

# Marketing Communication Tactics of Tourism Businesses in Preparation Towards ASEAN Economic Community.

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**Abstract**— The objectives of this study are to study marketing communication tactics of tourism businesses in preparation towards ASEAN Economic Community and to find out marketing communication methods in creating prominent points for tourism businesses. The research methodology was a qualitative research. The sample of the research was 20 tourism businesses, 10 small-sized travel agencies and 10 medium-sized travel agencies, which organized inbound and domestic tours and have received a tourism award. The research interviewed a variety of people, i.e. entrepreneurial representatives, marketing representatives, academic group and user group. The questions focused on marketing communication tactics and details of the research methodology were as follows:

The qualitative research was analyzed through the content analysis by categorizing data from the interview, separating aspects and source of data. After that, meaning of the data was analyzed and evaluated according to the contextual frame of the qualitative data to find out marketing communication methods in creating prominent points for tourism businesses in the era of ASEAN Economic Community, then verifying the research by the triangulation method.

As for the results of this study the researcher found that Small- and medium-sized tourism businesses use a variety of marketing communication tactics and mostly adopt 6 similar tactics as follows 1. Online media and social media 2. Personal media 3. Printed media 4. Outdoor media 5. Activity media 6. Television media and the results of Methods of Developing Marketing Communication Tactics for Tourism Businesses especially the tourism businesses should adopt the Marketing 3.0 Strategy.

**Keywords**— tactics, strategies, marketing communication, tourism businesses, ASEAN

## I. INTRODUCTION

AT the end of 2015 or in the coming 21st century, many countries in the Southeast Asia have become well aware of cooperation in creating the single production base to compete with communities around the world, under the name of “ASEAN Community” by the year 2015, with the shared vision of ASEAN leaders, that is, to create the ASEAN Community with highly competitive capability, apparent rules

and regulations, and being people-centered, as well as leading ASEAN member states to be “single family” having strength, good immunity and family members having good living conditions, safety and able to do business more conveniently. [1] Under the international relations and good cooperation in mutually creating tourism product development process, service standard, knowledge sharing and marketing communication strategy promotion, many countries have become well realized competition with one another in term of tourism [2].

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported the ASEAN region had the highest growth rate of tourists with more than 10%. The ASEAN countries have continuously supported cooperation in promoting tourism as a single tourist destination, signifying that tourists not only visit any country but also travel to other countries in the ASEAN region. The working group on marketing and communication stated that the ASEAN countries have promoted ASEAN tourism marketing under the brand “Southeast Asia - Feel the Warmth” which presents selling points of ASEAN with warm welcome by having activities focused on promoting various products to approach different target groups, consisting of mass tourism promotion especially India and China, experiential and creative tourism, adventure tourism, business tourism, and long-stay elderly tourism. These activities have publicized ASEAN tourism products through articles, photos, and public relations media, including promotion through the Internet, e.g. Facebook, the ASEAN Tourism website ([www.aseantourism.travel](http://www.aseantourism.travel)), the ASEAN tourism website in Chinese ([www.dongnanya.travel](http://www.dongnanya.travel)) and Sino Weibo for the China market. Moreover, there are a mobile application and cooperation with ASEANTA in annually organizing ASEAN Tourism Forum which consists of conference, seminar, and TRAVEX, together with cooperating with the alliance in promotion, i.e. PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association) in broadcasting ASEAN tourist attraction advertisements on Travel Channel, cooperation with ASEAN Tripper Magazine and Digital Innovation Asia, as well as preparing ASEAN for ASEAN to promote Intra-ASEAN Travel [3].

In the meantime, tourism entrepreneurs deemed that the opening of ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 would have the most positive impacts on businesses, especially the increases of tourists and income on tourism. It was an opportunity for tourism due to more freedom to travel without visas and tourism investment in Thailand and ASEAN

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countries. Negative impacts on tourism businesses would be more competitions. Having more business competitors would cause the decrease in income or profit of the businesses and tourism staff and business organizations of Thailand were not ready for competition. The obstacle of Thailand tourism was language for communication. The entrepreneurs considered the first priority that the government should proceed was stimulating domestic and international tourism markets, followed by enhancing quality of facilities and safety in tourist attractions in compliance with the international standards, as well as restoring and developing tourist attractions to be sustainable[4].

At present, tourism has become more complex; therefore, tourism businesses need to expand products and services to satisfy changes, be creative and find new tourism markets, e.g. changing from package tour and incentive tour to “tourism hospitality business” which is the business used by the tourists for visiting tourist attractions, reserving rooms, buying tickets, transportation and other services. The tourism hospitality business links tourists or buyers with tourism hospitality providers in choosing and merchandising tourist destination services according to the buyer’s need. The tourism businesses focus on attracting both Thai and foreign tourists to place importance on tourism because the more the tourists visit, the more income and employment occur.

The survey result on private tourism business sector in terms of consciousness and understanding of ASEAN Community by ASEAN Studies Center of Chulalongkorn University in 2012 showed that the private sector was rather excited and alert to ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the most prepared group. However, the SMEs group was probably not well prepared [5].

Marketing communication in the tourism industry has become an important tool. Nisa Chatchakul considered advertising and public relations in the tourism industry were rather on target by focusing on merchandising a variety of tourism services, specific advertising and action plans, and cost-profit orientation. When large-sized travel agency or tour operator organized package tours, it needed to sell tours as fast by advertising through media channels as many as possible. It was essential for customers to know movement of the company and to be persuaded to make a purchase in order to get fully number of customers as estimated. In case of some medium-sized travel agencies doing semi-retail and semi-wholesale business, trade policies were uncertain, depending on characteristics of the tourists’ trends. Success of medium-sized travel agencies depended on ability to observe, consider and analyze customers [6].

Philip Kotler [7] divided the most widely used tools for marketing public relations into 7 groups as follows:

1. Publications
2. Event, seminars and exhibitions
3. News
4. Community involvement activities
5. Identity Media, e.g. new staff uniform, small token of appreciation for customers.

6. Lobbying activities, i.e. attempts to force issuing laws and regulations for people’s benefits related to business dealing of the company

7. Social responsibility activities

The research was interested in studying the preparation of medium- and small-sized tourism businesses towards ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). It was the period of time that tourism businesses have becoming more and more competitive due to business opportunities leading more freedom to travel and more tourism investment. At the same time, the competition trend can also have negative impacts on tourism business. This research aimed to study what tactics medium- and small-sized tourism businesses used for business adaptation in conditions of opportunities, challenges and competitions waiting at the front by focusing the tactics to create prominent points for one’s business superiorly to competitors in the tourism businesses in the period of preparation towards ASEAN Economic Community.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### A. Objective of Research

The objective of this research is to study marketing communication tactics of tourism businesses in preparation towards ASEAN Economic Community and to find out marketing communication methods in creating prominent points for tourism businesses.

### B. Research Methodology

The study on marketing communication tactics of tourism businesses in preparation towards ASEAN Economic Community was a qualitative research. The researcher divided the study into 2 parts: Part 1 was the secondary research analyzing information from books, textbooks, and related document research; Part 2 was data collection from the in-depth interview.

The research instrument was the interview schedule. The sample of the research was 20 tourism businesses, 10 small-sized travel agencies and 10 medium-sized travel agencies, which organized inbound and domestic tours and have received a tourism award. The research interviewed a variety of people, i.e. entrepreneurial representatives, marketing representatives, academic group and user group. The questions focused on marketing communication tactics and details of the research methodology were as follows:

The qualitative research was analyzed through the content analysis by categorizing data from the interview, separating aspects and source of data. After that, meaning of the data was analyzed and evaluated according to the contextual frame of the qualitative data to find out marketing communication methods in creating prominent points for tourism businesses in the era of ASEAN Economic Community, then verifying the research by the triangulation method.

The Interview Questions are listed below :

1. What method do you communicate for your customers?
2. What are the main purposes to your communications?
3. How is your message like?

4. What is your interesting message?
5. Which method do you communicate to your target groups?
6. Which target groups do you need to communicate?
7. Which factors are interesting in your services?
8. What are your technology like?
9. Do you think,are they successful?
10. How is your feedback like? What are they?

III. RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

This research found that the new wave technology which enables connectivity and interactivity of individuals and groups is used as a driver, e.g. computers, mobile phones, internet and social media. These support customers to be assertive and to take part in tourism businesses. Social media have an important role in hotel businesses, travel agencies, airlines and restaurants because at present customers frequently buy package tours by studying information on the internet and social media[8].

Small- and medium-sized tourism businesses use a variety of marketing communication tactics and mostly adopt 6 similar tactics as follows:

I. Online media and social media

It is a very popular tactics at this moment. Most customers use the internet all the time, so it results in the success of online media, good feedback and people’s interest. This seems the best suitable tactics in this era because it is easily and fast accessible to consumers. As a result, the tourism businesses often advertise and offer promotions for credit cards through company’s website due to the fact that the society at present tend to be open and people can make contacts to one another easily through the internet and search more information immediately. Moreover, the businesses also use the social media through Facebook, Line, Twitter and electronic sources like emails.

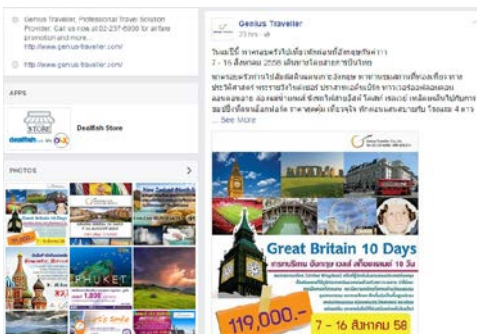


Fig.1 Online media

II. Personal media

This tactics emphasizes interpersonal communication to respond customers’ needs quickly and satisfactorily so that they can recognize staff and share good experiences to other people or so-called “word of mouth” (WOM). It is very reliable and passed on to friends. The recipients often believe messages from their friends. Now there are reviews of

customers’ actual usage which help them to make a contact whenever they have any questions.

Personal media also include gurus in tourist attractions of provinces, i.e. providing information and recommending tourism destinations, accommodations, restaurants through face-to-face communication, by which they can immediately interact with one another and ask questions.



Fig.2 Actress media

III. Printed media

It is considered a vital tool of successful marketing communication by designing media through messages, e.g. leaflets, brochures, newspaper and magazines, which the tourism businesses can put in restaurants or customers’ accommodations. Moreover, the businesses go to these places and introduce packages. The entrepreneurs consider this kind of media can reach all kinds of target groups, using low budget, having clear and understandable picture and being convenient to carry with them. Sometimes the tourism businesses attach brochures to credit card statements.



Fig.3 leaflets



quickly, television broadcasting places a large financial burden on companies. Moreover, if the presenter is well-known in the society, it will cost more expenses.

Fig.4 brochures to credit card

#### IV. Outdoor media

The tourism businesses organize boards on tourist attractions so that people are interested in using company's services and being informed of what the company would like to present in front of the point of sale to immediately draw customers' attention. The businesses also place billboards and advertising boards around official places to inform general people and persuade them to use services.



Fig.5 Thailand travel agent billboards

#### V. Activity media

This tactics can be called event marketing, i.e. customer-executive relation activities. The special activity can help the companies to approach to the target customers because they can choose interested activities of the target customers, leading to creating opportunities for customers to know and like "brand."

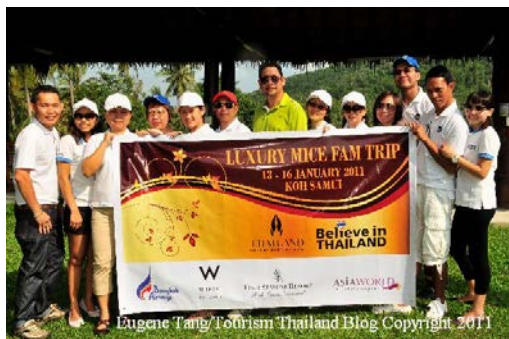


Fig.6 FAM Trip

#### VI. Television media

This kind of media can have more access to all kinds of people anywhere and anytime than other kinds of media. Although the entrepreneurs consider target group can be reached quickly, read details easily and recognize them



Fig.7 Channel media

#### Methods of Developing Marketing Communication Tactics for Tourism Businesses

World Tourism Organization (WTO) estimated the growth in number of tourists that in 2020 there would be 1.6 billion tourists around the world, which would visit Asia Pacific about 400 million and ASEAN about 160-200 million. The number increased from 2015 which was estimated that there would be 120 million tourists visiting ASEAN. Therefore, the methods of developing marketing communication tactics are possibly required to think about what is coming in the near future, that is, association of the ASEAN Community which leads to travelling between neighboring countries. This has more impacts on nonlocal and foreign investors, such as hotels, resorts, homestays, Thai restaurants, spas, Thai massage and tourism businesses, especially in Kanchanaburi Province, Mae Sot District of Tak Province, Chiang Mai Province, Mae Hong Son Province and Chiang Rai Province [9] Consequently, travel agencies need to be prepared in every aspect by focusing on providing comprehensive tourism services, making connected travel routes and promoting tourism in various aspects in terms of culture, history and nature. According to Dr. Taksin Pillavas, president of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, [10] businesses need to open the world and eyes, including supporting skillful employees for overseas field trips, providing scholarships for further study, and organizing short training courses. The government sector should urgently provide knowledge on ASEAN, languages and marketing. Importantly, the entrepreneurs should be encouraged to better develop websites and companies because tourists can search information from the internet all over the world. Hence, marketing should be done in the new type; especially the tourism businesses should adopt the Marketing 3.0 Strategy as follows:

I. Build brand recognition to be different from other travel agencies and use more specific media with the target groups in order to make brand more well-known by using word of mouth (WOM) named as "viral marketing" which appears in various



forms, e.g. sharing videos through YouTube, games, pictures, messages.

II. Use social media for marketing, i.e. Facebook is the tool of creating customer groups with common interests or travel experiences. This focuses travel experiences through still images and animations (video clips), raising various topics of discussions necessary before or during travelling, such as, entering and departing countries, recommended restaurants, travel destinations excluded from general package tours, and shopping places to arouse customers to take a trip.

Besides, the tourism businesses should listen to feedbacks or responses and answer customers' questions quickly, probably through social media immediately. This method is a two-way communication that helps respond needs of the target groups.

III. Use advertising media and public relations through smartphones, tablets and company website. Most companies have their own websites but they should always update website information and add video clip activities of the company to create the feelings of being lively and active all the time. This helps customers have an access to the website and get responses immediately. Customers should take part in creating travel contents. However, it is necessary to send emails. According to Litmus's survey, email was the most popular activity with 85%, followed by social media with 61%. Mostly, emails are used in doing businesses because of low cost, quick and two-way communication [11].

IV. Add marketing activities or campaigns so that regular and new customers can take part. When the regular customers meet one another and share experiences, it will lead to word of mouth. This method will implicitly create brand engagement among new and regular customers.

#### IV. DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Marketing or communication has been important in every era and to all kinds of businesses. Nowadays, tourism businesses have become more and more competitive. Due to changes of times, tourism businesses need to adapt themselves and adopt more new marketing communication strategies. That leads today's marketing different from the past, that is to say changing from mass market or selling products to a large group of consumers in the mass market. The target of mass market is to produce a large amount of standardized goods in order to have the lowest production cost and set cheaper selling prices. This method is called Marketing 1.0 or the product-centric era. At present, tourism businesses turn to the information technology marketing and the value-driven marketing, which means tourism businesses use Marketing 2.0 and Marketing 3.0. In term of information technology, entrepreneurs and customers are more informed and more competent. Customers can compare offers of similar products, evaluate and determine values of the products. Entrepreneurs will be interested in needs and wants of customers. Some tourism businesses make more adjustments and this group will not be product-centric and customer-oriented. In contrast, it emphasizes the organizations with missions, visions and values understanding and responding to the highest needs in economy, society and environment to fulfill human spirit [12].

The tactics of tourism business used were consistent with Duncan (2010) [13] which divided the integrated marketing communication tools adaptable to tourism. The tools that could be seen frequently were advertising, direct marketing, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, event marketing and sponsorship, packaging and customer service as follows:

I. Advertising possibly includes printed media (e.g., newspaper and magazines), broadcast media (e.g., radio and television), outdoor media (e.g., billboards, posters, movies and videos) and internet (e.g., websites and banner ads). Assistant Professor Kitda Prarathhajariya [14] found that the communication should show the highlight, preparing the manual for services and giving the information to the information center. Moreover, it should be created both leaflets and a CD of Samut Songkram province.

II. Direct marketing is the marketing communication tool which helps reach specific target groups. The communication tool is not only limited to direct mails. Instead, it is to apply one or more communication tools in combination with expectation of immediate responses from consumers.

III. Public relation is the communication tool used for mutual understanding between organization, consumers and organization's stakeholders. Most organizations will give information through news release and press conference.

IV. Sales promotion is the communication tool for persuading and eliciting consumer responses. There are a variety of communication tools, such as, premiums, specialties, coupons, price reduction, rebates, samples, sweep-stakes, contests and games.

V. Personal selling is the interpersonal communication to convince consumers. Roles of personal selling are different according to business types, types of products or services, and marketing strategies.

VI. Event marketing and sponsorship is the communication tool to create customers' brand involvement through brand experience because the messages will be efficient leading consumers to have positive feeling and recognize brand.

VII. Packaging is the communication tool used for drawing attention to brand and persuading consumers to purchase a product. Packaging can indicate brand, usage and benefits of the product.

VIII. Customer service is the management process of customers' shared experiences towards brand with the aim of consumers getting good experiences and recognizing brand. Customer service includes everything involved taking care of customers of the organization.

Application of online media and social media to respond customers' needs is what the tourism businesses should do as soon as possible. According to the research of Dr. Surapit Promsit, [15] the advisor of Thailand Tourism Reform, the tactics attracting tourists in the new era should be "360 Degree Marketing Communication," that is, the stories are told when people visited at the certain place to create online word of mouth or unimpressive matters are told through reviews.

Dr. Surapit thought the tourists became "identity seekers" and divided time "to learn society" by sharing new experiences, sharing things to the society so as to fulfil their

own “power of life” and “tending to create attractiveness through being designers of routes and services to find destinations in a different way.”

The findings of this research showed that a few of tourism businesses focused on this tactic. Therefore, what the entrepreneurs should review are adopting a new marketing communication tactic and listening to both good and bad feedbacks or reviews through social media. If the entrepreneurs adapt themselves unhurriedly, it will lose business opportunities and not catch up with the social media trend.

#### Research Suggestions

1. To Study participation of tourist pass by review or use social network for search engine

2. To Study social media's influence towards tourism behaviour

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