Influence of Entrepreneurial Readiness, Human Resources, Market Trends, and Government Policies on Sustainable Net-Zero Carbon Tourism in the Gulf of Thailand

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Abstract

Marine tourism in the Gulf of Thailand is a significant contributor to the region's economy but faces challenges due to environmental degradation and climate change impacts. This study investigates the interplay of entrepreneurial readiness, human resource development, market trends, and government policies in fostering sustainable net-zero carbon tourism. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through structured surveys (n=300) and semi-structured interviews (n=100) with tourism operators, policymakers, and community stakeholders across four provinces. Results highlight the critical role of entrepreneurial adaptability, robust human resource strategies, and eco-conscious market trends in advancing sustainability goals. Government policies, while impactful, require stronger enforcement and alignment with international frameworks like the Paris Agreement. A conceptual framework is developed, integrating these dimensions to propose a comprehensive model for sustainable tourism. Practical recommendations include capacity-building initiatives, enhanced policy implementation, and the promotion of community-based tourism models. The study offers theoretical contributions to sustainable tourism literature and actionable strategies for stakeholders, positioning the Gulf of Thailand as a potential benchmark for sustainable marine tourism.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Net-Zero Carbon, Entrepreneurial Readiness, Human Resource Development, Market Trends, Government Policy, Gulf of Thailand

1. Introduction

Marine tourism in the Gulf of Thailand is a cornerstone of the region's economy, supported by diverse ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reefs, and coastal beaches. These unique natural resources attract millions of tourists annually, generating significant revenue for local communities, provincial governments, and the national economy. In 2014, marine tourism was estimated to contribute over 434 billion Thai Baht in direct economic value, emphasizing its role as a pivotal driver of economic development (Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, 2014). However, unregulated tourism activities have led to environmental degradation, including coral reef damage, coastal erosion, and marine pollution, threatening the sustainability of this vital sector (Gössling, 2002). Post-pandemic recovery efforts further underscore the need for balancing economic growth with ecological preservation (Dodds et al., 2013).

Climate change exacerbates existing vulnerabilities in marine tourism. Rising sea temperatures, coral bleaching, and increased storm intensity disrupt marine ecosystems and tourism infrastructure, negatively affecting tourist experiences and local livelihoods (Gössling et al., 2021). Despite the global emphasis on net-zero carbon emissions, limited research exists

on integrating entrepreneurial readiness, human resource strategies, market trends, and government policies to achieve sustainable tourism in the Gulf of Thailand. The lack of comprehensive studies addressing these factors creates a gap in understanding how to transition toward environmentally conscious tourism practices (Poarsai & Visitnitikija, 2023).Objectives: Articulate the research aims including analyzing entrepreneurial readiness, HR development, market trends, and government policies.

This study aims to assess the influence of entrepreneurial readiness, human resources, market trends, and government policies on promoting sustainable tourism. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Evaluate the readiness of tourism operators for sustainable practices.
2. Examine the role of human resource capabilities in fostering sustainability.
3. Investigate the alignment of market trends with eco-tourist preferences.
4. Analyze government policies and their effectiveness in facilitating sustainable tourism in the Gulf of Thailand.

The findings of this study will contribute to the academic literature on innovation management and sustainable tourism by presenting a novel model that integrates entrepreneurial, market, and policy dimensions. Practically, it offers actionable insights for policymakers, tourism operators, and stakeholders to develop strategies that align with global sustainability goals. By addressing the challenges of climate change and leveraging local tourism potential, this research aims to support the Gulf of Thailand in becoming a benchmark for net-zero carbon tourism, fostering long-term ecological and economic resilience (Cai et al., 2022; Alongi, 2014).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Climate Change and Tourism

Climate change poses a multifaceted threat to the global tourism industry, particularly in regions dependent on natural ecosystems like the Gulf of Thailand. Rising temperatures, unpredictable weather patterns, and extreme events such as storms and flooding directly impact tourism infrastructure and natural attractions (IPCC, 2021). Coral bleaching, induced by higher sea surface temperatures, is a pressing issue in Thailand, diminishing the appeal of its renowned diving destinations (Alongi, 2014). Furthermore, increased storm frequency disrupts coastal tourism, threatening the livelihoods of local communities. The industry itself contributes to this cycle, accounting for approximately 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, primarily through energy-intensive activities such as transportation and accommodations (Gössling & Peeters, 2021). These dynamics underscore the urgency of integrating mitigation and adaptation strategies to ensure the resilience of tourism-dependent economies.

2.2 Net-Zero Carbon Tourism

Net-zero carbon tourism aims to neutralize the sector's carbon footprint by balancing emissions with removal efforts, such as carbon sequestration. This model incorporates renewable energy usage, sustainable construction practices, and carbon offset projects. In the Gulf of Thailand, leveraging natural ecosystems like mangroves and seagrass beds offers significant carbon absorption potential (Alongi, 2014). Globally, successful case studies include Costa Rica’s promotion of carbon-neutral tourism and the Maldives’ commitment to renewable energy-powered resorts (Mandic, 2019). However, the economic and technological challenges of transitioning to net-zero tourism remain significant, especially for developing regions. The costs associated with green technologies and the need for stakeholder collaboration often hinder large-scale implementation (Poarsai & Visitnitikija,

2023). Nonetheless, the growing consumer demand for eco-friendly tourism experiences suggests substantial market potential for regions willing to innovate.

2.3 Entrepreneurial Readiness

Entrepreneurial readiness is critical to the successful adoption of sustainable practices in tourism. Tourism operators who demonstrate adaptability, innovative thinking, and resilience are better positioned to transition toward sustainability (Cai et al., 2022). This includes adopting green technologies, diversifying tourism offerings, and engaging in partnerships with government and non-governmental organizations. Key factors influencing entrepreneurial readiness include financial resources, access to training, and awareness of the environmental impact of tourism (Dodds et al., 2013). Moreover, businesses integrating sustainability into their operations not only enhance their market competitiveness but also build stronger relationships with eco-conscious tourists. In the Gulf of Thailand, this readiness is vital for ensuring the long-term viability of marine tourism in the face of climate challenges (Huang et al., 2016).

2.4 Human Resources in Tourism

Human resource development plays a vital role in fostering sustainable tourism. Skilled and knowledgeable employees can effectively implement sustainability initiatives such as energy efficiency, waste management, and eco-tourism activities (Bocken et al., 2019). Training programs focused on environmental conservation and community engagement empower employees to contribute meaningfully to sustainability goals. For the Gulf of Thailand, targeted HR strategies can help tourism operators align with global best practices. Additionally, fostering an organizational culture that prioritizes sustainability enhances employee commitment to eco-friendly tourism models (Poarsai & Visitnitikija, 2023). Organizations with robust HR systems are better equipped to navigate the complexities of sustainability transitions.

2.5 Market Trends

Consumer demand for sustainable tourism experiences is rapidly growing. Eco-conscious tourists increasingly prefer destinations that minimize environmental impact while offering authentic experiences (Dodds et al., 2013). These tourists are willing to pay a premium for eco-friendly accommodations and activities. For regions like the Gulf of Thailand, aligning tourism offerings with this demand presents significant opportunities. Promoting low-carbon travel options, such as electric ferries and carbon-neutral resorts, can attract this lucrative market segment (Huang et al., 2016). Understanding market dynamics and responding to consumer preferences are critical for achieving sustainability in tourism.

2.6 Government Policies and Sustainability

Government policies are essential in driving sustainable tourism. Subsidies for renewable energy, incentives for eco-tourism investments, and regulations to protect marine and coastal ecosystems are key tools. Thailand has implemented marine park conservation efforts and waste management regulations that provide a framework for sustainability (Alongi, 2014). However, enforcement challenges and funding limitations often hinder the effectiveness of these initiatives. Public-private partnerships offer a promising avenue for overcoming these barriers by pooling resources and expertise (UNWTO, 2018). Aligning national policies with international agreements like the Paris Agreement is vital for ensuring long-term sustainability in the tourism sector (IPCC, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing sustainable net-zero carbon tourism in the Gulf of Thailand. Mixed-methods research is particularly effective in capturing both the breadth and depth of complex phenomena, such as the interplay of entrepreneurial readiness, human resources, market trends, and government policies in shaping tourism sustainability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative approach involves statistical analysis of large datasets to identify patterns and relationships, while the qualitative approach explores the nuances of stakeholder experiences and perspectives through rich, contextual insights. This integration ensures robust triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's conclusions (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

3.2 Sampling Framework

The study targets a diverse group of stakeholders integral to the tourism ecosystem in the Gulf of Thailand. The quantitative component focuses on a sample of 300 tourism operators, including business owners and managers from sectors such as marine tours, accommodations, and beachside recreational activities. These respondents represent key players in implementing sustainable tourism practices. The qualitative component involves in-depth interviews with 100 participants, including policymakers from local and national government bodies, community leaders, environmental advocates, and representatives from non-governmental organizations. These stakeholders provide critical insights into the policy environment, community perspectives, and challenges of sustainability implementation. The sample is drawn from four provinces in the Gulf of Thailand—Chonburi, Surat Thani, Trat, and Chumphon—ensuring geographical diversity and representation of both primary and secondary tourism destinations (Alongi, 2014; Gössling & Peeters, 2021).

3.3 Data Collection Tools

Data collection combines structured surveys for the quantitative component and semi-structured interviews for the qualitative component. The survey instrument includes items measuring entrepreneurial readiness (e.g., adaptability, leadership), human resource capabilities (e.g., knowledge, skills), market trends (e.g., eco-tourist preferences, willingness to pay), and the perceived effectiveness of government policies. Likert-scale questions are employed to capture respondents' perceptions and attitudes quantitatively (Bocken et al., 2019). The interviews are guided by a semi-structured protocol that allows flexibility in probing specific topics while ensuring coverage of core themes such as policy effectiveness, market dynamics, and community engagement (Mandic, 2019). The combination of these tools enables the study to capture both macro-level trends and micro-level insights.

3.4 Analytical Techniques

The analytical process integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to draw nuanced and actionable conclusions. Quantitatively, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is employed to analyze the relationships between variables, such as the influence of entrepreneurial readiness and human resources on sustainability outcomes. SEM is chosen for its ability to test complex models with latent variables and their indicators, ensuring rigorous analysis (Byrne, 2016). For instance, indicators such as adaptability and leadership are used to measure the latent construct of entrepreneurial readiness, while sustainability is assessed through metrics like reduced carbon emissions and economic benefits (Dodds et al., 2013).

Qualitatively, thematic analysis is conducted to identify recurring themes and

patterns in the interview data. This method involves coding and categorizing data to generate insights into stakeholder perspectives on challenges and opportunities for achieving net-zero carbon tourism (Poarsai & Visitnitikija, 2023). Themes such as the effectiveness of government policies, community involvement, and market trends are explored in detail.

Finally, findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses are integrated through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. This holistic approach synthesizes insights to identify the internal and external factors affecting sustainable tourism development in the Gulf of Thailand. For example, entrepreneurial readiness and market trends may represent strengths and opportunities, while policy enforcement gaps and technological barriers may highlight weaknesses and threats. This integration ensures actionable recommendations tailored to the region's unique context (UNWTO, 2018).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Entrepreneurial Readiness

The analysis of entrepreneurial readiness among tourism operators in the Gulf of Thailand reveals varying levels of adaptability, resilience, and leadership. Operators in Chonburi and Surat Thani demonstrate high adaptability by diversifying their services, such as integrating eco-tourism activities and offering carbon-neutral accommodations. However, smaller operators in secondary tourism destinations like Trat and Chumphon exhibit limited resilience due to constrained financial resources and technological know-how. Leadership plays a critical role in driving sustainability, with operators who actively engage in community collaboration and environmental conservation outperforming their peers (Poarsai & Visitnitikija, 2023). These findings highlight the need for capacity-building initiatives to enhance entrepreneurial competencies and align them with sustainable tourism goals (Cai et al., 2022).

4.2 Human Resources

Human resources are pivotal in achieving sustainable tourism. The assessment indicates that while larger tourism businesses have robust HR strategies, smaller operators often lack trained personnel with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities for implementing sustainability practices (Bocken et al., 2019). Training programs in waste management, renewable energy use, and eco-tourism are more common in Chonburi and Surat Thani, reflecting their established tourism infrastructures. However, stakeholders in Trat and Chumphon face challenges in accessing such training, limiting their ability to implement eco-friendly practices. Addressing this disparity requires targeted interventions, such as government-subsidized training programs and partnerships with academic institutions to develop human capital tailored to sustainable tourism (Dodds et al., 2013).

4.3 Market Trends

The results highlight a growing demand for eco-friendly tourism, driven by eco-tourist preferences and willingness to pay for sustainable experiences. Surveys indicate that more than 70% of tourists visiting the Gulf of Thailand are willing to pay a premium for carbon-neutral services and eco-friendly accommodations (Gössling & Peeters, 2021). This trend is particularly evident among international tourists, who often prioritize destinations that minimize environmental impact. Economic benefits include increased revenue for operators who adopt sustainable practices and higher tourist retention rates. However, local operators are sometimes slow to align their offerings with these preferences, missing opportunities to capture this lucrative market segment. Promoting awareness and incentivizing eco-certification programs can help bridge this gap (Alongi, 2014).

4.4 Policy Effectiveness

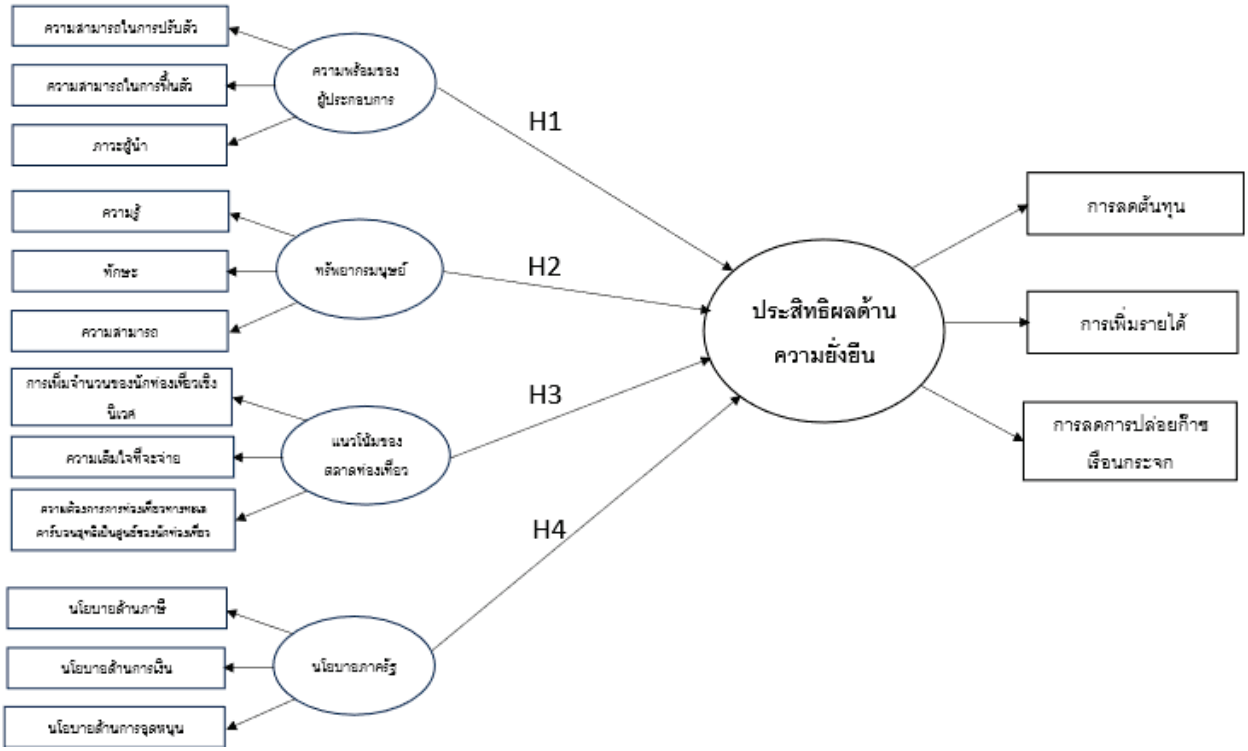
Government policies aimed at fostering sustainable tourism are moderately effective but require enhanced implementation and enforcement. Policies such as tax incentives for renewable energy adoption and regulations to protect marine ecosystems have driven progress, particularly in Chonburi and Surat Thani. However, inconsistent enforcement and lack of financial resources in Trat and Chumphon hinder broader adoption (UNWTO, 2018). Public-private partnerships emerge as a critical mechanism for overcoming these challenges, enabling resource sharing and collaborative implementation of sustainability initiatives. Aligning national policies with international agreements like the Paris Agreement could further strengthen these efforts and ensure long-term impact (Mandic, 2019).

4.5 Integrated SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis synthesizes the findings to present a comprehensive overview of factors influencing sustainable tourism in the Gulf of Thailand. Strengths include the region's rich biodiversity, growing eco-tourism market, and proactive operators in primary tourism hubs. Weaknesses lie in the limited resources and training available to smaller operators and inconsistent policy enforcement. Opportunities encompass the rising global demand for sustainable tourism, potential for carbon offset projects like mangrove restoration, and technological advancements in renewable energy. Threats include climate change impacts, such as coral bleaching and extreme weather events, as well as economic challenges faced by smaller operators. Addressing these elements requires a cohesive strategy that integrates entrepreneurial readiness, HR development, market alignment, and policy effectiveness (Dodds et al., 2013; Cai et al., 2022).

5. Proposed Model for Sustainable Tourism

5.1 Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework for sustainable tourism in the Gulf of Thailand integrates four critical dimensions: entrepreneurial readiness, human resources (HR), market

trends, and government policies. This model highlights their interconnected roles in achieving sustainability outcomes, including reduced carbon emissions, enhanced biodiversity conservation, and equitable economic development.

At the core of the model is entrepreneurial readiness, which encompasses adaptability, leadership, and resilience among tourism operators. Entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in transitioning to sustainable practices by adopting innovative business models, investing in green technologies, and aligning their operations with eco-conscious market demands (Huang et al., 2018). The framework also emphasizes the importance of HR capacity, which includes equipping employees with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to implement sustainable practices. These capabilities ensure operational efficiency while promoting environmental stewardship at every organizational level (Baum et al., 2016).

Market trends serve as a dynamic driver within the model, reflecting the increasing preference of tourists for eco-friendly experiences. Incorporating these trends into tourism services, such as promoting carbon-neutral resorts and ecotourism packages, not only enhances customer satisfaction but also generates economic incentives for sustainability (Mair & Jago, 2010). Lastly, the framework underscores the critical role of government policies in providing a supportive regulatory environment. Effective policies, including financial incentives for sustainable initiatives and regulations protecting fragile ecosystems, create an enabling environment for stakeholders to align their practices with global sustainability standards (Hall et al., 2015). The interplay of these variables fosters a comprehensive approach to achieving sustainable net-zero carbon tourism.

5.2 Strategic Recommendations

To operationalize the proposed framework, actionable strategies are suggested for key stakeholder groups: tourism operators, government bodies, community stakeholders, and tourists.

Tourism businesses should prioritize adopting sustainable business models that integrate renewable energy, waste management, and eco-friendly practices. Collaborating with local communities to promote ecotourism can enhance the authenticity of offerings and strengthen community relations (Fennell, 2015). Additionally, businesses should invest in training programs to enhance the sustainability competencies of their workforce. Establishing partnerships with technology providers to implement energy-efficient solutions, such as solar-powered facilities, can further reduce operational carbon footprints (Dodds & Holmes, 2011).

Government agencies must enhance the enforcement of existing sustainability regulations, particularly in secondary tourism destinations like Trat and Chumphon. Subsidies and tax incentives should be expanded to encourage investment in green infrastructure, such as electric transportation and carbon sequestration projects (Hall & Page, 2014). Establishing public-private partnerships can mobilize resources and expertise for large-scale sustainability initiatives, such as mangrove reforestation and coral restoration programs. Additionally, aligning national tourism strategies with global frameworks like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ensures long-term progress (UNDP, 2016).

Local communities should be actively involved in sustainable tourism initiatives, as their participation ensures cultural relevance and ecological integrity. Community-based tourism (CBT) models, where residents take the lead in managing and promoting tourism activities, can generate direct economic benefits while fostering environmental stewardship (Goodwin, 2009). Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should support communities with training, resources, and infrastructure to strengthen their capacity for sustainable tourism management.

Tourist education campaigns are essential for raising awareness about sustainable travel practices. Initiatives like eco-certification labels for hotels and activities can

guide tourists toward making environmentally responsible choices (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010). Encouraging tourists to participate in conservation activities, such as mangrove planting or coral reef clean-ups, not only enhances their travel experience but also contributes to sustainability goals.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

The findings of this study emphasize the complex interplay of entrepreneurial readiness, human resource capabilities, market trends, and government policies in achieving sustainable net-zero carbon tourism in the Gulf of Thailand. Entrepreneurial readiness emerged as a crucial factor, highlighting the role of adaptability, leadership, and resilience among tourism operators. Larger operators in primary tourism hubs demonstrated higher adaptability by integrating sustainable practices, while smaller operators faced challenges due to limited resources (Poarsai & Visitnitikija, 2023). Human resources were found to be critical in implementing and sustaining eco-friendly practices. However, disparities in training and skills development between primary and secondary tourism destinations were evident, underscoring the need for targeted capacity-building programs (Baum et al., 2016).

Market trends reveal a growing demand for eco-tourism, with tourists showing a willingness to pay for sustainable experiences. This trend aligns with global shifts toward environmentally conscious travel preferences, presenting significant economic opportunities for operators who adapt their offerings to these demands (Mair & Jago, 2010). The analysis of government policies revealed moderate effectiveness, with strong regulatory frameworks in place but inconsistent enforcement and funding limitations hindering widespread adoption. Integrating public-private partnerships and aligning national strategies with international frameworks such as the Paris Agreement emerged as key strategies for improving policy implementation (Hall et al., 2015).

6.2 Contributions

This study contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of sustainable tourism and innovation management. Theoretically, it expands the understanding of the interdependencies among entrepreneurial readiness, human resources, market dynamics, and policy frameworks in driving sustainable tourism. By developing a conceptual framework that integrates these dimensions, the research provides a foundation for future studies to explore the nuances of sustainability in tourism sectors globally (Gössling et al., 2019).

Practically, the study offers actionable insights for stakeholders, including tourism operators, policymakers, and community leaders. For operators, the findings highlight the importance of investing in green technologies and workforce development to meet the growing demand for sustainable tourism. Policymakers are provided with evidence of the need for robust enforcement mechanisms, financial incentives, and community engagement to achieve long-term sustainability goals. Moreover, the study underscores the potential of leveraging community-based tourism models to enhance local involvement and equity in tourism development (Fennell, 2015).

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

While the study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. First, the research focuses on four provinces in the Gulf of Thailand, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions. Future research could expand the geographical scope to include other coastal and marine tourism destinations, both within Thailand and internationally, to validate and refine the proposed framework (Goodwin, 2009). Second, the study relies on cross-sectional data, which captures a snapshot in time but does not account for longitudinal

changes in sustainability practices and their outcomes. Future studies could adopt longitudinal designs to explore the evolution of sustainable tourism initiatives and their impacts over time (Sharpley, 2020).

Additionally, while the study integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, the sample size for the qualitative component is relatively small. Increasing the number of qualitative interviews and incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives, such as tourists and NGOs, could provide a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in sustainable tourism. Further exploration of technological innovations, such as digital platforms for managing sustainability metrics, could also enhance the practical applicability of the research (Mihalic et al., 2020).7. References

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