Self-Drive Tourism: Unlocking the Potential of the Thailand Riviera

Parleda Sampaothong,[a] Narin Sungraksa,[b] Neeyakarn Limaroon,[a]* Kwanrat Jansirinara,[a] Thapana Tangjui[a] & Panarat Srisaeng[a]

[a] School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Suan Dusit University, Bangkok, 10300 Thailand
[b] Faculty of Management Sciences, Silapakorn University, Bangkok, 10170 Thailand

Article info

Abstract

The Thailand Riviera is a key element in the government's strategic plan to boost the nation's economy through targeted tourism development initiatives. Despite its natural beauty and numerous attractions, awareness of the region remains limited, suggesting the need for enhanced promotional efforts. This study aims to develop a proactive marketing and public relations model to promote tourism in the Thailand Riviera, with a focus on self-drive tourism as a case study. A mixed-methods approach was employed, including a survey of 400 tourists to examine their behaviors and perceptions of the Thailand Riviera, as well as in-depth interviews with 24 key informants, including tourists, government officials, and tourism professionals. The EDFR research method was applied to establish a proactive marketing and public relations model, incorporating the insights of 17 experts. A qualitative approach was used to test and verify the proposed self-drive tourism model. The findings suggest that the marketing and tourism promotion strategy for the Thailand Riviera should emphasize self-drive tourism and highlight a distinctive regional identity in alignment with provincial tourism policies under the Thailand Riviera brand. To build brand awareness, mascot marketing should be implemented, positioning the mascot as a tourism ambassador. The proposed self-drive tourism model includes the Thailand Riviera Self-Drive Salt Route in Phetchaburi, connected to the Thailand Riviera Self-Drive Coastal Route in Prachuap Khiri Khan, with community-based tourism activities along the scenic routes. This form of tourism has the potential to reach remote areas, promoting income distribution within local communities and contributing to national economic growth. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the potential of self-drive tourism as a key driver for promoting tourism in the Thailand Riviera.

* Corresponding Author
email: panarat_sri@duist.ac.th

Introduction

Tourism is a vital sector of Thailand's economy, but the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the global tourism industry, including Thailand (Sahebi et al., 2022). The Thailand Riviera, a long-term tourism initiative launched in 2018, aims to promote the coastal tourist attractions in Thailand as counterparts to the Riviera in France and Italy. The project seeks to attract high-spending, quality tourists to the region and encourage their distribution from main tourist hubs to nearby local areas, thereby introducing visitors to lesser-known sights. Also referred to as the Royal Coast, the Thailand Riviera is strategically positioned as a luxury coastal destination featuring both mountains and sea. It spans four provinces along the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman coast—Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Chumphon, and Ranong—offering scenic routes and a rich cultural heritage (Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2019). Between 2017 and 2019, the region saw a significant increase in tourist arrivals, with numbers reaching 5.67 million in 2017, 5.83 million in 2018, and 4.32 million in 2019 (Table 1). These figures underscore the region's appeal and its importance as a major tourist destination, contributing substantially to the local economy and fostering cultural exchange.

To promote tourism in the Thailand Riviera, it is important to explore new tourism patterns. Self-drive tourism (SDT) is an emerging trend that could boost regional tourism and provide economic benefits to local communities (Prideaux & Carson, 2011; Cruz et al., 2022). SDT involves travelers using rented or personal vehicles to explore destinations, rather than relying on public transport or guided tours. This form of tourism allows travelers the flexibility to choose their itinerary, travel at their own pace, and stop wherever they wish. SDT is similar to caravan tourism, where travelers can spend as much time as they want in specific areas (Alkan, 2021). However, while caravan tourism typically takes place in designated campsites or areas with water resources and suitable infrastructure for camping, self-drive travelers have more freedom to stay wherever they choose. Caravan tourism is often described as traveling with one's home, as caravans offer accommodation on the go. Both forms of tourism are gaining global popularity, particularly among young and adventurous travelers. However, since caravan tourism requires campsites for overnight stays, self-drive tourism presents a more practical option for promoting tourism in the Thailand Riviera for several reasons.

The Thailand Riviera is a region of exceptional natural beauty and rich cultural experiences, yet it remains relatively unknown to a broader audience. Despite its tourism potential, the area has not gained significant visibility among potential visitors. Therefore, proactive marketing and public relations efforts are essential to promote the Thailand Riviera as a must-visit destination and attract a wider range of tourists (Rathore & Sharma, 2021). Additionally, understanding the behavior and preferences of high-quality tourists is crucial for developing a successful tourism industry in the Thailand Riviera. In the context of the Thailand Riviera, self-drive tourism includes specific characteristics such as the frequency and duration of trips, with tourists often taking multiple short trips per year, each lasting only a few days. These tourists tend to select destinations based on scenic beauty, indicating a preference for natural landscapes and leisure activities along the journey. Self-drive tourists in the Thailand Riviera are particularly drawn to its picturesque coastal landscapes, vibrant cultural heritage, and diverse attractions. Key factors influencing their satisfaction include the quality of road infrastructure, the availability of activities such as beach outings, cultural experiences, culinary offerings, positive interactions with local communities, and favorable environmental conditions.

Tourism branding, along with proactive marketing and public relations, plays a pivotal role in attracting quality tourists to the Thailand Riviera. In today's competitive tourism market, destination branding is an

Table 1 Tourist Numbers for the Thailand Riviera during 2017-2019

Year	Petchaburi		Prachuap Khiri Khan		Chum Phon		Ranong		Total
	Thai	Foreigner	Thai	Foreigner	Thai	Foreigner	Thai	Foreigner	Total
2017	3,715,501	385,091	772,016	259,874	252,208	18,077	251,168	17,727	5,671,662
2018	3,810,545	397,811	800,815	268,766	261,276	18,826	258,463	18,236	5,834,738
2019	960,824	156,691	878,968	277,116	1,131,007	85,347	788,398	47,263	4,325,614

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2019).

especially important tool for Thailand, where the tourism sector targets niche markets (Morgan et al., 2011). Effective branding of Thai tourism destinations should emphasize their unique identity and highlight what sets them apart, persuading both first-time and repeat visitors to choose Thailand (Blain et al., 2005). Establishing a strong brand is essential for destinations to gain a competitive advantage, as it creates positive perceptions among tourists (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019; Frías-Jamilena et al., 2018; Aghaei et al., 2021). In the highly competitive global tourism industry, only ten countries attract 70% of international tourists, leaving other destinations to compete for the remaining 30% (Sahebi et al., 2022). As a result, destinations must distinguish themselves and craft effective marketing strategies to target their ideal markets (Moayyed et al., 2020). Positive brand perceptions can even influence tourists to visit destinations they have never been to before, underscoring the critical role of destination branding efforts (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019).

Proactive marketing and public relations strategies are crucial for promoting the Thailand Riviera to a broader audience, building awareness, and enhancing its credibility. By investing in these areas, the Thailand Riviera can position itself as a must-visit destination for high-quality tourists with significant purchasing power, thereby fostering long-term economic growth and sustainability.

Objective(s)

1) To analyze tourist behaviors and needs,

2) To develop tourism brand identity, and

3) To establish proactive marketing and public relations models for self-drive tourism in the Thailand Riviera

Literature Review

Self-Drive Tourism

Self-drive tourism has gained popularity in recent years as the self-drive holiday market continues to grow. Self-drive tourists tend to spend more on accommodation and dining compared to other types of tourists, making them a valuable market for tourism destinations. Several studies have examined the factors influencing self-drive tourists.

In a study conducted by Liu et al. (2012) on self-drive tourists in Nanning City, China, it was found that these tourists typically took around five self-drive trips per year, mainly on weekends and holidays, with each trip lasting two to three days. Their destination choices were primarily based on the presence of scenic spots. The study suggests that tourism businesses should focus on developing leisure activities and promoting short-term tourism products suitable for weekend getaways. Additionally, governments should invest in infrastructure, such as highways and tourist facilities, to attract more self-drive tourists. As tourists become more familiar with scenic destinations, developing diverse and distinctive activities is crucial for creating product differentiation.

A similar study by Wu et al. (2018) evaluated the factors affecting the satisfaction of Chinese self-drive tourists traveling overseas. Using multiple linear regression analysis, the study found that scenery, road infrastructure, and available activities significantly influenced tourist satisfaction. Additionally, the responses of local communities and environmental factors, such as air quality, were identified as key concerns for Chinese self-drive tourists. Further, Yiamjanya (2019) explored the travel motivations of self-drive tourists in Northern Thailand and found that their primary motivation was the opportunity to spend time with friends and family. The appeal of self-drive tourism was driven by the sociocultural significance of tourist attractions, followed by the natural beauty of the destinations.

Destination Branding, Proactive Marketing and Public Relations in Tourism

Destination branding gained significant attention in the late 1990s and has since become a crucial strategy for tourism destinations. In today's competitive tourism market, destination branding is especially important for Thailand, where the tourism industry targets niche markets (Morgan et al., 2011). The branding of Thai tourism destinations should focus on promoting their unique identity and emphasizing differentiation to persuade both new and repeat visitors to choose Thailand as a destination (Blain et al., 2005). Positive brand perceptions strengthen organizations, giving them a consistent competitive advantage. Consequently, many organizations aim to build and maintain a strong brand among their target audience (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019). For example, 70% of international tourists visit only 10 countries, leaving the remaining destinations to compete for just 30% of global tourism (Pike, 2008). Therefore, destinations must differentiate themselves to attract tourists (Murphy, 2004). Positive brand perceptions can even lead travelers to select destinations they have never visited before (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019). As a result,

destinations must make concerted efforts to develop effective marketing strategies tailored to their target markets (Moayyed et al., 2020). Proactive marketing and public relations play a key role in creating a positive image of a destination, enhancing customer loyalty, and generating positive word-of-mouth. This can result in increased visitor numbers, higher revenues, and economic growth. Additionally, proactive marketing and public relations can help mitigate negative publicity or manage crises within the tourism industry. By developing a unique brand identity and actively promoting it through various channels, tourism businesses can attract niche markets and enhance their competitiveness.

Social Marketing

Since the early 1970s, social marketing has been defined as a process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate, and deliver value with the goal of influencing the behavior of target audiences to achieve specific societal benefits, such as improving health, preventing injuries, protecting the environment, and contributing to communities (Kotler & Lee, 2007). According to Catherine (2024), social marketing adapts commercial marketing strategies to influence customer behavior, applying them to health and social behaviors. It encourages target audiences to voluntarily accept, reject, modify, or abandon behaviors for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole. Engaging content driven by a strong social marketing campaign, disseminated through social media and public relations platforms, can help an organization be effectively recognized and remembered by its target audience (TGM, 2024). Several studies have explored marketing, public relations, and tourism branding. For instance, a study by Gato et al. (2022) revealed that the marketing of creative tourism, combined with unique tourist activities, extends the length of stay, increases tourist spending, and creates competitive and sustainable advantages for local tourism development. Similarly, Jeuring (2016) concluded that tourism marketing strategies should involve stakeholders in co-creation, encouraging tourists to actively participate in engaging activities. Kowatthanakul (2016) proposed a brand design for creative community-based tourism in the Mekong River ethnic group, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The design incorporated a logo inspired by the traditional textile patterns of the Mekong River ethnic group, which was used across various communication media to promote cultural tourism. Pongsakornrungsilp (2019) focused on the branding

process in the Andaman Tourism Development Zone, positioning the brand as "Irresistible Andaman" to communicate with target tourists and introducing an integrated brand communication strategy to drive branding efforts.

In summary, this study examines several key variables related to self-drive tourism and destination branding. For self-drive tourism, the variables include the frequency and duration of trips (Liu et al., 2012), destination choices based on scenic spots (Liu et al., 2012), satisfaction factors such as scenery, road facilities, available activities, local community responses, and environmental conditions (Wu et al., 2018), as well as travel motivations such as time spent with friends and family, sociocultural significance, and natural beauty (Yiamjanya, 2019). For destination branding, the variables include promoting a unique identity (Blain et al., 2005), fostering positive brand perceptions (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019), ensuring competitive differentiation (Murphy, 2004), and implementing effective marketing strategies (Moayyed et al., 2020).

Research Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve the following objectives

1. Investigating Tourist Behaviors: A quantitative survey was conducted using questionnaires administered to a sample of 400 tourists. Additionally, semi-structured interviews served as the qualitative component, involving 24 key informants, including tourists, government agencies, and tourism personnel, selected through purposive sampling.

2. Developing a Brand Identity Model for the Thailand Riviera: Quantitative data on tourist perceptions of the area's tourism image were collected via questionnaires. This was complemented by qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in tourism management.

3. Establishing a Proactive Marketing and Public Relations Model: The Ethnographic Delphi Future Research (EDFR) method (Poolpatarachewin, 1986) was employed, using expert insights from 17 participants. The data were analyzed using median and interquartile range statistics.

4. Developing a Self-Drive Tourism Model: Qualitative research, through in-depth interviews, was used to develop the model, which was then tested and verified.

The methodology integrates quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and the EDFR method across various stages. For tourist behavior analysis, quantitative data was collected from 400 respondents, while qualitative insights came from 24 key informants. In developing the Thailand Riviera's brand identity model, tourist perceptions were gathered quantitatively and supplemented with qualitative interviews with stakeholders. The proactive marketing and public relations model was constructed using expert feedback through the EDFR method, analyzed with median and interquartile range statistics. Lastly, the self-drive tourism model was developed, tested, and verified using qualitative methods. Although this comprehensive approach aims to thoroughly address the research objectives, further refinement may be needed to address potential limitations.

Research instrument

The questionnaire was developed based on previous research focusing on tourist behavior and perception on destination image (Bui & Le, 2016; Chiu et al., 2016; Moon & Han, 2019). The self-administered questionnaire was used to assess tourist behavior and their perceived image on the Thailand Riviera. The questionnaire comprised of three main sections: tourist behavior, tourist's perception towards the image of the Thailand Riviera and demographic information. To ensure the questionnaire accurately measured the intended constructs, its content validity was assessed using the Index of Content Validity (IOC) by three experts, who evaluated whether the items were relevant and appropriate for measuring the targeted constructs (DeVellis, 2017).

Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of the destination image using a 5-point Likert scale, which is a reliable tool for assessing tourist opinions. The scale ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree (Ángeles Oviedo-Garcíaa et al., 2019; Bui & Le, 2016; Chiu et al., 2016; Huanga & Crottsb, 2020; Moon & Han, 2019). The tourist behavior was measured using nominal and ordinal scales.

Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to test the efficacy of the survey instrument, following the recommendations of Cargan (2007), and Ruel et al., (2016). Pilot studies are crucial as they allow researchers to address several issues, such as preliminary scale or instrument development, item difficulty, item discrimination, internal consistency, response rates, and parameter estimation. The pilot study employed a convenience sampling approach (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012) and included 30 respondents. Based on feedback from the participants, minor revisions were made to the survey instrument. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha test was conducted, yielding a high alpha coefficient of 0.94. A Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 is generally considered indicative of good internal consistency and reliability (Cronbach, 1951; Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020).

Data collection and study sampling

The sample for this quantitative study comprised 400 Thai and international tourists who visited the Thailand Riviera between 2019 and 2020. Data were collected using a convenience sampling method, and field editing was performed to ensure the completeness of the questionnaires (Gunturo & Hui, 2013). Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted for the qualitative portion of the study. Key informants, including tourists, government officials, private sector representatives, local community leaders, and tourism entrepreneurs, were selected purposively from all relevant stakeholders.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the collected data. Frequency and percentage were employed to examine the demographic variables, while mean scores and standard deviations were used to assess tourist behavior. The Ethnographic Delphi Future Research (EDFR) data were analyzed using median and interquartile range statistics. The interpretation of results was based on the following median score ranges: 4.50–5.00 indicated the most appropriate and likely statement, 3.50–4.49 indicated very appropriate and likely, 2.50–3.49 indicated moderately appropriate and likely, 1.50–2.49 indicated less appropriate and likely, and 1.00–1.49 indicated the least appropriate and likely. The consensus among experts' opinions was also analyzed. If the calculated interquartile range was less than or equal to 1.50, the comments were considered consistent; if greater than 1.50, they were considered inconsistent. To ensure the accuracy, credibility, and reliability of the findings, triangulation was performed, and content analysis was applied to analyze the qualitative data (Flick, 2018).

The conceptual framework of this study is illustrated as following figure.

Results

1) Tourist behavior and perception toward the image of the Thailand Riviera

The respondents included a diverse group of

Conceptual Framework
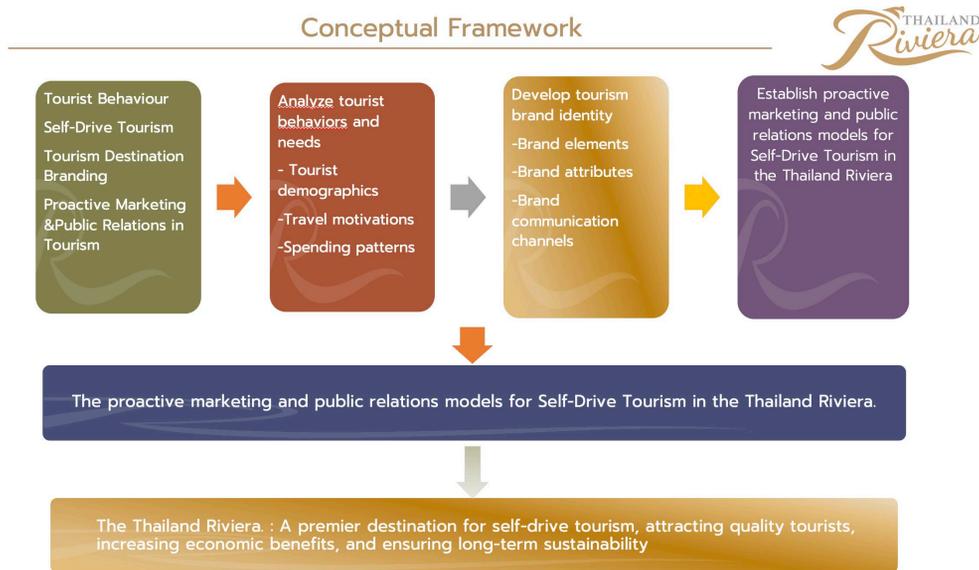
Figure 1. The research conceptual framework

travelers: older adults, families with children, and young travelers with friends, most of whom traveled by private car. They were asked to describe their travel behaviors and perceptions of the Thailand Riviera's tourism image. The tourist behavior patterns for visitors to the four provinces in the Thailand Riviera are presented in Table 2, while the mean and standard deviation (S.D.) scores for destination image are shown in Table 3.

The findings provide valuable insights into the behavior of tourists visiting the Thailand Riviera. Most visitors had previously visited the region, with the exception of Ranong province, which attracted a higher proportion of first-time visitors. Private car travel was the most popular mode of transportation, and most tourists visited only one province per trip, except for those who visited both Prachuap Khiri Khan and Phetchaburi. Regarding accommodation, tourists tended to prefer hotels and resorts, with an average daily expenditure of 1,000–3,000 baht per person. When asked to identify three words that came to mind for each province in the Thailand Riviera, as well as three activities to do in the area, tourists highlighted landmarks and experiences that reflected the unique identity of each province. For instance:

- Phetchaburi was associated with the beach, Thai desserts, Khao Wang (Heritage Mountain), and the palace.

- Prachuap Khiri Khan was linked to the sea, seafood, and beaches.

- Chumphon was connected to the Krom Luang Chumphon Monument, Turtle Island, and local coffee.

Table 2 Tourist behavior visiting the four provinces in the Thailand Riviera

Tourists' behavior	Phetchaburi	Prachuap Khiri Khan	Chumporn	Ranong
1. times visited	2-3 times	2-3 times	2-3 times	First time
2. main purpose	Leisure	Leisure	Leisure	Leisure
3. travel pattern	Private car	Private car	Private car	Private car
4. other province visited	Prachuap Khiri Khan	None	None	None
5. accommodations	Resort	Hotel	Hotel	Hotel
6. total expense/day/person (THB)	1,000 – 3,000	1,000 – 3,000	1,000 – 3,000	1,000 – 3,000
7. the first three words	• Beach	• sea	• Krom Luang Chumphon	• hot springs
	• Thai dessert	• seafood	• Island	• beach
	• palace	• beach	• Coffee	• island
8. plan to return	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9. recommend to others	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

- Ranong was noted for its hot springs, the sea, and Phayam Island.

Overall, most tourists expressed a desire to return to the Thailand Riviera and would recommend it to others.

Tourists were asked to rate their perception of the tourism image of the Thailand Riviera. The results revealed the key aspects of tourist image perception for the four provinces as follows:

- Phetchaburi Province: The most prominent tourism image was its reputation for delicious Thai sweets, with an average score of 4.87. This was followed by its association with the Royal Project (4.55) and its appeal as a foodie destination (4.47).

- Prachuap Khiri Khan: The top tourism image was as a city for family tourism (4.58), followed closely by its image as a leisure tourism destination (4.53) and as a city with a good climate (4.40).

- Chumphon: Tourists perceived Chumphon primarily as a leisure tourism destination (4.56), followed by its image as a peaceful and natural city (4.54) and a city with beautiful islands (4.52).

- Ranong Province: Ranong was associated with being a natural city (4.74), a tranquil city (4.66), and a health destination featuring hot springs, natural mineral water, spas, massage therapy, and rehabilitation facilities (4.60).

These findings indicate distinct tourism images for each province, reflecting their unique characteristics and appeal to visitors.

Table 3 Tourist image perception on the four provinces of the Thailand Riviera

Phetchaburi (Mean score, S.D.)	Prachuap Khiri Khan (Mean score, S.D.)	Chumporn (Mean score, S.D.)	Ranong (Mean score, S.D.)
Thai Dessert City (4.87, 0.843)	Family Tourism City (4.58, 0.668)	Leisure City (4.56, 0.657)	Natural city (4.74, 0.487)
The King's Royal Projects City (4.55. 0.808)	Leisure City (4.53, 0.711)	Peaceful City (4.54, 0.579)	Peaceful City (4.66, 0.479)
The foodie City (4.47, 0.652)	Good Climate City (4.40, 0.769)	Beautiful Islands City (4.52, 0.580)	Health city (4.60, 0.606)

2) An analysis of tourism brand identity of the Thailand Riviera.

According to the research objectives, a qualitative study was conducted that involved in-depth interviews with key informants from various tourism stakeholders regarding the identity of the Thailand Riviera. The interviews included representatives from the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Young Entrepreneur Chamber of Commerce (YEC) in Phetchaburi. Stakeholders identified culture and gastronomy as the province's key identity. This finding aligns with tourists' perceptions, who mentioned the beach, Thai desserts, the King's Royal Projects, and the city's reputation as a foodie destination, particularly highlighting the Palace as a significant attraction. In Prachuap Khiri Khan, discussions with the Office of Tourism and Sport and the Tourism Authority of Thailand focused on beach and sea tourism. This aligns with tourist feedback emphasizing the beach, seafood, family tourism, leisure activities, and the favorable climate. For Chumphon, interviews with key government agencies, including the vice-governor and representatives from the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the private sector, revealed a consensus on promoting the province's unique Robusta coffee and agricultural tourism. Tourists, in turn, perceive Chumphon as a leisure destination with peaceful surroundings and beautiful island attractions. Conversely, interviews with stakeholders in Ranong, both governmental and private, clearly identified mineral hot springs as the province's specialty. This sentiment mirrored tourists' perceptions of Ranong as a natural, peaceful, and health-oriented destination.

The results from both quantitative and qualitative methods indicate that the four provinces of the Thailand Riviera share a common identity as beautiful beach and sea tourism destinations. However, the unique characteristics of each province must be differentiated and emphasized. Each province should present its distinct offerings to ensure tourists enjoy diverse experiences without redundancy. This brand identity will encourage tourists to explore all areas of the Thailand Riviera comprehensively. The research identified the unique characteristics of each province in the Thailand Riviera that can be leveraged for tourism branding as follows:

- Phetchaburi Province: The focus is on Thai sweets and food, along with the arts and culture associated with the Phetchaburi artisan school. These elements can be integrated to create a brand as a cultural tourism city, highlighting diversity, culture, nature, artisan craftsmanship, community, and affordability, as it is not primarily an economic hub.

- Prachuap Khiri Khan: The province's distinctive identity lies in its beaches and sea, making it suitable for branding as a beach tourism city.

- Chumphon: The unique identity of Chumphon is its Robusta coffee, which can be promoted as an agricultural tourism destination by incorporating coffee into various tourism sectors.

- Ranong Province: Its mineral hot springs present an opportunity for branding in the healthy tourism sector.

The distinctive feature of the Thailand Riviera cluster is the variety of experiences offered by each province, catering to a wide range of tourist preferences. While they share a common identity as beach destinations, each province possesses its own unique character: Phetchaburi offers cultural experiences, Prachuap Khiri Khan is a beach paradise, Chumphon provides agricultural adventures, and Ranong features rejuvenating hot springs.

Following the analysis of the unique identities of each province through both quantitative and qualitative methods, the researchers developed a logo brand for the Thailand Riviera. A meeting was held with designers to create the brand design, resulting in three logo variations. After presenting these designs to the directors of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in the four provinces and other stakeholders, it was determined that the logo format shown in Figure 2 was the most suitable for use.

3) The EDFR research of proactive marketing and public relations models in the Thailand Riviera.

According to the Ethnographic Delphi Future Research (EDFR) study, which examined proactive marketing and public relations models in the Thailand Riviera area, the destination's common identity is its beautiful beaches that run alongside a scenic road. The study found that most tourists prefer to travel to the four provinces of the Thailand Riviera in their own cars with family members or close friends for safety reasons, particularly during the COVID-19 era.

To cater to this preference, a "Self-Drive Tourism Development and Promotion Strategy" should be initiated to enable targeted tourists to access the region's attractions, experience the local lifestyle, participate in community tourism activities, and support local shops, restaurants, and products. This approach will stimulate the local economy and promote tourism by developing a proactive marketing model and public relations strategy using a logo brand and icon to raise brand awareness.

Figure 2. The Thailand Riviera Logo Brand

The brand logo is designed with the intention to reflect the essence of the tourism area. The letter "R" in the logo stands for Riviera and the Royal Coast. The luxury stripes in the logo represent characteristics of the high-quality tourist. The brand "Thailand Riviera" will be easily recognizable and can be effectively introduced to tourists. The logo encompasses the tourism identity in the four provinces, namely, cultural tourism, beach tourism, agro-cultural tourism, and health tourism. A brand manual was developed as a guideline for the brand's effective promotion in the Thailand Riviera.

Data from Round 1 of expert interviews were utilized to formulate potential marketing and public relations models for the Thailand Riviera. These models were then presented as a closed-ended questionnaire, which served as a tool for conducting a second round of interviews with the same 17 experts from Round 1, including executives from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), entrepreneurs, and tourism academics. After collecting all the data, the median and interquartile range were analyzed to identify trends that are suitable for proactive marketing and public relations in the Thailand Riviera. Items with a median value of 3.5 or

higher and an interquartile range of 1.5 or lower were included in the development of the marketing and public relations model. The findings can be divided into two parts: first, an analysis of the experts' basic demographic data, and second, an analysis of the possible trends in marketing models and proactive public relations strategies for the Thailand Riviera.

Table 4 presents the demographic profile of the 17 experts, with the majority being male (53%) and 47% female. Most of the experts were between the ages of 40–49 years (47%), followed by respondents between 50-59 years and 30–39 years (18%). The majority of respondents were from private sectors (59%), followed by the government sector (18%). Most of the respondents (35%) had 20 years of experience, followed by 11–15 years (18%).

Table 5 presents the findings of the second round of the EDFR questionnaire analysis. The expert responses on the potential of proactive marketing and public relations models in the Thailand Riviera were evaluated based on the median and interquartile range. The results indicate that the statements were deemed appropriate in all aspects, with median values of 5 and 4, respectively, which exceeded the threshold of 3.5. Moreover, the interquartile range (Q3-Q1) was 1 and 0, which exceeded the criterion of less than or equal to 1.5, indicating that the statements are suitable for development as proactive marketing and public relations strategies for the Thailand Riviera.

Table 4. Demographic characteristics of the experts

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	9	52.94
Female	8	47.06
Age Group		
Less than 30	1	5.88
30-39	3	17.65
40-49	8	47.06
50-59	3	17.65
60	2	11.76
Affiliation		
Government sector	3	17.65
State enterprise	2	11.76
Private sector	10	58.82
Others	2	11.76
Experience		
1-5 years	1	5.88
6-10 years	3	17.65
11-15 years	3	17.65
16-20 years	2	11.76
Over 20 years	6	35.29

Table 5. The possibility of the pro-active marketing and public relations models for the Thailand Riviera

Statement	Mean	Interquartile	Meaning
1. Develop the marketing model based on the uniqueness of Thailand Riviera, which is a beautiful beach stretching over 400 kilometers, to make it a paradise for beach lovers.	4	1	Appropriate and consensus
2. Due to the beauty of the beach and its nature trails, it is important to develop and promote self-drive tourism, providing targeted tourists with easy access to tourist attractions and the tourist community in Thailand Riviera.	4	1	Appropriate and consensus
3. Develop tourism marketing and public relations models based on the distinctive identities of each province in Thailand Riviera by linking them through a common identity to attract and encourage tourists to visit all four provinces of Thailand Riviera.	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
4. The cultural prominence of Thai desserts, food, temples, and palaces in Phetchaburi can be used as a tourism identity based on the concept of gastronomy tourism. Passing on the gastronomic culture combined with artisanal skills will give Phetchaburi a unique tourism identity and a distinctive identity of Thailand Riviera.	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
5. The sea and sandy beaches define the tourist identity of Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, with wellness, nature, and rejuvenation as key highlights. Emphasizing health promotion should be a priority	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
6. Chumphon Robusta coffee is the dominant identity of Chumphon Province. Making Chumphon a Robusta city by integrating coffee into all sectors that will drive tourism and generate income for communities and tourism areas.	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
7. Ranong's most distinctive feature is the mineral hot springs, which have a unique identity unlike anywhere else in the world. They have medicinal properties and refresh the body, good for health, nourish beauty, and slow down aging, without the smell of sulfur dioxide.	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
8. Marketing strategies should focus on niche market groups, such as quality tourists with high spending.	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
9. Present Thailand Riviera's travel routes via social media	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
10. The four provinces of Thailand Riviera should organize a joint tourism campaign to encourage tourists to travel throughout the area.	5	0	Appropriate and consensus

Table 5. (Cont.)

Statement	Mean	Interquartile	Meaning
11. The four provinces of Thailand Riviera should jointly formulate a proactive marketing and public relations model for tourism so that tourists can see a distinctive tourism image or identity in the four provinces.	5	0	Appropriate and consensus
12. Awareness of Thailand Riviera is still limited so it is necessary to create proactive public relations with Brand Thailand Riviera by connecting the 4 city brands under the same big brand umbrella.	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
13. Develop a mascot to be Thailand Riviera's Brand Ambassador to raise awareness about tourism in Thailand Riviera.	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
14. Collaborative Marketing should be introduced. Similar businesses come together as partners, not competitors, allowing them to compete with other tourist areas.	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
15. Develop channels to present Thailand Riviera attractions on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Line.	5	1	Appropriate and consensus
16. Membership cards are provided only for tourists traveling in Thailand Riviera tourist attractions for discounts or privileges.	4	1	Appropriate and consensus
17. Create travel trends and deliver travel experiences through the identity of Thailand Riviera area with social media channels.	4	1	Appropriate and consensus

The results of the Ethnographic Delphi Future Research (EDFR) study indicated a consensus, as detailed in the statistics of median and interquartile range mentioned above. The marketing and proactive public relations models for the Thailand Riviera tourism area can be constructed as follows:

1. **Phetchaburi Province**: The marketing model should focus on cultural tourism, highlighting local communal dining experiences and artisanal arts and crafts.

2. **Prachuap Khiri Khan**: The emphasis should be on beach tourism activities, such as sand spas, which represent local wisdom and create unique travel experiences for visitors.

3. **Chumphon Province**: An agro-tourism marketing model centered around coffee is ideal. This can include activities like learning about the coffee-growing process, harvesting coffee beans, roasting, tasting, and café hopping in establishments run by a new generation of entrepreneurs who have returned to their family businesses. These activities encourage tourists to engage with community farmers, appreciate the beauty of coffee plantations, gain knowledge and experiences, and promote sustainable tourism that benefits the community and local farmers.

4. **Ranong Province**: The marketing model should be based on wellness tourism, focusing on Thai Onsen activities and developing Ranong into an Onsen Town. Utilizing its unique mineral water with medicinal properties, tourists can experience the therapeutic effects of mineral baths, promoting relaxation, relieving fatigue, and rejuvenating their bodies, which encourages repeat visits.

Additionally, experts suggest creating a Brand Ambassador for the Thailand Riviera through mascot marketing to raise awareness of attractions, activities, and tourism products, thereby promoting shared experiences. This initiative aims to expand the tourist base and enhance the profile of the Thailand Riviera brand. The Thailand Riviera Self-Drive Tourism Strategy is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3 The Thailand Riviera Self Drive Tourism Strategy

4) The results of the study on the development of self-drive tourism

The study focused on the development of self-drive tourism in the Thailand Riviera. The route was selected based on the principle of offering beautiful scenery and stops that represent the uniqueness of the area. The researchers identified potential routes along salt roads and coastal routes, and conducted a pilot study

by surveying the route and conducting in-depth interviews with communities along the way. They selected stops and attractions and drafted a salt road pattern. One route from Bang Taboon to Cha-am is approximately 82 kilometers, and the coastline route from Hua Hin - Pranburi - Sam Roi Yot - Kui Buri - Prachuap Khiri Khan is around 110 kilometers. The researchers presented the draft model to relevant authorities to certify and test the route with tourists for evaluation. The study found that tourists were highly satisfied with the beauty of the route and the various stops along the way. They found the tourism activities interesting and diverse, including activities not available on other routes such as salt farming, salt spa treatments, learning to weave 9 colors of fabric at the Ban Khao Tao Weaving Handicraft Center, and experiencing the community lifestyle while driving along the route. However, the study identified weaknesses in public toilet services and up-to-date tourist information at various scenic spots.

The area's common identity—its beautiful beaches—has been developed into a self-drive tourism route known as the "Beach Lover Paradise Route." This route connects the Thailand Riviera Self-Drive Salt Route in Phetchaburi to the Thailand Riviera Self-Drive Coastal Route in Prachuap Khiri Khan, covering a distance of approximately 200 kilometers. It is ideal for tourists who prefer to drive on their own, enjoy the scenic beauty, and participate in community activities. Tourists can also support the local tourism community by purchasing souvenirs or products. The route is suitable for travelers planning a 2–3-day trip or a weekend getaway. The infographics of the self-drive routes are presented in Figure 4.

Discussion

This research enhances the understanding of tourist behavior and branding within the Thailand Riviera. It was found that tourists often limit their visits to a single province due to time constraints and the distance between provinces. To address this issue, the study proposes the development of province-specific itineraries and the fostering of regional marketing collaboration. Tailored travel plans and joint promotional campaigns could incentivize tourists to explore the entire Riviera. Furthermore, the research highlights the unique identity of each province within the Thailand Riviera brand. This diversity enables targeted marketing strategies to attract visitors seeking specific experiences,

Figure 4. The self-drive routes in the Thailand Riviera: The Thailand Riviera Self-Drive Salt Route and the Thailand Riviera Self-Drive Coastal Route

thereby strengthening the overall appeal of the region. This approach aligns with existing research on the effectiveness of emphasizing unique identities in tourism branding (Kowatanakul, 2016; Pongsakornrungsilp, 2019). Finally, the study explores the potential of a "Self-Drive Tourism Development and Promotion Strategy." This approach encourages convenient access to attractions, fosters deeper connections with local culture, and supports local businesses. It aligns with the notion of highlighting social and cultural aspects of tourism (Yiamjanya, 2019), which can stimulate the regional economy. Promoting self-drive exploration can contribute to a more vibrant and sustainable tourism landscape in the Thailand Riviera.

Conclusions and Implication

The objective of this research was to develop a proactive marketing and public relations strategy for the Thailand Riviera area. The study results suggest that a proactive marketing and tourism promotion model for the Royal Coast, or Thailand Riviera, should focus on self-drive tourism while presenting a distinctive identity aligned with the tourism policy of each province under the brand "Thailand Riviera."

To enhance brand awareness, Mascot Marketing should be implemented with the introduction of a tourism ambassador. The self-drive tourism model in the Thailand Riviera includes the Thailand Riviera Self-Drive Salt Route in Phetchaburi, which is linked to the Thailand Riviera Self-Drive Coastal Route in Prachuap Khiri Khan, featuring community tourism activities along the scenic route. This form of tourism can reach remote areas and contribute to income distribution within the community, thereby elevating the income levels of both the community and the country.

Research Recommendation

The research findings provide several recommendations for tourism development in the Thailand Riviera. These include promoting each province's unique tourism identity and features to differentiate themselves from other tourist areas, as well as enhancing tourism facilities to a premium level to attract quality tourists. The government should incentivize entrepreneurs through tax deduction policies to support these developments. In light of the COVID-19 situation, the tourism marketing strategy for the next few years should target Thai tourists with high purchasing power. Additionally, Self-Drive Tourism should be expanded to include tourist driving routes that align with tourists' interests. It is essential to promote the participation of the tourism community and tour operators in welcoming self-drive tourists by creating engaging tourism activities and developing products, service quality, and safety measures that cater to their needs. This approach will encourage repeat visits and further exploration of the region. Lastly, a collective effort from all sectors is needed to enhance marketing and public relations in the area. Clear and continuous mechanisms at all levels should be established to achieve sustainable success.

Suggestions for further study

Future research should explore and develop additional self-drive tourism routes that align with the needs and preferences of self-drive tourists. This may involve creating new products and services tailored to this market segment. Additionally, future studies could examine self-drive tourism in China to gain insights into tourist behavior and the factors that attract them, which could be leveraged to promote self-drive tourism in the Thailand Riviera.

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