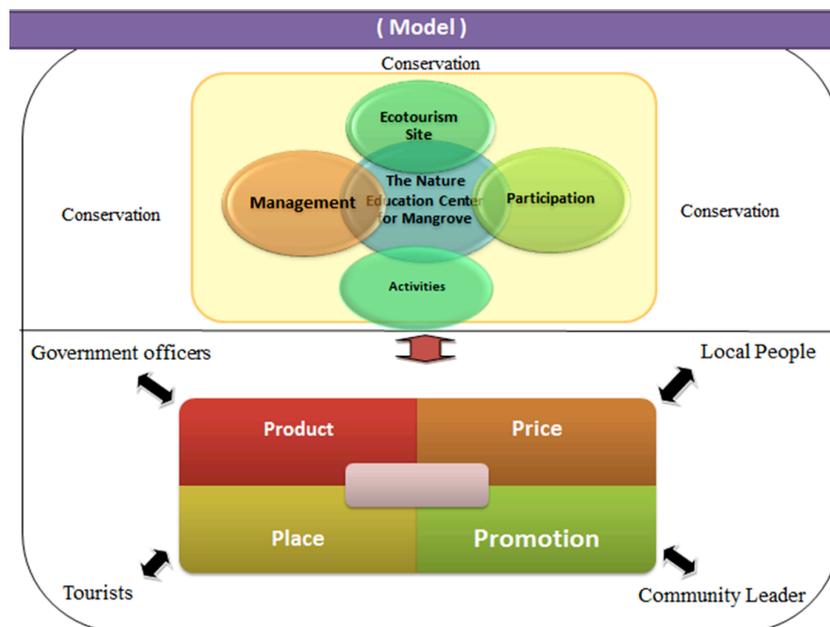


Figure 1: A proposed model of the marketing mix to promote tourism in the Nature Center for Mangrove Conservation and Eco-tourism

Conclusion

The results from the survey study, in-depth interview, questionnaire, it was found that the marketing mix planning to promote the destination are:

- 1) Attraction: *The facilities in the ecotourism site should be considerably developed.*
- 2) Price: *The respondents from the study agreed that the price should be affordable or reasonable, and they also suggested that the entrance fee should be around 20 baht.*
- 3) Place (or channels): *The entrance tickets should be able to purchase comfortably at well-known tourist spots.*
- 4) Promotion: *The concerned governors should continuously offer promotion, arrange public relations, and provide brochure for promoting this ecotourism site to become more popular among tourists. Online marketing media such as websites, YouTube, and Facebook should be created and developed to persuade travelers to visit this natural attraction.*

Recommendations from the study

- 1) Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and local government should renovate deteriorated building structures for visitors' safety and convenience such as pathway pavilion, toilets, interpretation signs, food and beverage station, souvenir shop, wayside exhibition concerning biological diversity, bird observatory tower, and boardwalk.
- 2) In order to accommodate visitors and provide knowledge about the different ecosystems of the mangrove forest in Chonburi province, the auditorium or lecture hall renovation and expansion is needed.
- 3) Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and local government should redesign landscapes and to provide clear trail signs.
- 4) Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and local government should properly and constantly publicize this natural attraction through press release and effective media such as leaflets, brochures, websites, and etc.
- 5) Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and local government should educate visitors and local people to appreciate nature in mangrove forests and increase awareness in protecting the environment so as to conserve the natural attraction sustainably.

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