

Enhancing Efficiency in Community-Based Tourism Enterprises: Integrating Leadership, Knowledge Development, and Innovation Strategies in Thailand

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of leadership, knowledge development, and innovation strategies on the management efficiency of community-based tourism (CBT) enterprises in Thailand. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, involving surveys with 300 community enterprise leaders and in-depth interviews with 20 government officials. Findings reveal that while CBT enterprises have made significant progress in leadership development and knowledge transfer, their adoption of technological innovations remains limited. Leadership practices characterized by participative decision-making and collaborative governance contributed positively to business performance, while bureaucratic barriers and inconsistent policy support hindered enterprise growth. Digital marketing and technological integration were found to enhance competitiveness, though resource constraints limited widespread adoption. The study concludes by recommending continuous leadership development programs, innovation hubs, integrated policy frameworks, and participatory governance models to ensure the sustainable development of CBT enterprises. Suggestions for future research include cross-country comparative studies, longitudinal assessments of leadership programs, and policy evaluation models.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Innovation Management, Leadership Practices, Knowledge Development, Digital Transformation, Sustainable Tourism, Policy Support, Cross-Sector Collaboration, Tourism Enterprise Management, Thailand.

Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a major driver of economic development in many countries, including Thailand, where community-based tourism (CBT) enterprises play a crucial role in generating income and promoting local culture. With a rich tapestry of cultural heritage and natural landscapes, Thailand's tourism sector significantly contributes to the national economy by fostering employment and improving infrastructure (Goodwin, 2020). Community-based enterprises in tourism focus on local engagement, ensuring economic benefits trickle down to grassroots levels while preserving cultural authenticity. This aligns with the Thai government's national strategic development plan (2023-2027), emphasizing sustainable economic growth through local enterprise empowerment (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2023).

Despite its potential, community-based tourism management faces critical challenges in maintaining operational efficiency, fostering innovation, and adapting to changing market dynamics. The integration of leadership practices, knowledge sharing, and technological advancements is essential to enhance tourism enterprises' sustainability (Richards, 2021). Addressing these issues through systematic research can guide policy formation and strategic

planning for Thailand's tourism-driven economy.

Although community-based tourism has gained prominence, many enterprises struggle with inefficient management, limited access to financial resources, and inconsistent quality of services. The lack of a clear strategic direction, coupled with insufficient leadership skills and limited use of digital marketing tools, restricts enterprise growth (Zapata et al., 2020). Additionally, the fragmented nature of CBT operations creates challenges in scaling business models while ensuring sustainable resource management (Prahalad & Hart, 2002).

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges, exposing gaps in the resilience of community-based enterprises due to reduced tourist inflows and financial instability. This necessitates innovative business models that blend traditional practices with modern management tools to improve competitiveness (George & Frey, 2019). Therefore, examining the critical success factors—such as leadership capabilities, innovative management, and inter-organizational collaboration—is vital for strengthening CBT enterprises.

The primary objective of this study is to explore how leadership, knowledge development, and innovation strategies influence the management efficiency of community-based tourism enterprises in Thailand. Specific objectives include:

- To evaluate the current level of leadership practices, knowledge-sharing mechanisms, and technological innovations among community-based tourism enterprises.
- To identify the critical factors that affect operational efficiency in tourism enterprises.
- To propose a conceptual framework that integrates leadership, innovation management, and inter-organizational cooperation.

Achieving these objectives will contribute to formulating policies aimed at enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of CBT enterprises in Thailand.

The research addresses the following questions:

- What is the current state of leadership, innovation practices, and knowledge-sharing among CBT enterprises in Thailand?
- Which factors have the most significant impact on enterprise management efficiency?
- How can a strategic framework be developed to enhance the competitiveness of CBT enterprises through leadership and innovation integration?

The hypotheses for this study are:

- H1: Leadership capabilities positively influence management efficiency in CBT enterprises.
- H2: Knowledge-sharing practices have a direct impact on innovation and operational performance.
- H3: Inter-organizational collaboration fosters competitiveness and business expansion in the tourism sector.
- H4: Digital and technological innovations play a critical role in enhancing service quality and market outreach.

Literature Review

The conceptual framework of this study builds on three key theoretical pillars: innovation management, community enterprise models, and leadership in business development. Innovation management theory emphasizes the structured process of generating, implementing, and commercializing new ideas within an organization (Tidd & Bessant, 2020). It involves enhancing operational processes, developing new products or services, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. This perspective aligns with the need for community-based tourism (CBT) enterprises in Thailand to adopt innovative approaches to survive and compete in a dynamic market.

Community enterprise models are rooted in socio-economic development theories, emphasizing the collective ownership and community-led management of resources (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). These models prioritize sustainability, social equity, and income distribution within local communities. In the context of Thailand's CBT sector, this model is vital as it promotes community self-reliance and equitable economic participation.

Leadership in business development theory highlights the role of visionary leadership in guiding organizational success through strategic decision-making, inspiring teams, and fostering adaptive organizational cultures (Northouse, 2021). In CBT enterprises, leadership determines the strategic direction, resource allocation, and community involvement, making it a crucial determinant of business sustainability.

Knowledge transfer refers to the process through which information, skills, and best practices are shared within or between organizations (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In CBT enterprises, effective knowledge sharing among members enhances business skills, marketing strategies, and customer service quality. This is particularly relevant in rural tourism contexts where formal business training may be limited (Hall & Williams, 2020).

Community collaboration involves the active participation of local stakeholders in decision-making processes, resource management, and enterprise governance (Bramwell & Lane, 2019). This approach fosters collective ownership, accountability, and social cohesion, making enterprises more resilient to economic fluctuations.

Digital transformation denotes the adoption of digital technologies to improve business processes, customer engagement, and operational efficiency (Vial, 2019). In the tourism sector, digital marketing, online booking platforms, and social media engagement are essential tools for enhancing competitiveness and expanding market reach. CBT enterprises can significantly benefit from digital adoption to attract international tourists and boost sales.

Sustainable resource management involves utilizing natural and cultural resources in a way that meets current tourism needs while preserving these assets for future generations (Sharpley, 2020). This principle ensures environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and socio-economic balance, which are fundamental goals of CBT enterprises in Thailand.

Several empirical studies have explored the intersection of tourism management, innovation, and community development. Poudel and Nyaupane (2021) examined the impact of community participation on the success of rural tourism enterprises in Nepal, concluding that active local involvement leads to better business performance and sustainable development. Similarly, Lee et al. (2020) investigated the role of leadership in fostering innovation in community tourism enterprises in South Korea, highlighting that participative leadership enhances business resilience and adaptability.

Research by Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) emphasizes the significance of integrating local cultural heritage into tourism experiences as a value-adding strategy. This aligns with the Thai CBT model, where cultural tourism plays a vital role in creating unique tourist experiences. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2019) explored the role of digital technologies in reshaping tourism businesses, finding that digital transformation significantly enhances customer engagement, service delivery, and market visibility.

Lastly, the findings of Hall and Williams (2020) underscore the critical role of knowledge sharing and capacity building in sustaining tourism enterprises. They advocate for continuous training and collaborative learning as pathways to achieving long-term success in the tourism industry.

Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how leadership, knowledge development, and innovation strategies affect community-based tourism (CBT) enterprises in Thailand. This approach allows for robust data triangulation by combining numerical data from surveys with rich, contextual insights from in-depth interviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The integration of these methods enhances the validity and reliability of the findings by capturing diverse perspectives from multiple stakeholders involved in tourism enterprise management.

The mixed-methods design was selected to explore both measurable variables and contextual factors influencing CBT management efficiency. The quantitative component includes structured surveys aimed at measuring leadership competencies, knowledge-sharing practices, and enterprise performance indicators. The qualitative component consists of in-depth interviews with key informants such as community leaders and government officials. This dual approach facilitates a deeper understanding of both statistical trends and underlying reasons behind enterprise success or failure (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The target population consists of leaders of CBT enterprises and representatives from relevant government agencies in Thailand. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that participants had significant experience in managing tourism enterprises or policymaking. The sample size included 300 community enterprise leaders and 20 government officials, selected based on their expertise and role in the development and management of CBT enterprises (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2023). This selection criterion aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of knowledgeable informants in tourism-related studies (Hall & Williams, 2020).

For the quantitative survey, a multi-stage sampling process was implemented, starting with the selection of provinces with the highest concentration of CBT enterprises. Within each province, enterprises were randomly selected to minimize sampling bias. In the qualitative phase, interview participants were selected using a snowball sampling technique, ensuring representation from various regions and organizational levels (Babbie, 2020).

The study employs three data collection methods: surveys, in-depth interviews, and secondary data analysis. Surveys were distributed to CBT leaders using structured questionnaires focusing on leadership practices, business strategies, and operational outcomes. The questionnaires were validated through a pilot test conducted with 30 enterprise leaders to ensure clarity and relevance.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, enabling participants to share their experiences and perspectives on factors influencing CBT enterprise performance. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent for accurate transcription and analysis (Patton, 2015).

Secondary data sources included government tourism reports, policy documents, and previously published research articles. This data was used to contextualize the findings and validate the results obtained through primary data collection.

The study employed statistical analysis and thematic coding to analyze the data collected. Quantitative data from the surveys were processed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including frequency distributions, means, and regression analysis. SPSS software was used for statistical computations to identify significant relationships among

variables such as leadership quality, innovation adoption, and business performance (Field, 2018).

Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic coding, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. This involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final report. Themes such as leadership influence, knowledge-sharing practices, and community collaboration emerged as critical factors.

Triangulation was achieved by comparing findings from quantitative and qualitative data sources, ensuring consistency and enhancing data validity (Creswell, 2014). The integration of these analytical methods provides a holistic understanding of how leadership and innovation strategies shape the effectiveness of CBT enterprises in Thailand.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from the study reveal that community-based tourism (CBT) enterprises in Thailand have made considerable progress in knowledge development and leadership implementation, though significant gaps remain in innovation adoption. Surveys conducted with 300 CBT leaders indicate that while 72% of respondents reported participating in government-sponsored training programs, only 45% applied these skills effectively in their business operations. This aligns with the literature on tourism education, emphasizing that training alone does not guarantee improved business practices unless supported by follow-up initiatives (Hall & Williams, 2020).

Leadership practices in CBT enterprises were found to be hierarchical, with community leaders making most strategic decisions. This traditional leadership model hinders collaborative management, reducing innovation opportunities. For instance, only 38% of enterprises adopted digital marketing strategies, despite the increasing reliance on online platforms in the tourism industry (Wang & Li, 2020). The slow adoption of technology reflects a resistance to change, which is often driven by limited technical skills and perceived high investment costs (Kim et al., 2019).

Management efficiency in CBT enterprises is primarily influenced by leadership practices, government support, and technology adoption. Thematic analysis from in-depth interviews highlighted leadership's role in motivating teams and driving strategic goals. Leaders with a participatory management style facilitated higher business productivity and staff morale (George & Frey, 2019). Conversely, enterprises led by autocratic managers reported limited innovation due to centralized decision-making.

Government support emerged as a critical factor. Interviewees acknowledged that subsidies, training programs, and marketing campaigns facilitated business survival during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, inconsistent policy implementation and bureaucratic delays were cited as persistent challenges, consistent with findings by Sharpley (2020). Similarly, technological adoption significantly impacted management efficiency. Enterprises that embraced digital platforms reported higher customer engagement, increased bookings, and streamlined internal operations (Vial, 2019).

Effective management of CBT enterprises has a direct and positive impact on local economies through job creation, income generation, and poverty reduction. The study found that well-managed CBT enterprises contributed up to 60% of household incomes in rural communities, aligning with past research emphasizing tourism's role in reducing economic disparities (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Furthermore, the integration of local cultural elements into tourism products boosted visitor engagement and generated additional revenue through handicraft sales, cultural performances, and culinary tourism. This finding supports the argument that cultural heritage integration serves as a sustainable tourism model (Richards, 2021). However, participants

stressed that inconsistent tourist arrivals and seasonal demand fluctuations limit steady income flow, highlighting the need for diversified revenue streams through innovative tourism offerings.

Cross-sector collaboration between government agencies, private enterprises, and local communities emerged as a fundamental driver of tourism enterprise success. Collaborative initiatives such as joint marketing campaigns, public-private partnerships, and inter-organizational networks facilitated resource sharing and increased visibility in international markets (Bramwell & Lane, 2019).

Despite these successes, interviewees pointed out barriers such as misaligned priorities, insufficient communication, and conflicts over resource management. For example, local communities often prioritized environmental conservation, while private companies emphasized profit maximization. This highlights the need for well-defined agreements and clear roles among stakeholders to minimize conflicts and ensure long-term sustainability (Poudel & Nyaupane, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study explored the dynamics of leadership, innovation management, and operational efficiency within community-based tourism (CBT) enterprises in Thailand. The findings indicate that while CBT enterprises have developed foundational leadership and community collaboration frameworks, significant challenges remain in innovation adoption and management efficiency. Specifically, the study revealed that 72% of CBT enterprises received leadership training, but only 45% applied innovative management practices effectively. Leadership styles leaning toward centralized decision-making limited collaborative efforts and stifled creative business development, reflecting findings by Northouse (2021).

Additionally, enterprises that embraced digital marketing platforms experienced higher customer engagement and revenue growth. However, technological adoption remains uneven due to resource constraints and limited digital literacy (Vial, 2019). The study also underscored the critical role of government support, noting that policy inconsistencies and bureaucratic delays impeded smooth business operations—a challenge also identified by Hall and Williams (2020). Finally, cross-sector collaborations were effective when clear roles and mutual goals were established, though conflicts over resource management and differing priorities often hindered success (Bramwell & Lane, 2019).

Policy Recommendations for Enhancing Innovation and Leadership Practices

To strengthen CBT enterprises and promote sustainable tourism development, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

Leadership Development Programs: Establish continuous leadership development initiatives emphasizing participatory and adaptive leadership models. Programs should incorporate mentoring, peer learning, and practical business simulation workshops tailored to tourism management (George & Frey, 2019).

Innovation Hubs for CBT Enterprises: Create regional innovation hubs offering technological training, digital marketing support, and access to affordable digital tools. These hubs could provide business incubation services and encourage technological experimentation (Vial, 2019).

Integrated Policy Frameworks: Develop integrated policy frameworks that streamline bureaucratic procedures and reduce delays in accessing government funding and training resources. This would align with best practices for public-private partnerships in tourism development (Sharpley, 2020).

Financial and Resource Support: Implement grant and microloan programs targeting CBT enterprises with innovative project proposals. A portion of tourism taxes could be earmarked for this purpose, ensuring consistent financial support (Hall & Williams, 2020).

Collaborative Governance Structures: Promote participatory governance models where CBT enterprises, local governments, and private tourism operators co-manage tourism development initiatives. This would ensure shared responsibility, transparent decision-making, and long-term sustainability (Poudel & Nyaupane, 2021).

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should build upon the findings of this study by addressing the following areas:

Comparative Cross-Country Studies: Conduct comparative studies examining CBT enterprises in different cultural and regulatory environments to identify best practices for scaling and sustainability (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Longitudinal Impact Assessments: Implement longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of leadership training and innovation initiatives on tourism enterprise performance, including economic and social metrics (Richards, 2021).

Technological Integration Models: Investigate the feasibility of integrating emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and augmented reality into CBT business models to enhance customer experience and operational efficiency (Wang & Li, 2020).

Community Engagement Frameworks: Explore community engagement models that balance commercial tourism growth with cultural preservation and environmental conservation (Bramwell & Lane, 2019).

Policy Evaluation Studies: Evaluate the effectiveness of government policies supporting CBT enterprises, focusing on policy design, implementation, and outcomes. Future studies could incorporate policy simulations and impact modeling (Sharpley, 2020).

By addressing these areas, future research can provide actionable insights for improving the management and competitiveness of CBT enterprises globally. A more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics would inform policymakers, tourism operators, and community leaders, ensuring sustainable and inclusive development in the tourism sector.

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