DESIRABLE COMPETENCIES OF LEADERSHIP TOWARDS PROMOTING SMART TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF TOURIST ATTACTION COMMUNITY IN NAKHON PATHOM PROVINCE, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to study the desirable competencies of leadership towards promoting smart tourism; a case study of tourism attraction community in Nakhon Pathom province with the objective to studied the desirable competencies of leadership towards promoting smart tourism; a case study of tourist attraction community in Nakhon Pathom province. In order to reach the objectives of this study, the researcher used the exploratory sequential mixed method design by collecting the qualitative data from 5 tourism academic experts, 5 information technology academic experts then analyzing the content from the interview and collecting the quantitative data from 15 leaders of successful tourist attraction community as well as 15 local enterprises leaders of the innovative OTOP (One Tambon One Product) community in Nakhon Pathom province in Thailand and analyzing the quantitative data by using basic data analysis statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and the index value of the priority needs (Modified Priority Needs Index: $PNI_{Modified}$). The results shown that the desirable competencies of leadership towards promoting smart tourism in Nakhon Pathom province can be separated into two parts: the primary competencies consisting of knowledge of community and knowledge of an information technology as well as skills which are including public relations skills and tourism marketing skills through the use of information technology, the secondary competency consisting of drive to pursue achievement, accountability and disciplined in order to accomplish goals respectively.

Keyword: Development, Leadership competency, Smart tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the main industry of the country that continuously boosted Thailand's economy, it has impacted the development of people's quality of life in the tourist attraction communities. Nowadays, there are many different types of tourism, including creative tourism, smart tourism, historical tourism, cultural tourism, eco-tourism, and health tourism for example. According to Kankaew, K. & et, al. (2023), technology is developing rapidly and has been employed to create customer experiences across various business industries. Additionally, technology's algorithm might predict, recall, and customize to the specific requirements of its customer base. In regard with Lee, P., & et, al. (2020), smart tourism, utilizes technology and information to enhance the attractiveness of destinations and create unforgettable experiences, therefore, tourists can decide or make transactions for the trip easily and conveniently. For business operators, as referred to Boes, K. & et, al., (2015), smart tourism is utilized to enhance experience and create memorable moments for their customers, including increasing work efficiency which leads to the sustainability. Thus, the business operators should acquire new competencies in accordance with the application of technology for tourism. Thai government

has supported the local communities to engage in the development of the tourist destinations by using creativity and innovation to create value to local products and community. This makes to economy grow with stability, prosperousness and sustainability without destroying the environment. Smart tourism needs the engagement from the locals and communities in order to create the internal transformation and reflect the ideas and actions of the people. Moreover, in order to effectively promote smart tourism, it is also necessary to support local communities' ability to acquire new skills for embracing technology for tourism. Referred to Charernnit, K., & Kankaew, K. (2020), efficiency, helpfulness, attractiveness, expertise, and communication skills are the five competencies that influence the quality of the services provided. The leaders are the key to the successful implementation of smart tourism in a local area by cooperating with people to develop the activities for tourists and encourage the operation of the smart city. Therefore, the leaders play an important role in driving a service quality and smart tourism. Many literatures indicates that community planning is a crucial next step, particularly when there are capable leaders in place to help them decide whether or not smart tourism is necessary. Therefore, the researcher aimed to study the desirable competencies of the leaders towards promoting smart tourism and identify strategies, initiatives, or other means of raising the professional standards of those in charge of leading smart tourism respectively.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Thia research aimed to studied the desirable competencies of leadership towards promoting smart tourism; a case study of tourist attraction community in Nakhon Pathom province.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Smart Tourism

"Smart", one of the most widely-used terms in the past decade, refers to enhancement of productivity and effectiveness through the involvement of information technology. Information technology plays a crucial role in our daily lives, entrepreneurship, and national development especially in infrastructures, which enriches national economy, competitiveness of businesses, and quality of life in society referred to Boes, K. & et, al., (2015). Likewise, "smart" is currently gaining more attention from the tourism industry.

"Smart tourism" means tourism that utilizes information technologies to create attractive travel destinations as referred to Lee, P. & et, al. (2020). Moreover, Gretzel, U., & et, al. (2015), the term "smart tourism" recently appeared to describe the growing reliance of tourism destinations, industries, and travelers on new ICT developments that enable the conversion of vast volumes of information into value offers. Smart tourism can prevent errors in news information related to tourism business management, which helps tourists in decision-making while planning their journey, for example, a real-time information allows tourists to plan accurately for their accommodation expenses, meal spendings, and traveling costs. According to Charernnit, K. (2023), technology has been developing rapidly and is being utilized to create client experiences throughout various business industries. With technology, travelers can also reach their destinations more easily. Japan Travel, is an example for a comprehensive application for travelers. The applications enrich experience for tourists visiting Japan by providing convenience to their tourists through reliable data such as maps, translation features, travel guides indicating famous landmarks, restaurants, choices for accommodation. Therefore, entrepreneurs and or leaders in the tourism industry should incorporate technology to create new experiences, values, and impressions for their customers as technology transfers data to enhanced productivity, which leads the industry towards sustainability.

Leadership Competency Development

A study conducted by Kankaew, K.& et, al. (2023), focused on competency development for entrepreneurs of small hotels in Thailand towards sustainability. The research suggested that leadership, knowledge management in culture, knowledge management in evaluation, and knowledge management in technologies are the factors of a sustainable growth of the leaders. However, Girdwichai, L., & Sriviboon, C. (2020) understanding employees' motivations is crucial, and organizations should take proactive measures to sustain employee motivation in the long term. Likewise, leadership is also required an action towards smart tourism as Boes, K. & et, al. (2015) discovered that the success factors of the smart tourism destinations in Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Helsinki are leaders who has the initiative, creativity and change management skills. These leaders work with stakeholders and utilize information technologies to form databases and create information that offer benefits to the tourists. In addition, the logic continues, in association with Jariyachamsit, S. & et, al. (2010) that high quality of tourism resources and management links to a high tourist's level of satisfaction, and high level of satisfaction links with tourist loyalty which means the tourists are more likely to come back or revisit the destination. Previous studies from Rahman, S.& et, al. (2016), emphasized the importance of leadership competencies comprised of the following competencies which enhance financial and non-financial of business performance.

1. Opportunity Competencies: This covers the ability to seek, develop, and evaluate market opportunities. The ability to transform the opportunity into the positive outcome. Leaders must understand the needs of their customers and be able to serve those needs to benefit the business in both financial and non-financial aspects.

2. Relationship Competencies: This covers interpersonal skills, person-to-person interactions, person-to-group interactions, and connection building for business opportunities.

3. Conceptual Competencies: It is the ability to think intuitively, think differently, think innovatively, and to evaluate risks. These abilities help entrepreneurs analyze, take decisions, solve problems, and make action to drive businesses towards success.

4. Management Competencies: This covers the capability of managing human resources, facilities, financial resources, and technologies as well as skills, including planning, organizational management, persuasion, and controlling.

5. Strategic Competencies: This covers visioning, evaluating, targeting, change-making, competitive position assessment, and driving toward goals as well as using tactics to respond to customers or competitors and tracking results.

6. Commitment Competencies: This covers the competencies of dedication and perseverance towards the long-term goal and professional development, giving importance to employees, commit to the personal beliefs, including values and goals, and resilience.

7. Supportive Competencies: This covers competencies, including learning, adaptability, time management, self-assessment, life balancing, stress management, and business ethics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research covers the studies about the desirable competencies of leaders towards promoting smart tourism in aspects of knowledge, skills, and other relevant attributes related to primary competencies and secondary competencies accordingly. The innovative OTOP (One Tambon One Product) community in Nakhon Pathom province in Thailand was selected as an area of study, where the data from 5 tourism academic experts as well as 5 information technology academic experts were gathered for an interview and the data from 15 leaders of successful tourist attraction community as well as 15 local enterprises leaders of the innovative OTOP (One Tambon One Product) community in Nakhon Pathom province in Thailand that

also were gathered to analyzed the leadership competencies towards promoting smart tourism respectively. The period of study is conducted in one year from October 2022 – September 2023.

RESEARCH RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

From the research, the primary competencies of leaders towards promoting smart tourism were placed on the knowledgeable about the community and knowledge of an information technology as well as skills which are including public relations skills and tourism marketing skills through the use of information technology. The leaders must be able to present their understanding about the community in various aspects (such as general information, history, terrain, climate, landmarks, culture, etc.) to enable development of tourism in their community. To achieve the goal of smart tourism, the leaders should be well-rounded about tourism activities in the community, management methods, information technology utilization, using information technology for marketing purposes, and tourism public relations. Additionally, community leaders should be initiative in promoting tourism by using social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) as a main channel of public relations. As information is transferred via technology to increased productivity, which promotes the business community toward sustainability. For secondary competencies of leaders towards promoting smart tourism were placed on a strong drive to pursue achievement, accountability and disciplined in order to accomplish goals. The leaders should be an honest person with the self-control to develop smart tourism and prepared to overcome the numerous challenges that the growth of community has encountered. They should have a strong desire to create smart tourism in their community and have a high standard for and are driven to build effective, sustainable tourism and eager to see their community tourism grow into a profitable smart tourism industry appropriately.

RECOMMENDATION

While leadership is about being knowledgeable, productive, optimistic, and honest, smart tourism leadership requires information technology skills. This covers the ability to seek, develop, and evaluate market opportunities and transform the opportunity into the positive outcome respectively. Leaders must understand the needs of their customers and be able to serve those needs to benefit the business in both financial and non-financial aspects. However, according to Charernnit, K., & Kankaew, K. (2020), service quality is the key to create the business differentiation as well as to elevate a superior level of market competitiveness. Ideas of incorporating smart tourism and service quality can be ignited by observing case studies in Nakhon Pathom province or other locations which can be enhanced by offering high-quality services, convenience, and trustworthy information that satisfy visitors' needs.

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