

Enhancing Agritourism in Thailand Through Digital Marketing Strategies: Challenges and Opportunities in the New Normal

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Abstract

The main focus of this article is to investigate the potential of marketing communication strategies to bolster agritourism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the digital age. The tourism industry is progressively resuming operations as governmental controls are eased and the virus's effects begin to diminish. Nevertheless, the "new normal" necessitates a departure from conventional tourism models and alterations in the conduct of tourists. In order to align with consumer demands and adequately equip farmers for the digital age, it is imperative to augment communication strategies employed in agricultural tourism marketing. Nevertheless, in this period of the "new normal," which necessitates a departure from traditional forms of tourism, including changes in visitor travel behavior. For instance, it is necessary to alter the original version. To effectively cater to consumer expectations and equip farmers for the digital era, it is essential to enhance agricultural tourism marketing communication approaches. Utilizing innovation to enhance agrotourism experiences by increasing the level of engagement at agrotourism locations. The creation of selling points can be achieved through the implementation of six marketing communication tactics. These strategies encompass the following: 1) ensuring that all online social media applications and content remain consistently updated and engaging. 2) Establishing a human touch in marketing efforts to foster a personal connection with the target audience. 3) Posting content on various online social media platforms at optimal times to maximize reach and engagement. 4) Implementing a push-to-store approach to drive customers to physical retail locations. 5) Maintaining a consistent brand positioning and cultivating a loyal follower base. 6) Showcasing

agritourism activities by integrating the agricultural sector and community way of life with tourism.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Marketing Communication Strategy, Agritourism, Digital Age, Tourism recovery, Consumer engagement

Introduction

Thailand Agricultural tourism, which includes farming activities, significantly benefits local communities in Thailand and attracts both domestic and international tourists. This form of tourism not only supports local farmers' livelihoods but also contributes to the economy. Given the diversity of customs and unique cuisine in each region, Thailand's tourism resources are varied and abundant. Agrotourism, deeply connected to industries producing goods with high financial returns (Sitaphat et al., 2018),, is essential for the economic development of local communities. To align with the National Tourism Development Plan 2021-2022 and drive the economy towards "Thailand 4.0," which focuses on creative tourism that preserves cultural highlights through technology and innovation, agrotourism business owners need to adopt innovative marketing strategies (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2021).

Entrepreneurs in agrotourism has been changing their business models and have begun to implement new marketing

communication tactics, such as offering online services for quicker and safer service (Santoso et al., 2022). Business practices and strategies have been established to reflect the digital environment. Governmental organizations have been set up to encourage farmers to use management expertise. Technology and innovation are employed to improve marketing potential and competitiveness. Encourage community growth, tourism, and the main tourist destinations (lordache et al., 2010). Entrepreneurs must adapt. To be responsive to changing client needs. Agricultural product prices were declining, and they also had to deal with dropping agricultural commodity prices (Kerri et al., 2014). It necessitates both knowledge, innovation, and technology, as well as innovative marketing approaches, to enable farmers to earn larger returns. Reduce reliance on middlemen. The consumer would profit more from the low pricing (Office of Agricultural Economics, 2016).

Information about mobile phone internet networks, marketing communication techniques for agritourism

in the digital age, and other resources that include knowledge vital to the field. Most significantly, travelers need to travel more than ever, according to the current state of the global tourism sector (Adeola and Evans, 2019). As a result, travelers must search more information about tourism, especially non-formal tourism. Travel anytime, anywhere, and with uncertainty because anything can happen at any time. Consequently, there is a higher demand for information network technologies among travelers. Adequate and practical travel information. Because of this, agricultural tourism marketing communication methods for the digital era. As a result, it plays a significant role in the agrotourism business (Santoso et al., 2022).

This article explores the impact of digital marketing strategies on agrotourism in Thailand, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of marketing communication methods for agrotourism in the digital age, helping business owners prepare for upcoming competition and adapt to new consumer behaviors and technological advancements.

What is the current trend in agricultural tourism?

Agricultural tourism is experiencing a dynamic shift towards sustainable and immersive experiences that respect local culture and ecosystems. Travelers now prefer to visit natural areas where they can engage with the environment and local culture without causing harm or disruption. This trend highlights the importance of agrotourism in providing meaningful vacations that allow visitors to relax, decompress, and fully engage in discovering cultural traditions. Travelers seek enriching journeys that offer opportunities to gain insight into the farming lifestyle and learn about the cultivation of locally grown fruits and vegetables. Agritourism provides visitors with the chance to engage in activities such as food production, harvesting, and tasting produce grown outside their typical environments. These experiences meet travelers' desire for more fulfilling and educational vacations. Agritourism also gives visitors the opportunity to engage in novel activities, including experimenting with food production, harvesting and tasting food that is grown outside of their typical environments (Liu et al., 2017). “Agricultural tourism will effectively fulfill travelers' desire for more enriching

journeys". Establishment of agricultural infrastructure to cater to the growing influx of tourists, with the aim of promoting agricultural tourism. The problem of environmental harm and degradation of natural attractions can be mitigated by replacing the natural tourism resources that are being destroyed on a daily basis.

According to Pattrat Wongchaikul, (2020) post-COVID-19 agritourism is set to surge, offering visitors opportunities to learn about ecology and health in a semi-adventurous countryside setting and return to nature. The region most likely to benefit from this trend is Southeast Asia. Furthermore, according to tourist experts, demand for wilderness places would increase. This trend would promote community-driven and environmentally sustainable agritourism and make Southeast Asia, being predominantly rural, well-positioned to benefit from the increasing demand for community-driven and environmentally sustainable agritourism. Tourist experts predict a rising demand for wilderness areas, making these countries more aware of environmental, community health, and hygiene issues. According to the market research firm Technavio, the global agritourism market is expected to grow at an exponential rate, with an annual growth rate of around 18% between 2019 and 2023.

The current trends in agricultural tourism emphasize sustainable and immersive experiences, a growing interest in eco-friendly practices, and significant market growth. Future research should focus on long-term impacts and explore new forms of community engagement to sustain this sector.

What are the most important digital tourism marketing communication strategies?

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed us to rely even more on technology. Regardless of the nature of engagement, such as relaxation and entertainment, the primary focus is on creating new innovations and technology to address challenges and ease concerns related to social distancing and safety protocols. Providing support to the tourism business in this situation is essential for its survival. Even after the epidemic ends, these travel improvements are likely to stick around and become new methods of traveling. For example, employing innovation to provide alternative experiences to promote tourist destinations can urge tourists to come and experience these destinations themselves when free travel becomes available.

Digital Platforms

Thailand has recognized the importance. In terms of tourist management and the tourism market, the development of a new tourism style that focuses on digital marketing, which has influenced Thailand's tourism industry policy and tourism marketing 4.0 by employing digital platforms. Concerning tourism, including administrative assistance (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2015; Suprapha Somnakpong, 2017; The Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2018). The digital to prepare for Thailand 4.0 and satisfy passengers' expectations, which envision online information and self-booking increasing by 50–60%, as well as creating content on the Internet to be used as tourism information (Thai Rath Online, 2017). As a result, contemporary tourism operators can communicate more effectively with tourists. Marketing communications are used to raise awareness and appreciation for tourist destinations as well as other products and services in the tourism business. Which tourism business entrepreneurs should pay close attention to various situations that will have an impact on the country's tourist industry? Both are favorable elements for establishing opportunities for businesses and negative factors for improving

operations in order to provide timely support, such as taking advantage of the government's tourism stimulus initiatives. Product and service public relations tourists are continuously informed thanks to social media. Development of digital marketing (Suprapha Somnakpong, 2017; The Bangkok Insight, 2020).

Social Media Influence

Furthermore, (Mihalcescu et al., 2016; the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2015; Suprapha Somnakpong, 2017), discussed the digital tourism model, which employs digital marketing tools to generate awareness and advertising via the Internet and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, weblogs, Google Search, and mobile phone applications. This is seen as the advancement of the tourism business based on innovation, culture, and community identity, which must be modernly promoted. For example, to enhance travelers' awareness and facilitate them access to various sites and attractions. It is regarded as the most effective marketing technique because it can reach the target audience as rapidly and efficiently as feasible in the Thailand 4.0 era commented that the production of social media using various programs is

regarded as the heart of the public relations media as today's communication technology has helped to promote the emergence of many new forms of social media that are convenient and modern to make public relations in the current era, which has caused a global change in communications (Warach Khruchit, 2012). Furthermore, the Department of Defense Science and Technology (2015) believe that social media was a network of virtual relationships that responds to the formation of lines. Connecting relationships allow us to meet others who share common interests. Capable of creating new societies for everyone and successfully linking communications within and outside the organization, which was what meets the modern lifestyle. Thailand has awoken to an increasing emphasis on the usage of social media. (National Statistical Office, 2017) It was found that the majority of the population used the internet for social networking activities (Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, LINE, Instagram), and also downloading pictures, movies, videos, music, and games to play games, watch movies, listen to music, listen to radio, and download music software to share on websites. According to Munar and Jacobsen (2014), social media users is apart of daily activities. It is popular to share photographs, movies, and trip experiences

from various tourist locations, which causes people to seek information in various media to be interested and boost search. It also increases confidence in picking tourist destinations. Definitely shortening the time required to decide on a tourism destination. According to Ma and Chan, (2014), important communication channels are used to reach target groups of visitors at a low cost, quickly, and efficiently by providing various tourist attractions information. Covers both substance and territory without a doubt. Responding to the behavior of searching for information on various tourist attractions in order to make decisions, online media is related to the increase in factors impacting access to tourist attractions and businesses.

Marketing 4.0, often known as "digital marketing," is an evolution of traditional marketing. By conducting practically all marketing through digital media, a new type of marketing uses consumer communication via digital channels, which, despite being a new medium, adheres to old marketing ideas. It just alters consumer communication channels and collects customer data. (Wertime and Fenwick, 2008) described digital marketing as "the development of a future market that occurs." When the majority of the company's marketing operations are carried out via digital

communication channels. Digital media is a medium with a unique identification that can be employed, allowing marketers to engage in two-way communication continuously and individually. The information gathered from each consumer interaction is learned collectively. This real-time information and direct customer input can be used by marketers to maximize the benefits of future consumers or promotional strategies. Utilizing online database techniques to establish a prompt and efficient connection with consumers while prioritizing privacy and cost-effectiveness. (Rietzen, 2007).

In other words, digital media has evolved to accommodate the needs of potential customers. They will clearly express their desires, making the union a formidable entity that marketers must also take into account. Those who pay attention first have the best chance of creating satisfaction. First satisfy yourself and develop efficient marketing. Trends in the Tourism Market 4.0 in Thailand The findings revealed that, as a result of shifting global trends and the government's Thailand 4.0 program, there has been the creation of a group of tourists known as Solo Mo, which derives from the words "social local," "location," and "mobile," who utilize technology to travel alone. The majority are self-managed domestic travel groups

(DIT: domestic independent tourism) and independent international visitors (FIT: international independent tourism). As a result, a new style of tourism marketing that focuses on digital marketing is deemed "open-minded social media marketing." Participation It is also an acceptance of individual variances. Communication technology has been developed to enable customers to contact and exchange knowledge, as well as search for information and buy and sell products and services across borders, by linking marketing online and offline and managing channels to reach customers (Omni Channel). This can be used to study target groups and visitor behavior in order to be consistent with the current marketing style and in line with evolving tourism trends in the future. As a result, marketers must devise new techniques for attracting customers (Suprapha Somnakpong, 2017).

According to Kotler's book Marketing 4.0, the present purchasing decision-making process has been superseded by the 5A model. Consumers go through a 5-step procedure (Kotler, 2017).

Awareness (product recognition) is the stage at which buyers become acquainted with the product. Developing awareness can be done in a multitude of ways, such as by developing a website,

advertising on Facebook, and advertising on Instagram. Agricultural tourism must be conscious of increasing awareness through various online channels, such as Twitter advertising, line creation office accounts, or line ads. It is a low-cost and quick way to spread the word about one's products, services, and business operations.

Appeal (as in a product) is how marketers must entice customers to purchase their items. Agricultural tourism can be likened to other rivals. In order to achieve your goal, it is imperative to stimulate curiosity and captivate individuals. To tourists via online media channels that reach tourists by employing visuals or atmospheres that elicit emotions and create an impression, visitor feedback, etc. In contrast to outbound marketing, Kotler (2017) defined inbound marketing as employing marketing to encourage individuals to come in like a magnet. The principle is to use interesting stuff. Attract a large number of potential clients. Especially in the field of digital marketing, which is marketing to attract customers. Agritourism businesses should target individuals who have a genuine interest in this form of tourism but have limited knowledge about our industry. Once we have identified this specific group of customers, we will have the opportunity to market and offer our products and services

to them. By becoming a member of our travel page, you can easily generate online media links and discover various organizations. This will enhance your interest in following our content. It may result in more followers or increased visibility, which will aid in making identify target groups who are likely to be interested in the company's products and services and have the potential to become consumers in the future which makes use of marketing to generate interest in products that are very relevant or products that people want to spend time researching in order to use. Choose whether to purchase or obtain services, such as travel tickets, accommodation, or tourist attractions, or our agriculture.

The customer acquires knowledge about the product through the process of asking questions. Prospective customers often initiate inquiries regarding product specs and pricing from brands, especially when seeking recommendations from acquaintances or family members who have prior experience with the product. They must possess the readiness to provide fundamental information and should not become fatigued by responding to inquiries, because each inquiry incites greater inquisitiveness. You have the option to utilize either automated or manual responses.

The act step follows the product investigation step. Provided that the buyer is content and confident, they will proceed with the purchase of the product. Enhance the overall satisfaction of consumers. Emphasis should be placed on enhancing the ease of making reservations, purchases, and payments. Since every convenience ultimately leads to contentment, perceptions are established as a consequence of satisfaction.

Advocate (product recommendation from others or word of mouth) The period of word-of-mouth is crucial. In contemporary times, the power of "word of mouth" is to convert clients who are loyal to the business into people. Continue to refer new consumers. Agrotourism operators can do this by paying close attention to how the marketing mix for hospitality enterprises is applied to the aforementioned 5A model.

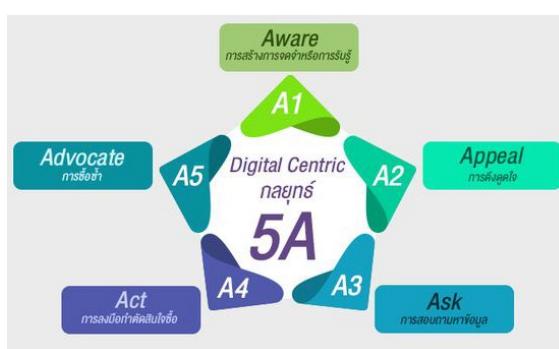


Figure 1 5A model (Kotler, P, 2017).

According to Yubol Benjarongkit (2011), communication strategies must be

developed in accordance with the objectives, goals, visions, and overall marketing plan and become an integral element of the organization's fundamental strategic support. Strategic communication planning must include the following ten elements: 1) Situation, 2) Objectives, 3) Facts, 4) Goals, 5) The Target Audience, 6) Key Message, 7) Strategies, 8) tactics or communication activities; 9) timetable; and 10) evaluation.



Figure 2 Communication Strategies

(Yubol Benjarongkit, 2011).

Since the key digital tourist marketing communication tactics are around using digital platforms, leveraging the impact of social media, and implementing effective marketing frameworks like Kotler's 5A model. These tactics are essential for the tourist business in Thailand, enabling it to adjust to evolving consumer behaviours and technology improvements.

Agritourism Enhancement and Empowerment Through Marketing Communication Strategies in the Digital Age.

The following section examines fundamental approaches to augmenting and enabling agritourism via digital marketing communications in the contemporary digital era. The transition to the digital age has significantly altered tourist behavior, making information technology essential in the agricultural and tourism sectors. In order to adequately accommodate tourists, agritourism destinations must advance information technology that enables visitors to access the necessary data conveniently and expeditiously through their preferred electronic devices. This entails augmenting the assortment of information technology platforms, including specialist websites for visitor destinations and Facebook, in order to streamline the process of accessing information. The information shown on the devices chosen by tourists is presented in a specific way. Expanding the range of information technology platforms employed to disseminate diverse information to tourists, including Facebook and dedicated websites of tourist attractions, in order to facilitate the quick and convenient access to information for

passengers. Depending on the manner in which the information technology is employed. Furthermore, the purpose of tourism is agricultural tourism. will determine the target groups that are appropriate for the behavior of various tourist groups in order to apply the technology to more effective agrotourism information.

As a result, the strategy to modernizing and strengthening agricultural tourism through marketing communication tactics in the digital age It should contain the following 6 strategies:

- 1. The strategy is to regularly update all types of ad material on online social media applications.**

Strategies for keeping the application page up-to-date and exciting 24 hours a day by identifying issues that are currently of interest to agricultural tourists or employing real-time marketing strategies in conjunction with the generation of supporting content selling things for amusement can be separated into two categories. Product Excitement, Creative Material, and Up to Date are examples of material that match the strategy criteria of "Keeping all kinds of online social media application ad content fresh." to be relevant to what is happening or current at the time, making the brand look active and exciting.

2. Strategy create a human touch.

Content production and interaction tactics to make agricultural visitors aware of the administrator's presence and make the administrator a concrete identity for consumers not to allow customers to feel the need to converse with brands. In other words, the administrator is like a friend. Which consumers will be able to determine that Admin is a male aged 20–40 years old, unmarried, and has a habit of being humorous, playful, funny, disheveled, but not rude? Is the person who gives positive news to customers in order to help them receive a complaint and constantly solves difficulties. According to Wertime and Fenwick, (2008), the fundamental of efficient viral marketing is that information must be compelling (compelling information), that is, it must be entertaining, fun, and useful. These will allow more messages to be delivered than explicit advertising ones. and using consumer research methodologies to generate content that engages customers emotionally.

3. Strategy post at the best time on all social media.

A timely posting approach by assessing and matching the suitability of the intended content. Time for communication and blogging, the administrator of the application or the administrator can refer to

the application to access information on agricultural tourists that is constantly changing from the media database. (Thitikarn Nithi-uthai, 2012) discussed strategy development. Determining the frequency of posting should take into account differences in time, such as the habits of page members when receiving information. Furthermore, if a brand has a lot of information to offer, it can publish up to 3-5 times every day.

4. Strategy always on brand positioning content.

Strategies for developing content to present and enhance the brand positioning of agricultural tourist attractions. However, the forms of material that fit the criteria for the strategy "Always On Brand Positioning Content" can be classified as promotion, new activity, and farm review.

5. Strategy push to store (Online to Offline to Online).

Content creation strategies to drive tourists to travel or, in certain cases, force tourists to visit places in order to return online. However, the sorts of content that fit the criteria for the "Push to Store" strategy can be classified as product excitement, promotion, and activity creation.

6. Strategy stable follower base.

In order to establish and maintain a consistent group of followers, it is essential

to utilize efficient tactics for increasing an application's subscriber base through different online communication channels. In a study conducted by Sasima Udomsin (2014), the marketing communication tactics of three online influencers in the restaurant business were examined. These influencers made use of communication channels on three social networks: Facebook, Instagram, and Wongnai (wongnai.com). The study found that employing captivating language online and cultivating a wide audience are crucial elements of influencer marketing communication strategies. Regular monitoring and collective deliberations are equally crucial. These tactics can be implemented in a similar manner to agritourism by utilizing social media platforms to advertise agritourism activities, captivating potential tourists with attractive content, and sustaining regular engagement to cultivate a devoted community of followers.

In decision, the implementation of these six strategies is crucial in order to empower and strengthen agritourism via digital marketing communications. To effectively adapt to the digital age and satisfy the changing demands of tourists, agritourism can establish a stable follower base, consistently update social media content, incorporate human elements into

the posting process, maintain consistent brand positioning, and employ push-to-store strategies. Implementing these tactics will assist agritourism providers in increasing visitor engagement and attraction, thereby fostering sector expansion and sustainability.

Conclusion

The article examines the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry, with a particular emphasis on the potential of agritourism to convert challenges into advantages by offering socially engaging and immersive experiences. The primary discoveries underscore the significance of crafting unique and meaningful experiences that provide an opportunity for individuals to disconnect from their daily lives and promote a feeling of unity within a community. Agritourism and destination marketing experience significant growth when they are bolstered by community engagement, environmental awareness, and efficient resource distribution. Communities that prioritize environmental values generally excel in promoting destinations effectively. Consequently, operators of agrotourism companies must possess a comprehensive understanding of the marketing components that appeal to

agrotourism tourists or brand identities. Undoubtedly, prioritization lies with the media generation and management systems. To establish the orientation of the presentation, one should define clear objectives, methodologies, and communication strategies that consistently embody the brand's identity (Natarith Chaiphan, 2016; Tranchenko et al., 2020; Ghaisani and Afifi; 2020; Phumrungruang and Bacongus, 2020). In addition to being media artists, they must possess a deep understanding of themselves. Media designers must possess a comprehensive understanding of their intended audience. Is the utilization of media essential, and if so, what is its purpose? To create content that satisfies users' requirements while also achieving engagement that aligns with the aims, with the purpose of utilizing it as informative material and recommendations for enhanced strategizing. Developing communication and message design strategies tailored to meet the specific demands of consumers in order to enhance the success of agricultural tourism (Parlov et al, 2016; Sudarat Pimonratanakan, 2019) Moreover, the PT. Granting Jaya's inclination towards Instagram as a digital marketing approach emphasizes the crucial significance of digital resources, including social media, mobile applications, and online videos, in promoting tourist and

hospitality offers (Hristoforova et al., 2019; Riyadi, 2019). It is crucial for success in today's competitive environment to use these technologies and crowd marketing approaches that rely on user ratings and recommendations. The combination of COVID-19's influence, the distinctive advantages of agrotourism, and the successful utilization of digital marketing technologies emphasize the need for flexibility and creativity in the tourism and hospitality industry. Adopting these techniques and technology is not only beneficial but necessary for the ongoing expansion and prosperity of firms in this rapidly changing market.

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