

Developing a Creative Marketing Ecosystem: An Action Research Framework for Enhancing Creative Tourism in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study developed and validated a creative ecosystem framework for tourism marketing and sales product consumption in emerging economies. Focusing on Thailand's high-potential creative industries, including food, spa, and Muay Thai, the research employed a 15-month mixed-methods approach that combined the Double Diamond design process with action research. The framework systematically integrated supply-side development (positioning, persona, product & service, price) with demand-side stimulation (accessibility, perception, consideration, experience). Working with nine entrepreneurs through iterative interventions and drawing on supportive insights from a wider group of 65 experts, tourists, and stakeholders, the study demonstrated significant impacts. These initiatives included brand development, influencer marketing, and a custom digital platform (ThaiThai), which ultimately led to the engagement of 1,613 high-quality tourists, a revenue increase of 2,245,526฿ across seven entrepreneurs (achieving 2.25 times their first-year targets), and a projected economic impact of 67.37 million ฿ over five years. The framework provides a replicable model for enhancing tourism competitiveness by integrating creative industries.

Keywords: Creative economy; High-quality tourists; Marketing framework; Sustainable tourism development; Thailand; Tourism ecosystem

INTRODUCTION

Thailand's national development plan is aligned with global sustainability initiatives and has directly addressed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in its long-term plan (Manotungvorapun & Gerdtsri, 2025). In this plan, the creative economy (CrEc) is increasingly recognized not just as a cultural sector but as a vital engine for sustainable economic growth (Chaiboonsri, 2024), job creation, and innovation, especially in tourism-oriented economies (Stock & Stock, 2024).

Despite its strategic importance, significant gaps in both academic and practical knowledge persist that need to be addressed. The CrEc, although being remarkably dynamic and interdisciplinary, is often treated at a very high policy level (Gustafsson & Lazzaro, 2021), with few frameworks that organically combine theoretical perspectives and practical commercialization pathways (Dent et al., 2024). Despite the highly heterogeneous nature of the CrEc sectors, ranging from gastronomy to the performing arts, previous academic studies often treat the sector as a monolithic entity. This leads to overlooking specific challenges in how sub-sectors undertake their operations, assess markets, form critical partnerships, and their underlying strategic objectives. As a consequence, findings are often of little use to sustain entrepreneurs (Lee, 2022; Martin & Grodach, 2022). These limitations are even more

pronounced when applied to tourism, as the potential of creative industries to enhance destination attractiveness and attract high-value tourists remains underutilized (Richards, 2021; Suryani, 2024). Thus, there is a pressing demand for implementation-oriented models that go beyond policy recommendations by offering practical valuables for value creation and market access (Montaldo et al., 2023).

To fill these voids, this research seeks to investigate: (1) the development of the integrative CrEc commercialization framework; (2) the framework validation through empirical action research; and (3) the proposal of strategies through the application of a CrEc ecosystem development. Furthermore, this research focuses on three highly creative Thai industries. These are the food/cuisine, spa/wellness, and Muay Thai/martial arts, all pillars in shaping Thailand's soft power (Roongsangjun, 2023). Moreover, these sectors support the ever-increasing demand for authentic, experience travel from the international wellness tourism market (Global Wellness Institute Releases New Data, 2025).

By developing marketing and sales ecosystems that fuse products and services from these sectors with creative design, this research analyzes the behaviors of high-quality tourists to formulate commercial guidelines. It also helps in enhancing the competitiveness and economic value of Thailand's creative tourism offerings, contributing to a more sustainable and high-yield tourism model (Dolnicar & Demeter, 2024; Sigala et al., 2025; Zhichao & Yashu, 2024).

To fill this research gap, this study develops, implements, and validates an integrative framework for the development of the creative tourism ecosystem. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the core components of an effective marketing and sales ecosystem for commercializing creative tourism products in an emerging economy context?

RQ2: How does the implementation of this ecosystem impact entrepreneurial performance, specifically in terms of revenue, tourist engagement, and market reach?

RQ3: What are the key industry-specific adaptations required for applying this framework to the food, spa, and Muay Thai sectors?

To answer these questions, this study employed an action research methodology over 15 months, collaborating with nine entrepreneurs across all three selected industries. The results showed that the framework is effective in adding value to their products, increasing competitiveness, and providing more substantial economic benefits, thereby offering a reproducible framework for the development of creative industries and sustainable tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review synthesizes the literature across four key areas to establish the theoretical foundation and identify the research gap for this study. It begins by examining the role of the CrEc in tourism and identifying the critical implementation gap. It then explores the modern concept of high-quality tourism as the target market, followed by the ecosystem approach that forms our theoretical lens. Ultimately, it situates the study within Thailand's unique creative industries.

The Creative Economy (CrEc) in Tourism: From Policy to Practice

The creative economy (CrEc) has moved away from a niche cultural activity to become a recognized contributor to sustainable economic growth (Arcos-Pumarola et al., 2023). The CrEc has also become a significant global driver for many tourism economies (Gustafsson & Lazzaro, 2021; Pisarović et al., 2025), creating a thriving, strong economy sector that has been embraced as a conduit for innovation capability development, job creation, and the building of cultural soft power (Gustafsson & Lazzaro, 2021; Khunarsa, 2024).

This is reflected in the Thai context, in the form of national policy which made an explicit link between the CrEc sectors such as movie and film (Ainslie, 2025), Thai dance (Praditsilp & Pongsakornrungsilp, 2024), Thai food (Subphonkulanan, 2024), and tourism development with soft power strategy.

Despite this high-level policy acknowledgement, a considerable implementation gap remains between this rhetoric and entrepreneurial performance. While there are now numerous macro-level analyses of the creative sector (Che Arshad & Irijanto, 2023), much scholarly research has been criticized for remaining highly theoretical or conceptual or treating the CrEc as one entire entity (Dent et al., 2024), leaving a dearth of infrastructure in detailed industry-specific frameworks offering entrepreneurs the practical tools of development, marketing, and commercialization they require (Lee, 2022). Indeed, this gap is especially pronounced in the tourism context, where creative assets must be converted into sellable experiences that attract high-yield, discerning tourists (Li & Shaw, 2022; Richards, 2021). This research fills this gap through the development and trial of an integrative framework for creative tourism ecosystem development.

High-Quality Tourism and the Demand for Authentic Experiences

In light of the limitations and challenges of mass tourism, the tourism sector has systematically shifted its attention towards attracting quality tourists – those who bring the most economic value per capita and exhibit greater cultural and environmental sensitivity (Dolnicar & Demeter, 2024; Stone & Stone, 2022). According to the latest literature, this segment is characterized not by a sociodemographic profile, but by what it does and why it does so, as it seeks transformative, authentic experiences that give it meaning and personal fulfillment, as well as a unique link to the local culture (Sigala et al., 2025).

This change is a natural fit for the core offerings of the CrEc, as quality tourists are not simply consumers, but participants who seek to co-create value with a destination by learning, interacting, and immersing themselves within it (Carvalho et al., 2021). They reject 'mass tourism' models of consumption as exemplified by the former 'Niagara Gateway' interpretation of tourism (Sharma et al., 2025). Instead, they seek 'creative tourism' (Richards, 2025), which transcends mere observation and is inherently participatory in nature. They seek hands-on learning experiences with craft makers and wish to cook local foods with restaurateurs, as well as immerse themselves in local traditions. Thus, the core challenges in developing creative tourism products is to have a grounded understanding of the market segment and how this segment's products should be designed. This is the demand side of the creative tourism research framework.

An Ecosystem Approach to Marketing Creative Tourism

To effectively bridge the CrEc supply with high-quality tourist demand, a holistic marketing approach is needed. This study adopts a service ecosystem approach, based on service-dominant logic (Jaakkola et al., 2024), and considers marketing as an emergent process of value co-creation in networks of actors through service exchange and resource integration. This is to be distinguished from the more or less one-way exchange of goods in return for money (or barter).

Traditional, linear marketing models are not well-suited to the complex reality of tourism, where a consumer's journey involves multiple touchpoints and stakeholders (Prayag, 2022). An ecosystem perspective, on the other hand, takes into account the fact that value is co-created based on the integration of resources and the interactions of various stakeholders (i.e., tourists, entrepreneurs, platforms, local communities) (Bachinger et al., 2022; Buhalis et al., 2023). Such a way of thinking implies that supply-side development (e.g., product positioning, storytelling, pricing) and demand-side stimulation (e.g., accessibility, perception management, experience design) need to be performed simultaneously (Kokins et al., 2021). Therefore, our framework operationalizes an ecosystem way of thinking by integrating the supply- and demand-side into one coherent model, addressing RQ1 by identifying the key building blocks (internal factors) of a well-functioning marketing and sales ecosystem.

The Thai Context: Food, Wellness, and Muay Thai as Creative Industries

The three creative tourism industries that reflect Thailand's local creative and cultural assets and showcase them to the world, namely food, wellness, and Muay Thai, tend to be Thailand's competitive advantage in creative tourism (Pookaiyaudom, 2020). The three industries were selected for this research because they are at the core of Thailand's soft power and are priority areas for attracting high-quality tourists.

Food

Thai food is an important form of gastrodiplomacy and a key motivator for travel (Demirag et al., 2025). The industry already leverages the wealth of traditional foodways present in Thailand (Krasae-in et al., 2025). However, it must also move beyond the increasingly ubiquitous restaurant meal, drawing on curated food activities that align better with the current tourism trend toward experiential tourism.

Wellness

Thailand enjoys the high status of being "a global wellness destination," with the wellness sector recording impressive growth (Kukreti et al., 2025). Spa businesses, in particular, rely on traditional Thai medicine and the philosophy of Thai healing (Lee-Anant & Kungwansith, 2025), thereby offering a competitive advantage that rests in authenticity and holistic health (Inta et al., 2025; Kulshreshtha & Michopoulou, 2025).

Muay Thai

As a UNESCO-nominated intangible cultural heritage (Lertcharnrit & Watanasawad, 2023), Muay Thai represents an integration of sport, culture, and discipline. It has evolved from a sport of combat into a significant force in sports and experiential tourism, inspiring many tourists to satisfy their needs for physical fitness, cultural experiences, and personal growth (Dawson, 2024; Jones & Theerawong, 2021). By focusing on these three distinctive yet complementary industries, the research aims to produce nuanced and industry-specific insights (RQ3) while also testing the broader validity of the proposed ecosystem framework.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed a 15-month, mixed-methods action research approach (Ivankova & Johnson, 2022), structured around the Double Diamond design process (Viviani et al., 2024) to ensure a rigorous alternation between divergent exploration and convergent implementation (Figure 1). The model consists of four phases including a discover phase, definition phase, development phase, and delivery phase (Fragou, 2025). The process is iterative, meaning teams can loop back to previous stages with new insights to refine the final product. The research was conducted in two sequential phases.

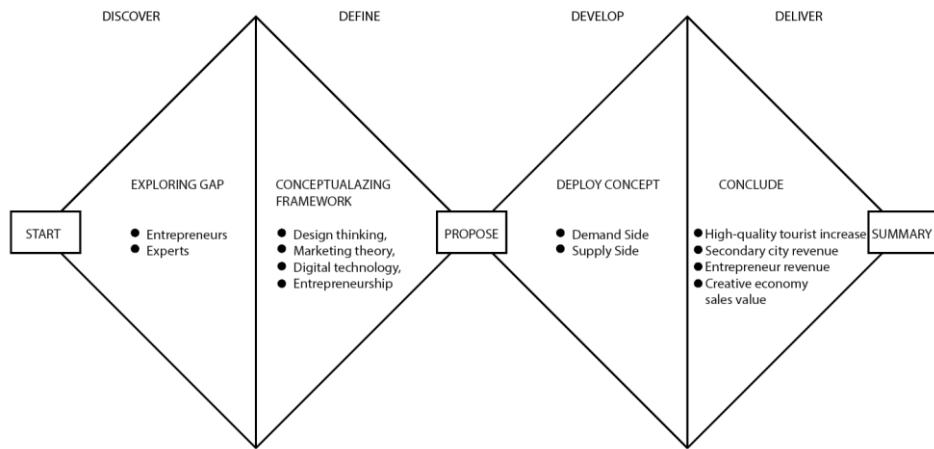


Figure 1. The Research Design using the Double-Diamond Model.

Image source: The Authors

Phase 1: Discovery and Framework Development

The first phase focused on understanding the ecosystem and developing the conceptual framework (Figure 2). Data was collected from 65 participants across key stakeholder groups:

- 10 domain experts in tourism and the CrEc.
- 15 entrepreneurs from relevant sectors.
- 25 high-quality tourists.
- 15 stakeholders from supporting industries.

Methods included semi-structured interviews, content analysis, and a comprehensive literature review. Thematic analysis of this data identified critical gaps and informed the development of the initial Creative Marketing and Sales Ecosystem Framework.

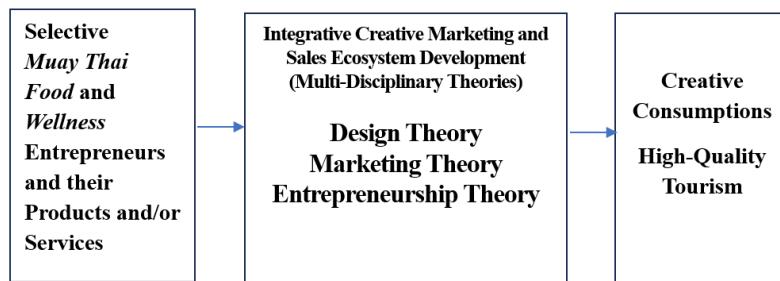


Figure 2. The theoretical framework of the study.

Image source: The Authors

Phase 2: Action Research and Implementation

The second phase translated the framework into practice through action research (Kossinna et al., 2025). From an initial pool of 12 entrepreneurs, a final cohort of nine entrepreneurs was selected based on three readiness criteria: (1) product/service, (2) entrepreneurial capacity, and (3) operational capability. The sample was distributed equally across the three target industries:

- **Food:** Baan Sukultong, Ban Duea Community Enterprise, Honey Rose Herb Garden & Art.
- **Spa:** Baan Sabai Village Resort and Spa, Spa Mantra, Fah Lanna Spa.
- **Muay Thai:** Kiat Song Rit Camp, Kru Arthur Camp, Racha Gym.

The action research involved two iterative sprints of simultaneous intervention:

- **Supply-Side Development:** Collaborative workshops with entrepreneurs to refine branding, product positioning, and service packages.
- **Demand-Side Stimulation:** Targeted marketing actions, including influencer campaigns and the development of the 'ThaiThai' digital platform, to drive consumer engagement and conversion.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research received ethical approval from Chulalongkorn University (Certificate No. 362/66, dated 26 September 2023). Data collection was tailored to each phase of the study.

In Phase 1, qualitative data from interviews and documents were analyzed using thematic analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Goyanes et al., 2025) with NVivo software to develop core themes and the conceptual framework.

In Phase 2, a mixed-methods approach was used. Qualitative data from participatory observation and workshops were analyzed reflexively. These were triangulated with quantitative performance metrics (e.g., revenue, tourist numbers, platform engagement) to measure the commercial impact of the interventions. This methodology ensured both theoretical grounding and the generation of actionable, empirically validated outcomes for the creative tourism ecosystem.

Philosophical Underpinnings and Researcher Positionality

This action research adopts a pragmatic paradigm, which focuses on solving practical problems that yield actionable knowledge through iterative cycles of intervention and reflection (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Participants were selected purposefully, with the nine core entrepreneurs meeting explicit criteria for product, entrepreneurial, and operational readiness. As such, this ensured the researchers' ability to engage meaningfully with, and implement, the framework. As action researchers, we adopted a collaborative role, actively working with entrepreneurs in workshops and development sprints. While the nature of the methodology necessitates our involvement, we aimed to ensure the rigor of the process by systematically triangulating data and maintaining a reflexive journal throughout, to identify potential biases and attempt to account for them.

RESULTS

The results unfolded in two stages corresponding to the study's sequential design. The first stage generated the empirical material that shaped the framework, while the second translated that framework into practice through coordinated interventions with participating entrepreneurs. Presenting the findings in this order clarifies how ecosystem insights were formed before demonstrating the effects of implementation.

Phase 1 Findings: Discovery and Framework Formation

Phase 1's exploratory work captured the perspectives of entrepreneurs, industry experts, quality tourists, and complementary stakeholders. Transcripts of interviews and documentary evidence were analyzed using thematic analysis principles as outlined by Castleberry and Nolen (2018), as employed in recent tourism research (Goyanes et al., 2025). The process identified themes that appeared as recurrent sequences of information, revealing the operational realities of the food, spa, and Muay Thai sectors.

All participants across the three industries addressed their reliance on quality, authenticity, and product service consistency. Food entrepreneurs emphasized their reliance on locally sourced ingredients and place-based narratives that appeal to travelers seeking cultural meaning—a pattern well recognized in the tourism literature on culinary heritage (Timothy & Ron, 2013). Spa operators described a synergy of Thai massage traditions, wellness philosophies, and service diversity, evoking broader strands of the wellness tourism literature that position Thailand as an international leader in holistic health modalities (Lee-Anant & Kungwansith, 2025; Kulshreshtha & Michopoulou, 2025). Muay Thai entrepreneurs referred to certified instruction and culturally embedded training formats, both of which correspond to scholarship that interprets Muay Thai simultaneously as a sport and as cultural performance enfolded in contemporary experiential tourism (Dawson, 2024; Jones & Theerawong, 2021).

Thematic coding highlighted capacity gaps in each of the three selected sectors. Weaknesses included "inconsistent" service standards, a lack of branding, problems in communicating due to language barriers, and a lack of quality certification. This supports a broader theme in CrEc literature on the lack of sector-oriented commercialization tools for small businesses (Dent et al., 2024). Conversely, participants agreed that the sectors were well-positioned for growth due to the national soft-power agenda, which emphasizes culture production, wellness, and culinary identity as strategic sectors of the economy (Ainslie, 2025; Roongsangjun, 2023).

Interviews and survey results with tourists provided a demand-side perspective. The high-quality tourists interviewed consistently highlighted the importance of service quality, perceived benefits, and reliability of the service provider. Indeed, tourists' decision-making was strongly influenced by social media (Liu et al., 2024), images and videos, and reviews (Guo & Pesonen, 2022)—a finding that points to wider changes in tourists' behavior

identified in more recent research (Sigala et al., 2025). Demographically, tourists tended to participate as part of family groups and indicated a willingness to pay between 500–1,000฿ for a creative tourism experience. However, high-income domestic tourists (earning $\geq 75,000$ ฿ monthly) indicated that they would be willing to pay more if the experiences were authentic and the service providers had expertise within the creative field.

Industry differences were also observed. Gastronomy tourists emphasized flavor, ease of access, and environmental indicators, similar to the study by Krasae-in et al. (2025) of the experiential elements sought by prospective gastronomy tourists. Wellness (or spa) tourists prioritized image, reputation, and the reliability of service, as literature on wellness suggests that such travelers place trustworthiness and professional expertise as the primary motivations for wellness tourism (Kukreti et al., 2025). Muay Thai tourists emphasized instruction by professionals and its facility standards. This finding aligns with the market's expectations for the aforementioned qualifications, as well as a depth of knowledge in the discipline and local culture (Lertcharnrit & Watanasawad, 2023).

Together, these findings informed the development of the Creative Marketing and Sales Ecosystem Development Framework (Figure 3), which brings together supply-side development with demand-generation mechanisms, drawing on the ecosystem perspective on tourism that emphasizes interconnected networks of actors and the co-creation of value (Bachinger et al., 2022; Jaakkola et al., 2024). Framework components were therefore drawn directly from the empirical patterns that emerged across participants.

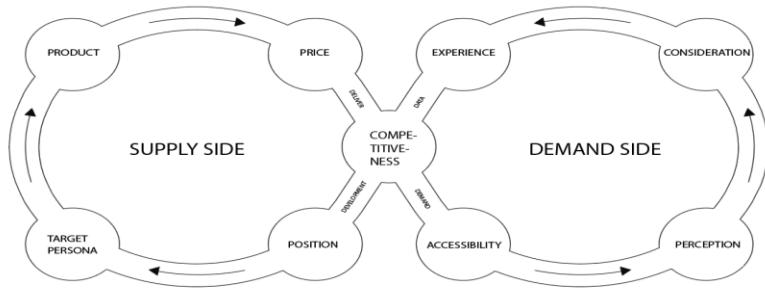


Figure 3. The Creative Marketing and Sales Ecosystem Development.

Image source: The Authors

Phase 2 Findings: Implementation Outcomes

The second phase put the framework into action through focus interventions in branding, product fine-tuning, communication design, and digital channel integration. Working with nine entrepreneurs across the food, spa, and Muay Thai sectors, the interventions were delivered through iterative sprints, short, time-boxed cycles of work aligned with action research principles (Table 1) (Shaughnessy & Goulding, 2021). In this context, a sprint was a focused, time-bound period for developing, implementing, and testing a specific part of the marketing ecosystem, allowing for fast feedback and continuous improvement through real-world learning (Kossinna et al., 2025). Sprint 2 built upon initial feedback to optimize pricing strategies, enhance digital presence through a purpose-built platform (the 'ThaiThai' platform), and improve product-market fit.

Table 1. Phase 2 - Action Research Results.

Sprint	Supply-Side Development	Demand-Side Stimulation	Results
Sprint 1	Developed communication materials for nine entrepreneurs; Created multilingual menus and brochures; Designed brand identity; Enhanced product positioning	Influencer marketing, Creative content storytelling, and Social media advertising	Reach: 852,807; Engagement: 24,817; Purchase inquiries: 540; Target audience: Female, 25-34 years.
Sprint 2	Refined products based on Sprint 1 feedback; Optimized pricing and service packages; Enhanced entrepreneur brand presence; Improved product-market fit	ThaiThai platform development; Targeted advertising campaigns; Curated content articles; Recommendation system; Direct channel integration	Reach: 6,408,481; Engagement: 73,044; Purchase inquiries: 24,550; Website views: 63,559; Target audience: Female, 35-44 years
Overall Impact	7 out of 9 entrepreneurs increased revenue; Highest revenue increase: 808,200 baht (Fah Lanna Spa); Diversified product and service offerings	Generated 1,613 high-quality tourists; Total sales increase: 2,245,526 baht; Performance ratio: 2.25 times above Year 1 target	Research efficiency improved from 4.86 to 10.92; Projected 5-year economic impact: 67,365,780 baht

The supply-side work generated new brand identities, multilingual storytelling materials, content designed around cultural and experiential themes, and revised product–service configurations. These outputs helped clarify value propositions that had previously been implicit. At the same time, the *ThaiThai* platform served as the principal infrastructural tool for demand stimulation. Content dissemination, influencer collaboration, and algorithmic recommendation features enabled the matching of tourist preferences with appropriate experiences, reflecting broader trends in digitally mediated tourism interaction (Buhalis et al., 2023).

The marketing campaigns reached more than 6.4 million individuals, generating 73,044 engagements, 24,550 purchase inquiries, and 63,559 website views. A notable shift occurred in audience demographics, with a dominant segment transitioning from travelers aged 25–34 to those aged 35–44. This movement toward a more mature consumer segment aligns with global patterns, which show that culturally motivated travelers often belong to demographic groups with higher spending capacity and a stronger interest in meaningful experiences (Carvalho et al., 2021; Stone & Stone, 2022).

The commercial outcomes also reflect these audience changes, with seven of the nine entrepreneurs recording revenue increases, totaling 2,245,526 ₩ and a peak increase of 808,200 ₩ for a single enterprise. The interventions attracted 1,613 high-quality tourists, resulting in a performance ratio of 2.25 compared to the target set for the first year. When projected over a five-year horizon, the combined outputs suggest a potential economic impact of 67,365,780 ₩.

Secondary city participation, represented by Baan Duea Community Enterprise in Nong Khai Province (“Local Chef Ban Duea Community,” 2024), generated an additional 76,905 ₩ in sales (Figure 4). Although these early outcomes fall below national secondary-city growth benchmarks, they indicate potential entry points for future clustered development—an approach recommended in the regional development literature (Manotungvorapun & Gerdtsri, 2025).



Figure 4. English Language Baan Duea Resort Marketing Poster.

Image source: The Authors

Industry-Specific Outcomes

Although the interventions shared a common framework, the three participating industries demonstrated distinct responses shaped by their operational character and tourist expectations. The results presented here focus solely on observable outcomes without advancing interpretations, which will be addressed in the Discussion.

Food Sector

Participating restaurants and ingredient providers introduced multilingual storytelling (Jongsuksomsakul, 2024), as well as improved visual content and atmospheric presentation, to highlight local ingredients and cultural elements (Park et al., 2023). Entrepreneurs experienced increased online engagement after these changes, particularly driven by travelers seeking enriched culinary experiences in line with global trends in gastrodiplomacy and heritage cuisine tourism (Demirag et al., 2025; Timothy & Ron, 2013). Observations from the profile analytics over the same time period indicated stronger engagement from the middle-aged female traveler segment, which also used social media as a primary information source (Liu et al., 2024). This is consistent with patterns observed in earlier Phase 1 observations, where the revenues of all food-related entrepreneurs increased. Ultimately, all participating food entrepreneurs consistently reported increases in purchase inquiries and searchability, leading to enhanced market visibility.

Spa Sector

Spa firms innovated and renewed distinctive product/service combinations based on local wellness heritages, encompassing Lanna-style treatments and crafted packages. These developments align effectively with the preferences of wellness tourists for identity-rich, reputation-driven experiences, as documented in recent wellness research (Lee-Anant & Kungwansith, 2025; Kukreti et al., 2025). Spa entrepreneurs recorded some of the highest commercial gains among all firms in the sample, with Fah Lanna Spa achieving the highest revenue gain (808,200฿) among entrepreneurs. Other spas noted stronger consistency in booking strength and a greater proportion of foreign tourists seeking authentic practices. Analytics also showed heightened engagement from South and East Asian markets, reinforcing the sector's cross-cultural appeal.

Muay Thai Sector

Branding interventions in Muay Thai businesses emphasized instructor credentials, training structures, facility standards, and English language marketing elements that tourists had identified as central to their decision-making in Phase 1 (Figure 5). The verification of expertise and portrayal of cultural depth resonated with international audiences familiar with Muay Thai as both a sport and a cultural tradition (Dawson, 2024; Lertcharnrit & Watanasawad, 2023). Engagement data showed a substantial interest in specialized content, particularly introductory training clips and behind-the-scenes footage. Two Muay Thai businesses reported marked increases in inquiries from male travelers aged 35–39, a demographic already associated with motivation patterns in sports tourism. Revenue gains were positive but less pronounced than in the spa sector, reflecting the longer decision-making cycle typical of training-based experiences.



Figure 5. English language Muay Thai marketing posters.

Image source: The Authors

Research Question Findings Alignment

To clarify how the empirical material addresses the study's aims, the following synthesis maps the evidence directly onto the three research questions.

RQ1: Core Components of an Effective Marketing and Sales Ecosystem

Phases 1 and 2 showed that an effective ecosystem comprises two interlocking spheres: supply development and demand stimulation. On the supply side, core components included coherent brand identities, culturally embedded storytelling, product- and service-based enhancement, and pricing schemes corresponding to perceived value. On the demand side, key mechanisms were assessable digital channels, trust-enhancing communication materials, targeted social dissemination, and a platform capable of matching tourist preferences to appropriate offerings. These elements reflect the ecosystem principles more broadly found in recent service-dominant logic research, which emphasizes value co-creation through interconnected actor networks (Bachinger et al., 2022; Jaakkola et al., 2024).

RQ2: Impact on Entrepreneurial Performance

The interventions resulted in measurable economic benefits. The nine entrepreneurs collectively registered a 2,245,526 baht increase in sales, with seven achieving positive revenue growth. Moreover, 1,613 "high-quality tourists" directly engaged with their offerings, with their digital campaigns reaching over 6.4 million people. The performance ratio of 2.25 relative to first-year targets indicates the potential scalability of the framework, with a

projected economic impact of 67,365,780฿ over five years, demonstrating long-term promise. The improvements are consistent with arguments in the creative tourism literature that associate structured product development with enhanced commercial viability (Richards, 2021).

RQ3: Industry-Specific Adaptation Requirements

Across all three sectors, variations of the framework were needed to support the priorities and selling propositions of each industry (Table 2). Food tourism drew strongly on atmospheric cues and culinary heritage, while spa tourism required identity-based design and the articulation of traditional wellness knowledge. Muay Thai requires credible signals and standardized training information. The differences align with long-standing evidence from cultural and CrEc research, which emphasizes the requirements for context-specific commercialization strategies (Krasae-in et al., 2025; Lertcharnrit & Watanasawad, 2023). Although the ecosystem model provided a standard structure, the pathways to enactment varied according to the cultural and operational characteristics of each sector.

Table 2. Creative Actions Implemented Across Food, Spa, and Muay Thai Industries.

Industry	Entrepreneur	Creative Actions Implemented
Food	Baan Sakultong	Developed a 5-language menu (English, Portuguese, French, Japanese, Chinese, Thai); Created storytelling materials explaining dish history and origins; Designed promotional placemats featuring the restaurant logo and menu highlights
Food	Baan Duea Community Enterprise	Developed photo backdrop at welcome area with community story and local heritage; Created gift sets from community products (food and handicraft sets); Developed bilingual online promotional materials (Thai and English).
Food	Honey Rose Herb Garden & Art	Created bilingual brochures about Miang Mitri and herbal compress balls; Developed informational materials about food-related cultural activities; Designed fabric banners for tourist information
Spa	Baan Sabai Village Resort & Spa	Developed online promotional materials showcasing brand identity; Created content highlighting accommodation features, services, activities, and amenities
Spa	Spa Mantra	Updated bilingual promotional materials (Thai and English) for massage training courses and spa services; Developed content emphasizing Thai identity to communicate service value and build trust
Spa	Fah Lanna Spa	Developed Lanna-style aromatic diffuser reeds product set; Created scents representing 8 Northern provinces; Designed distinctive packaging to attract high-quality consumers
Muay Thai	Kiat Song Rit Muay Thai Camp	Created bilingual online promotional materials (Thai and English); Organized content by priority with comprehensive details; Emphasized contact channels on every page to improve camp accessibility
Muay Thai	Kru Arthur Muay Thai Camp	Developed complete brand identity (logo, color palette, typography, visual elements); Created bilingual promotional materials (Thai and English) highlighting instructor credibility and teaching expertise
Muay Thai	Rajadamnern Gym	Developed bilingual promotional materials (Thai and English) showcasing camp facilities; Used high-quality photography displaying atmosphere and activities; Created brochures and certificates emphasizing Thai identity aligned with Muay Thai culture

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contributions and Framework Efficacy

The Creative Ecosystem for Marketing and Sales Framework has shown considerable effectiveness in closing the theory-practice gap in the commercialization of creative tourism. The 2.25x attainment of first-year targets demonstrates the effectiveness of the framework in generating measurable economic impact through the holistic integration of both supply-side development and demand-side stimulation (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). This is an important gap in CrEc literature, which has historically focused more on policy at the expense of practice. The effective performance of the framework is rooted in several interlinked pathways. The bidirectional feedback loops initiated between supply and demand elements fostered a continuous improvement cycle, whereby market memos directly informed the refinement of creative products (Metwaly, 2024). This on-the-fly alignment allowed entrepreneurs to incrementally upgrade their products to more closely meet the expectations of high-quality

tourists, moving beyond the static creative product development processes that underpin traditional tourism-led models of creative tourism (Richards, 2020).

Entrepreneurial Impact and Market Response

The significant entrepreneurial outcomes, including a total revenue increase of 2.246 million ฿ across seven entrepreneurs, illustrate the framework's ability to deliver demonstrable commercial value. The variations in performance across entrepreneurs also offer important insights into implementation. The outsize results achieved by Fah Lanna Spa (808,200 ฿ increase) also suggest that enterprises with relatively superior incumbent brand assets and operational maturity can expect faster returns to the framework. However, community-based businesses, such as Ban Deua, may require longer development cycles to reach an equivalent scale.

The significant audience shift from 25-34 years to 35-44 years old within marketing sprints suggests the efficacy of this framework in attracting mature, higher-yielding tourist markets. This evolution is aligned with the profile of high-quality tourists (those interested in the authenticity of a destination, culture seekers, with increased capacity to spend) (Sigala et al., 2025).

Industry-Specific Value Creation Pathways

Each industry exhibited distinct value creation pathways, indicating varying implementation practices. For example, food industry entrepreneurs have a strong presence in multilingual storytelling and cooking narratives, demonstrating their clear relevance in the creation of gastrodiplomacy value (Kihlgren Grandi, 2023). The intense focus on authentic taste and quality of the atmosphere is an indicator of tourist demand for gastronomic experiences that extend beyond mere consumption (Timothy & Ron, 2013). This finding is significant because it validates and supports the Thai government's long-standing efforts to promote Thai cuisine and culture through its domestic and international 'Thai Select' program (Auapinyakul et al., 2022; Lin & Jiang, 2022; Low, 2021).

In the spa industry, the successful extension into Lanna-style product lines demonstrates the potential for CrEc businesses to develop complementary revenue streams beyond core services (Areewan Klunklin et al., 2021). This product-service integration enhances brand authenticity while creating tangible connections to cultural heritage.

For Muay Thai, the professional branding interventions effectively countered industry-level perception challenges by emphasizing instructor credentials and training quality (Croom, 2022). The high engagement with specialized content confirms that cultural authenticity and professional standards can overcome negative associations when communicated effectively.

Digital Ecosystem Integration and Future Directions

The ThaiThai platform's role as an ecosystem orchestrator proved essential, as it effectively recommended and matched tourist preferences with suitable offerings. The unexpected prominence of South Asian markets in the platform analytics suggests substantial untapped potential beyond traditional Western source markets, indicating new directions for strategic expansion.

The prevalence of family group travel across all industries highlights the need for experience design that accommodates multi-generational participation while maintaining cultural authenticity (Chen & Hsu, 2024). Future research should explore family-oriented creative tourism packages that strike a balance between accessibility and heritage preservation.

While the framework shows strong scalability potential through its canvas tools, the more modest gains in secondary cities indicate the need for clustered development strategies and extended support timelines for regional entrepreneurs. Longitudinal studies tracking entrepreneurial progress beyond the intervention period would provide valuable insights into sustainable growth pathways.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research successfully developed, validated, and implemented a Creative Ecosystem for Marketing and Sales Framework to enhance the commercialization of creative tourism products. The 15-month action research project involved nine entrepreneurs in the food, spa, and Muay Thai industries across Thailand. The results highlighted their ability to engage 1,613 high-quality tourists, produce a 2.246 million ฿ increase in revenue, and exceed first-year targets by 2.25 times.

Our study's main theoretical contribution is its integrative framework for creative tourism, which synthesizes design thinking, marketing theory, and service-dominant logic into a holistic model. By operationalizing dynamic feedback loops between supply-side development efforts and demand-side stimulation efforts, our framework provides a heuristic for the value co-creation ecosystem in tourism settings.

In practical terms, the research delivered actionable tools, such as the ThaiThai platform prototype, which enabled systematic product development and market access for creative entrepreneurs. These resources address critical gaps in small business marketing capabilities while providing replicable models for industry associations and policymakers.

For policy-making, strategic repositioning from volume-based tourism to quality-based development, leveraging cultural authenticity for competitiveness, is suggested. This necessitates investing in developing entrepreneur capabilities, designing balanced quality assurance frameworks, and providing digital infrastructure to connect creative SMEs to international markets.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study demonstrates strong support for the effectiveness of the framework, some limitations should be acknowledged. The 15-month and nine-entrepreneur sample size enabled deeper qualitative involvement in the business model development process, but limits the assessment of long-term sustainability and generalizability of the findings. The provincial locations in Thailand are concentrated in particular conditions that do not fully reflect those in other regions.

- **Broader Validation:** Conducting larger-scale studies across diverse geographical contexts and creative industries (e.g., handicrafts, performing arts) would enhance external validity and enable the statistical testing of success-critical factors.
- **Market adaptation:** The surprising visibility of South Asian tourists in the platform data suggests ample opportunity to explore strategies of cultural adaptation and market-specific value propositions for emerging source markets.
- **Longitudinal Impact:** Research that follows entrepreneurial progress post active intervention phase would offer vital insights into the sustainable growth trajectories and continuity of framework benefits. These research directions enable further refinement of the framework alongside improving their contribution towards sustainable tourism development in CrEc contexts.

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