

Experiential Marketing Strategies for Forest Bathing: In-depth Perspectives from Small and Medium-sized Accommodation Business Entrepreneurs

Wannawanat Nongnuch^{1*}, Wongladda Weerapaiboon² and Thanakrit Sangchoey³

^{1*,2,3}Faculty of Management Science, Silpakorn University, Thailand

(Received: April 27, 2026; Revised: July 19, 2026; Accepted: July 27, 2026)

Abstract

Forest bathing is the mindful immersion in nature using all five senses to achieve deep relaxation and holistic well-being. As this practice gains momentum in Thailand's wellness tourism, research remains focused on its definitions, values, and benefits, leaving a strategic marketing gap for the small and medium-sized accommodation industry. This qualitative study aims to analyze strategic drivers and marketing environmental factors influencing competitive advantage, alongside proposing innovative marketing mix strategies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 16 founders and executives nationwide, analyzed via reflexive thematic analysis. Findings reveal the primary driver as a mission-driven model that redefines nature as a healer over mere scenery. Amidst social pressures, the Synergic Business Resilience Model (SBRM) was synthesized to emphasize community collaboration for stability. Innovation strategies include a Quality Service Innovation Model rebranding the 7Ps by prioritizing Kinship People and Crafted Process. Furthermore, the ECO-RELATE Model fosters spiritual connectivity between humans and ecosystems. These businesses have evolved into Transformative Identity Designers, establishing sustainable differentiation that surpasses competitors in the wellness industry.

Keywords: 1) Forest Bathing 2) Accommodation Business 3) Experiential Marketing 4) Forest Bathing Service Innovation 5) Business Resilience

^{1*} Doctor of Philosophy Program in Tourism, Hotel and Event Management; E-mail: wn.nongnuch@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)

² Department of Exhibition and Events Management

³ Department of Tourism Management



Introduction

In the contemporary era, the global community's heightened focus on holistic wellness led to a significant expansion of the wellness tourism industry (Osawa, et al., 2024, p. 1216). However, modern lifestyles, characterized by technological dependence and the accelerated pace of urban living, have alienated humans from the natural world, giving rise to the phenomenon known as Nature Deficit Disorder (Louv, 2023, p. 297). Consequently, forest bathing (Shinrin-yoku) has emerged as an innovative service for health promotion and preventive healthcare, gaining international popularity supported by substantial empirical evidence (Li, 2022, p. 43; Sauerlender, 2021, p. 9).

In the context of Thailand, despite the governmental push for the Medical Hub strategy and the Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) launch of spiritual marketing initiatives like the Power Spot Travel project (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2021) to attract high-quality niche tourists, a critical observation arises from existing literature. Although the efficacy of forest bathing is widely proven in medical science, tourism management research predominantly focuses on the demand side, exploring the impacts and values perceived by tourists (Ambrose-Oji, 2013, p. 25; Chansawang, et al., 2022, p. 80; Rodtook, et al., 2024, p. 428). This focus has resulted in a significant research gap concerning strategic understanding from the supply side. To bridge this gap, this study aims to 1) analyze strategic drivers and marketing environmental factors influencing the competitive advantages of small

and medium-sized forest bathing accommodation businesses in Thailand and 2) propose innovative service marketing mix strategies and integrated experience management to establish distinctive competitiveness.

This is particularly evident in the accommodation sector, which serves as the primary resource manager and service innovator, ultimately determining the quality and value of the tourism experience (Hasan and Islam, 2020, p. 38). This research, therefore, aims to explore the new paradigm of Thai entrepreneurs who are transitioning from mere accommodation providers to creators of transformative wellness spaces. Drawing upon the concept of the Experience Economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 1), this study analyzes strategic drivers intended to enhance competitiveness moving beyond basic differentiation toward establishing a distinctive presence in the minds of modern consumers seeking authentic holistic wellness.

Literature Review

Based on the literature review, the researcher concludes that forest bathing is an activity that deeply connects humans with nature through immersion in a green environment. This process involves the mindful and conscious use of the five senses to achieve relaxation and enhance both physical and mental well-being.

Within the context of the accommodation business, forest bathing possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it significantly from other forms of outdoor recreation. These differences can be categorized into three pri-

mary dimensions:

Distinction from Hiking and Trekking: Forest bathing focuses on the “Here” rather than the “There” (Clifford, 2021, p. 2). While hiking is classified as an active activity that emphasizes physical goals, distance, or bodily statistics (Phueksuwan, 2016, p. 19), forest bathing within accommodation settings prioritizes grounding, slowing down the pace of life, and lingering mindfully to connect with the atmosphere (Clifford, 2021, p. 2).

Distinction from Forest Spas: Although spas are generally considered passive activities for relaxation, forest bathing in the accommodation sector transcends mere physical pampering. It evolves toward creating cognitive (Think) and relational (Relate) experiences (Schmitt, 1999, p. 60). This involves communicating with the natural environment without religious rituals, focusing instead on meditative immersion to allow nature to act as a healer (Sweet, 2020, p. 66).

The Serious Leisure Perspective: In the context of accommodation businesses, forest bathing is not merely casual leisure or general sightseeing (Stebbins, 2020, p. 13). Instead, it is categorized as a form of leisure requiring high intentionality (Hurd, Anderson and Mainieri, 2021, p. 37). It aims to create life meaning and restore mental balance through a well-designed customer journey, spanning from pre-participation and participation to self-reflection after the activity (Reukapiwat, 2020, p. 16).

Consequently, in studying forest bathing experiential marketing strategies within the accommodation business, the researcher has

integrated key concepts and theories to establish an academic foundation that bridges business management with therapeutic aesthetics, as follows:

2.1 Macro-Marketing Environmental Concept (PESTEL Analysis) Effective strategic direction requires an analysis of the external marketing environment, which businesses cannot control but which significantly impacts their competitive capabilities (Buain, 2024, p. 55; Gursoy, Buttle and Bowie, 2023, p. 255). This is particularly crucial for forest bathing businesses that utilize natural resources as their primary business capital. Consequently, the researcher employed the PESTEL Analysis framework as a tool to analyze six key factors (Chiddee, 2022), consisting of: Political factors related to government policies and political stability; Economic factors affecting profitability and consumer purchasing power; Social factors covering lifestyle changes and evolving values toward holistic wellness (American Marketing Association, 2024); Technological factors influencing information access and innovative service development; Environmental factors, identified as the most critical upstream factor since ecosystem integrity directly determines therapeutic quality; and Legal factors concerning safety standards and land-use regulations (Gursoy, Buttle and Bowie, 2023, p. 255).

2.2 Service Marketing Mix (7Ps) Since the service business possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it from general consumer goods, the researcher applied the service marketing mix framework by Booms and Bitner (1982, p. 35). This framework extends the original 4Ps (Product, Price, Place,



Promotion) by adding three additional core elements of the Extended Marketing Mix to ensure a comprehensive management of service operations. These include: 1) People, referring to the service personnel who interact directly with customers; 2) Process, the procedures and operational methodologies designed to deliver services efficiently; and 3) Physical Evidence, the tangible cues that customers use to evaluate the quality of intangible services. This set of seven tools serves as the operational strategy employed by forest bathing accommodation businesses to systematically respond to needs and create tourist satisfaction.

2.3 Experiential Marketing Concept (5 SEMs): The researcher applied the Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs) framework proposed by Schmitt (1999, p. 63), a theoretical foundation that focuses on creating impressions and memorability through the management of consumer experiences across five key dimensions. These consist of: 1) Sensory Experience (Sense), stimulating the five senses to create aesthetic value and attraction; 2) Affective Experience (Feel), fostering internal moods and emotions that positively influence service perception; 3) Cognitive Experience (Think), encouraging creative thinking processes and shifts in consumer perspectives; 4) Physical Experience (Act), promoting physical engagement and lifestyles that differ from the norm; and 5) Relational Experience (Relate), creating experiences that expand beyond the individual to social relationships and cultural groups. The researcher utilized these five modules as criteria to analyze forest bathing experience

management, aimed at delivering wellness and transformative identity changes to tourists.

To synthesize the conceptual framework, it can be concluded that the macro-environmental analysis serves as a guiding framework for accommodation businesses to appropriately adapt their service marketing mix. These marketing mix elements are subsequently utilized as operational tools to deliver experiential marketing that comprehensively fulfills tourists' needs.

Methods

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research approach using a multiple case study strategy to understand the strategic driving phenomena of forest bathing activities within the highly dynamic context of the accommodation business. The research process emphasized transparency and accountability at every stage, as follows:

3.1 Participant Selection The researcher utilized criterion sampling to select primary informants, ensuring the data reflected the actual conditions of the wellness tourism supply side. The inclusion criteria were: 1) small and medium-sized accommodation establishments providing forest bathing as either a primary product or a supplementary activity; and 2) businesses that had been in operation for at least two years. A total of 16 cases were identified, comprising owners, founders, or senior executives. To ensure professional and formal engagement, official invitation letters were issued by the researcher's affiliated institution to each establishment. Furthermore, this research project was conducted in strict

accordance with ethical standards, having received approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol No. REC 67.0808-111-6115). These cases covered the ecological diversity of Thailand's regions (5 from the North, 6 from the West, 2 from the Central, 2 from the Northeast, and 1 from the East). While the study aimed for nationwide representation, the final selection was restricted to 16 cases that strictly met the inclusion criteria. The current distribution primarily reflects the regions where forest bathing is most established and actively promoted as a strategic wellness

product, notably in the Northern and Western forest corridors. Consequently, cases from the Southern region were not included, as the study focused on areas with a high concentration of entrepreneurs operating within similar ecological and forest resource contexts. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached at the 16th informant, where no new significant themes emerged, ensuring sufficient depth for qualitative conclusions. The detailed profiles of the key informants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Profile of Key Informants Categorized by Region

Region	Code	Position / Title	Gender
Northern Thailand	BB	Founder and Owner	Male
	DD	Founder and Owner	Female
	FF	Founder and Entrepreneur	Female
	II	Founder and Entrepreneur	Male
	NN	Founder and Entrepreneur	Female
	OO	Founder and Entrepreneur	Male
	PP	Founder and Entrepreneur	Male
Central and Western Thailand	CC	Marketing Manager	Female
	EE	Founder and Owner	Female
	GG	Founder and Entrepreneur	Female
	HH	Founder and Entrepreneur	Female
	KK	Center Manager	Male
	MM	Founder and General Manager	Male
Northeastern Thailand	AA	Founder and Owner	Female
	JJ	General Manager	Female
Eastern Thailand	LL	Second-Generation Entrepreneur & General Manager	Male

3.2 Data Collection The researcher employed semi-structured in-depth interviews, developed based on a comprehensive literature review, via online platforms as the primary tool for data collection. The interview

questions focused on strategic drivers, the marketing environment, the service marketing mix (7Ps), and experience management. Furthermore, the researcher examined the physical context and environment of the "For-



est Architecture” by analyzing photographs and multimedia materials provided by the establishments. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the actual physical environment in conjunction with the interview data.

3.3 Data Analysis Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87): 1) familiarizing with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing potential themes; 5) defining and naming themes within a strategic context; and 6) producing the final report to address the research objectives. To clarify the analytical pathway, raw data were coded and theoretically clustered to formulate three empirically grounded models: 1) external environment codes (PESTEL) synthesized the SBRM; 2) operational strategy codes (7Ps) formulated the Quality Service Innovation Model; and 3) tourist activity codes (5 SEMs) developed the ECO-RELATE Model.

3.4 Trustworthiness To ensure the validity and neutrality of the findings, the researcher adhered to the standards established by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 289) through the following procedures:

3.4.1 Data Source Triangulation

Following Denzin (1978, p. 291), findings were validated by comparing data from multiple sources: 1) cross-person checking among 16 informants with diverse business contexts; 2) cross-evidence checking between interview transcripts, business documents, and official social media content; and 3) cross-location checking to confirm the consistency of the

phenomena across different regions of Thailand.

3.4.2 Intra-coder Reliability

To ensure consistency in data interpretation, the researcher used a recoding method. After the initial coding process was completed, a two-week time-lag was implemented before the researcher recoded the same data set. This minimized subjectivity and ensured that the emergent themes were precise and consistent.

3.4.3 Confirmability and Reflexivity

Recognizing the role of the human instrument, the researcher maintained a reflexive journaling practice throughout the process to manage personal biases. Furthermore, an audit trail was systematically documented, linking raw data to final codes and conclusions, ensuring transparency and traceability according to the criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 318).

Results

The reflexive thematic analysis conducted with primary informants, comprising owners and senior executives of 16 accommodation establishments nationwide, reveals that forest bathing accommodation businesses in Thailand exhibit significant spatial clustering in areas with high natural capital. This is particularly evident in the Northern and Western regions, which together account for 81% of all studied establishments. Most business models are driven by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly farmstay and homestay formats (56%), as these structures facilitate close personal interaction and experiential knowledge exchange. These are

followed by resort models, which focus on standardized service excellence and comprehensive amenities. In terms of the business life cycle, forest bathing activities serve as a core strategy for businesses in the emerging stage to establish competitive differentiation, and as a service innovation for pioneers with over 20 years of operation to enhance the value of their existing natural resources. The percentages reported in this section represent the proportion of key informants ($n = 16$) who mentioned each specific theme.

Regarding management, the forest bathing experience in the accommodation sector is meticulously designed to align with the ecological identity of each locale. These range from forest bathing through organic farming in farmstays to sensory-based therapy within the vast conservation forests of resorts. A pivotal commonality identified is the transition from conventional lodging to experiential learning spaces. These spaces integrate mental tranquility with diverse activities such as grounding, walking barefoot, healing art crafts, and deep ecology. This reflects the significant potential of Thailand's forest bathing accommodations to deliver holistic wellness while fostering environmental awareness.

The researcher has summarized the key strategic findings, categorized by research objectives, as follows:

4.1 Analysis of Strategic Drivers and Marketing Environmental Factors (Objective 1)

Based on in-depth interviews to extract factors influencing the competitive capacity of forest bathing accommodation businesses in Thailand, the following key issues were identi-

fied:

4.1.1 Inspiration and Strategic Drivers

The in-depth analysis reveals that the primary drivers of forest bathing accommodation businesses in Thailand are not rooted solely in commercial dimensions. Instead, they function as mission-driven businesses arising from the integration of personal experiences, environmental ideologies, and modern therapeutic sciences. These drivers can be categorized into four key dimensions:

1) Personal Wellness Transformation

This dimension originates from using nature to heal personal health crises and stress, leading to a desire to provide healing spaces through modern modalities such as earthing (balancing electrical charges) and sensory therapy.

2) Ecological Ideology Driven by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Deep Ecology, this perspective views nature as an integral component of a life system that demands respect, rather than merely a consumable resource.

3) Service Innovation and Modern Science: Entrepreneurs aim to elevate existing business standards through international knowledge, particularly the Japanese practice of Shinrin-yoku, to create systematic communication tools backed by scientific evidence.

4) Sustainability and Resilience against Global Crises This dimension responds to Climate Change through low-carbon architecture that humbles itself before nature, aiming to reduce the alienation of modern humans from the natural world.

The pivotal commonality identified across these drivers is the shift in nature's



role from mere scenery to a healer. This shift fosters a balance between human wellness, ecosystem survival, and community resilience. These strategic drivers serve as the foundation for designing unique activities and service processes that define the specific identity of each establishment.

4.1.2 Macro-Environmental Analysis (PESTEL Analysis)

The analysis of external environmental factors affecting forest bathing accommodation businesses in Thailand reveals that Social factors exert the most significant influence (32.06%). Businesses are primarily driven by shifts in urban lifestyles as people confront Nature Deficit Disorder, creating substantial demand for health-restorative activities. This is followed by Political factors (22.90%), reflected through the role of the public sector such as the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) acting as facilitators and providing marketing budget support. Additionally, entrepreneurs utilize national and provincial strategies as strategic compasses to determine business direction.

Regarding Environmental factors (17.56%), these are identified as both primary

capital and uncontrollable crises, specifically issues regarding PM 2.5 dust, droughts, and agricultural chemical pollution from surrounding communities. Meanwhile, Economic factors (16.79%) are driven by creating value added for local products to build immunity against economic slowdowns. In terms of Technological (6.11%) and Legal (4.58%) factors, although their frequency proportions are relatively low, they are considered essential structural factors particularly the demand for professional certification and the management of back-end systems to establish digital safety and consumer trust.

4.1.3 Synergic Business Resilience Model (SBRM)

The researcher synthesized the knowledge gained from responding to external environmental pressures (PESTEL) to propose the Synergic Business Resilience Model (SBRM). This model demonstrates that environmental factors are not merely obstacles but are essential gears that entrepreneurs must harmonize (Synergy) to establish long-term viability and resilience. The interconnections between these factors are detailed in Table 2

Table 2 Analysis of the Interconnections between PESTEL Factors and the Synergic Business Resilience Model (SBRM)

PESTEL Factors	Key Research Findings	SBRM Model Components
S - Social (32.06%)	Community reliance; collaborative networks; local attitudes and mindsets.	The Roots: Social Capital Mobilization
P - Political (22.90%)	Government policies (TAT/ThaiHealth); provincial strategies; professional standards.	The Trunk: Synergizing Growth Policies

PESTEL Factors	Key Research Findings	SBRM Model Components
E - Environmental (17.56%)	PM 2.5 crisis; droughts; agricultural chemicals; forest integrity.	The Roots: Sustainable Resource Guardianship
E - Economic (16.79%)	Value-added production; Sufficiency Economy; niche market selection.	The Canopy: High-Touch Economic Adaptation
T - Technological (6.11%)	Digital Detox; marketing via LINE/FB; back-end systems against fraudulent pages.	The Canopy: Harmonized Tech Adoption
L - Legal (4.58%)	Overlapping land rights; professional standard vacuum; activity center licensing.	The Trunk: High-Standard Credibility Building

Based on the interconnections detailed in the table above, the researcher illus-

trates the SBRM model through the metaphor of a great tree, as shown in Figure 1

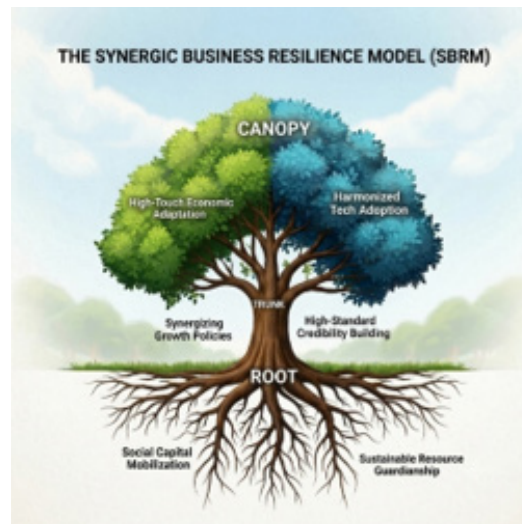


Figure 1 Synergic Business Resilience Model (SBRM)

1) The Roots Representing the origin and energy source that sustains the entire system, encompassing both social capital and the guardianship of natural resources. This component ensures the long-term availability of soil and water for the business. As one entrepreneur noted: “Community issues are the most vital taproot... we must build deep collaboration, helping them realize that a healthy forest is a sustainable source of income.”

2) The Trunk Serving as the driver of stability, linking government policies with the elevation of internal professional standards. Credibility acts as the heartwood, providing structural strength that allows the tree to withstand external friction and storms.

3) The Canopy Constituting the part that interacts with the outside world and reflects revenue growth. This is achieved through High-Touch service refinement and the balanced



adoption of technology to generate economic value from high-quality niche markets.

The SBRM Model demonstrates that true sustainability is achieved only when a business shifts from a reactive stance to a proactive one, fostering deep, flexible interactions and working in synergy with environmental factors to ensure sustainable coexistence of the entire ecosystem.

4.2 Innovative Service Marketing Mix Strategies and Integrated Experience Management (Objective 2)

4.2.1 Innovative Service Marketing

Mix Strategies based on the Quality Service Innovation Model

From the analysis of the Service Marketing Mix (7Ps) in forest bathing accommodation businesses, the researcher identified a significant paradigm shift from traditional marketing toward a Quality Service Innovation Model. Entrepreneurs place the highest strategic importance on People and Process (equally at 20.87%), identifying them as the primary gears for creating depth within the experience. These findings are detailed in Table 3 and Figure 2

Table 3 Summary of Service Marketing Mix (7Ps) Strategies for Forest Bathing Accommodation Businesses in Thailand

Priority Ranking	Original Marketing Factor	Rebranded Strategic Factor	Strategic Essence
1 (Tie) (20.87%)	People	Kinship People	Managed through a kinship-based approach utilizing host authenticity, with the facilitator acting as the central guide into the therapeutic state.
1 (Tie) (20.87%)	Process	Crafted Process	Highly refined and flexible procedures, ranging from initial intention screening to final post-activity sharing sessions.
3 (20.08%)	Physical Evidence	Forest Physical Evidence (Phanasatapat)	Utilizing ecosystem integrity as empirical evidence, integrated with architecture that minimizes environmental disturbance.
4 (14.96%)	Product	Forest Bathing Innovation	Elevating activities into creative workshops, integrated with lodging packages and forest-derived biological products.
5 (9.84%)	Promotion	Trust-Based Promotion	Brand building through authentic experiences and word-of-mouth (WOM), emphasizing scientific knowledge to establish credibility.
6 (7.48%)	Place	Forest Bathing Pathway	Focusing on direct-to-consumer (D2C) access via social media and strategic partnership networks.
7 (5.90%)	Price	Inclusi-Value Pricing	Establishing prices that reflect intrinsic value, balancing business profitability with social accessibility to forest bathing.



Figure 2 Quality Service Innovation Model

The research findings indicate that the most strategically significant factors, tied for first place, are Kinship People and Crafted Process (each at 20.87%). From the data synthesis, the researcher established seven innovative strategies to enhance competitive capability as follows:

1) Kinship People Strategy Focuses on selecting personnel with a genuine passion for nature and managing them through a kinship-based model to deliver authenticity (e.g., Informants BB, DD, FF, HH, LL). The facilitator acts as the central figure in creating a psychologically safe space. “We hire 98% from the local village. We rely on their simplicity, sincerity, and purity to care for guests like siblings... the facilitator is the most crucial element” (Informant GG).

2) Crafted Process Strategy Involves designing refined and flexible procedures (customization), starting from screening intentions to manage expectations and provide emotional support (e.g., Informants AA, GG, JJ, KK). “We don’t accept walk-ins at all... we have a form for guests to fill out regarding their issues, why they want to forest bathe, and what their

intentions are, so we can align with what the tourists truly need” (Informant FF).

3) Forest Physical Evidence Strategy Focuses on creating empirical evidence through Bio-Harmonious Architecture, using the existing ecosystem’s integrity as the primary therapeutic tool (e.g., Informants CC, HH, MM, NN). “Our accommodations are tucked into various areas; trees are never removed. Some trees even pass through the houses... the decor is designed to evoke a tropical rainforest” (Informants LL, OO).

4) Forest Bathing Service Innovation Strategy Transitions accommodation products into creative workshops integrated with healing arts and natural nutrition to create product differentiation (e.g., Informants BB, CC, FF, GG). “We set personalized activities for each individual or group... weaving forest bathing into the experience,” as well as creating value-added products from forest materials, such as therapeutic essential oils (Informants AA, II, JJ).

5) Trust-Based Promotion Strategy Emphasizes brand building through authentic experiences and word-of-mouth (WOM) rather than traditional advertising, utilizing scientific



knowledge to build credibility (e.g., Informants BB, EE, GG, LL, MM). “Customers come almost 100% from referrals... we’ve never spent a single baht on ads,” and “using short video content to clearly explain the health benefits” (Informant DD).

6) Forest Bathing Pathway Strategy Establishes a direct-to-consumer (D2C) approach through friendly social media platforms, coupled with building strategic alliances (e.g., TAT/communities) to guide target groups into the area (e.g., Informants BB, FF, JJ, KK). “Sending 'Happy Monday' images... building relationships to stay in the customer’s heart... reaching out to agencies to create a consistent activity base” (Informants AA, HH, LL).

7) Inclusi-Value Pricing Strategy Determines pricing that reflects unique value and social value (accessibility), utilizing flexible pricing systems to reduce inequality (e.g., Informants BB, FF, HH, JJ). “Since we want to offer this activity to everyone... we aim to improve the quality of life in the tourists' wal-

lets as well, so we don't set high prices,” and “organizing ESG Packages for corporations to use the revenue to support the community” (Informants AA, MM).

4.2.2 Integrated Experience Management Strategy based on the ECO-RELATE Model

Through the lens of the Experiential Marketing framework, the research reveals that forest bathing accommodation entrepreneurs in Thailand place the highest strategic priority on the Relational (Relate) dimension, ranking it first at 24.82%. This finding reflects that the core of this business transcends individual therapy; it is about dissolving the boundaries between humans and the ecosystem (Deep Ecology). These five experiential dimensions do not function in isolation but operate as a synergistic cycle. This integration led to the synthesis of The ECO-RELATE Model: A Framework for Creating Sustainable Forest Bathing Experiences, as detailed in Table 4 and Figure 3.

Table 4 The ECO-RELATE Model: A Framework for Creating Sustainable Forest Bathing Experiences

Levels	Business Component	Experience Dimensions	Strategic Explanation
1. Foundational Level	Sensory and Emotional Hospitality	[Sense] + [Feel]	Creating a state of receptivity by utilizing the natural atmosphere and warm hospitality as the frontline to alleviate stress and prepare guests for deep experiential immersion.
2. Service Transformation Level	Intellectual and Wellness Transformation	[Think] + [Act]	Driving transformation by repurposing the forest into a classroom through educational and hands-on activities, empowering guests with self-care skills and fostering a paradigm Shift.

Levels	Business Component	Experience Dimensions	Strategic Explanation
3. Strategic Value and Ultimate Outcome	Strategic Connectivity and Brand Equity	[Relate]	Achieving sustainable value - the pinnacle where guests connect with themselves, the community, and the world. This results in brand loyalty and the creation of shared value, ensuring stable business growth.



Figure 3 The ECO-RELATE Model for Creating Sustainable Forest Bathing Experiences

The researcher analyzed the detailed components of the ECO-RELATE Model across the five experiential dimensions as follows:

1) Foundational Level (Sensory and Affective Foundations) Entrepreneurs serve as experience designers focusing on stimulating the five senses (Sense - 19.86%). This involves using soundscapes and the scent of phytoncides to slow down busy mental frequencies. This leads to the affective dimension (Feel - 14.89%), which emphasizes relaxation and stress release, preparing the guests for the subsequent stages of the therapeutic process.

2) Service Transformation Level (Cognitive and Behavioral Transformation) This stage transcends conventional relaxation, moving

into the cognitive dimension (Think - 22.70%). It challenges anthropocentric (human-centered) mindsets and shifts toward Deep Ecology. This aligns with the behavioral dimension (Act - 17.73%), where the accommodation space serves as a model for a sustainable society. Through simple yet portable activities such as Digital Detox or natural nutrition guests develop a commitment to permanent lifestyle changes.

3) Strategic Value Core (Connectivity and Pinnacle Value) The relational dimension (Relate - 24.82%) functions as the pinnacle of the experience. It focuses on fostering a new human-nature connection and community engagement through tourism ethics. When



tourists feel part of something greater than themselves, it generates immense emotional and intellectual value, transforming them from visitors into forest guardians. This transformation creates opportunities for long-term loyalty and repeat visits.

In conclusion, the ECO-RELATE Model does not merely focus on providing temporary pleasure. Instead, it creates an experiential ecosystem that transitions recipients toward holistic wellness and sustainable coexistence with nature. This serves as the most powerful competitive differentiation strategy for forest bathing accommodation businesses in Thailand.

Conclusion and Discussion

Based on this study, the discovered models extend existing theories as follows: 1) The Synergic Business Resilience Model (SBRM): Extends the PESTEL framework from a reactive risk-assessment tool into a proactive integration strategy, transforming community pressures into strategic partnerships and leveraging government policies for credibility. 2) The Quality Service Innovation Model (7Ps Rebranding): Reconceptualizes Booms and Bitner's (1982, p. 35) traditional 7Ps by prioritizing 'Kinship People' and 'Crafted Process.' It shifts personnel from mere service providers to intellectual capital who deliver authenticity and transformative wellness experiences. 3) The ECO-RELATE Model: Aligns with Schmitt's (1999, p. 60) 5 SEMs but transcends its focus on short-term sales by elevating the 'Relate' dimension. It merges human-ecosystem boundaries (Deep Ecology) to foster a profound

ecological commitment.

5.1 Conclusion and Discussion of Objective 1: Strategic Drivers and Environmental Factors

The research findings reveal that the primary strategic driver is a mission-driven identity, which emerged from the transformation of personal health crises into a commitment to delivering wellness. Furthermore, social factors were identified as the most influential environmental force (32.06%).

The development of business resilience through social taproots a key finding in the SBRM Model emphasizes deep-level collaboration with the community for forest guardianship. This aligns with the perspective of Chiddee (2022), who asserts that contemporary business operations must integrate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to achieve long-term sustainability. A critical point of discussion is that forest bathing businesses in Thailand do not perceive the local community as competitors; instead, they are viewed as strategic partners who provide the social license and legitimacy required to utilize natural resources effectively.

5.2 Conclusion and Discussion of Objective 2: Service Innovation Strategies and Experience Management

The research found that the competitive advantage of Thai forest bathing businesses stems from the transformation of the marketing mix into a Quality Service Innovation Model and the creation of experiences based on the ECO-RELATE Model, as follows:

5.2.1 Service Marketing Mix Innovation

The paramount importance placed on Kinship

People and Crafted Process supports the research of Widardi, et al. (2020, p. 168), which emphasizes that employees in the accommodation business are not merely service providers but intellectual capital. Kinship-based management facilitates the delivery of authenticity, a distinct advantage of SME accommodations, which modern wellness tourists crave more than conventional, patterned service.

5.2.2 Safety and Wellness Management in the New Normal The implementation of Screening processes and the refusal of walk-in customers to manage expectations aligns with the suggestions of Sweet (2020, p. 66) regarding proactive hygiene and safety management in the new normal. This approach allows customers to perceive professionalism and a high degree of personalized wellness care.

5.2.3 Trust-Based Marketing and Digital Communication The finding that word-of-mouth (WOM) and platforms like Facebook/LINE are more effective than Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) corresponds with the literature by Pourfakhimi, Duncan and Coetzee (2020, p. 638), which emphasizes that the interpersonal and uncommercial nature of eWOM makes it significantly more trusted by consumers than other commercial sources. This indicates that Thai consumers, particularly the elderly who constitute a primary target group, prefer communication centered on interaction and relationship-building via familiar daily platforms rather than complex, automated booking systems.

5.2.4 Spiritual Connectivity The ECO-RELATE Model, which prioritizes the Relational (Relate) dimension as its core, aligns with the

concepts of Matteucci and Filep (2017, p. 16). They propose that the essence of wellness tourism is the dissolution of boundaries between the self and the ecosystem (human-nature connection). By integrating solitude (Wi-Wek) and nature therapy, Thai entrepreneurs elevate the value of the experience from mere physical aesthetics (Esthetic) to profound Relational Value, which is difficult for international competitors to replicate. Providing unique and irreplaceable experiences fosters robust brand loyalty by offering a distinct value proposition unavailable elsewhere in the industry (Jadesadalug and Siriyotin, 2021, p. 204).

To extend the theoretical contribution beyond existing literature, this study highlights significant divergences from conventional frameworks. Unlike Schmitt's traditional experiential marketing (SEMs), which primarily stimulates commercial consumption, the ECO-RELATE Model demonstrates that the 'Relate' dimension is the most prominent driver of competitive advantage. It transcends superficial engagement by fostering a profound spiritual connection and healing among tourists, nature, and society. Furthermore, within the Synergic Business Resilience Model (SBRM), community collaboration functions not merely as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, but as a fundamental survival strategy. By integrating the local community as co-creators, businesses ensure sustainable resource guardianship, transforming local alliances into an irreplaceable competitive advantage that conventional hospitality models cannot easily replicate.



5.3 Practical and Managerial Implications

To effectively implement the SBRM and ECO-RELATE frameworks within the industry, the researcher proposes the following strategic guidelines:

5.3.1 Implications for the Public Sector

The public sector should transition its role from a conventional regulator to a Roots Facilitator. This involves prioritizing the integration of a Social License to Operate in collaboration with local communities. Given that social (32.06%) and environmental (17.56%) factors represent the most critical upstream capital, the government should provide budgetary support focused on preventive care and niche tourism in secondary cities to reduce inequality in wellness access. Furthermore, relevant ministries should expedite the development of Professional Certification for Forest Bathing Facilitators and chemical-free green space standards to close the legal gap and elevate national services to international standards.

5.3.2 Managerial Implications Establishments should systematically adopt the Quality Service Innovation Model, specifically prioritizing the top-tier factors: Kinship People and Crafted Process.

1) Human Resource Development: Focus on training in deep listening and creating psychologically safe spaces rather than just standard service skills. This ensures the delivery of authenticity as a genuine host.

2) Process Design Implement Screening and Reflection procedures based on the ECO-RELATE Model. This shifts the business from being a general lodging provider to a

Transformative Identity Designer, creating a competitive edge that is difficult for rivals to replicate.

3) Marketing Communication Emphasize Trust-Based Promotion via social media (LINE/Facebook) that focuses on individual relationship-building and scientific education rather than engaging in price wars.

Future Research Directions

The researcher proposes that future studies employ quantitative research methods to empirically validate the predictive power and structural relationships between the variables within the ECO-RELATE Model and the seven innovative service dimensions (7Ps Rebranding).

Significantly, the ongoing global and Thai transition toward an aging society presents a vital opportunity to investigate the Active Citizen elderly tourist segment. This group represents a high-potential market characterized by significant travel needs, high purchasing power, and ample leisure time for health-restorative experiences. It is recommended that future academic endeavors build upon the foundational findings of Nongnuch and Jaroenwisan (2023, p. 98) by exploring the motivations and market segmentation of active seniors within the forest bathing context.

Integrating the ECO-RELATE framework with this burgeoning segment would facilitate the refinement of wellness activities and facility standards to better align with the physiological and psychological needs of aging consumers. Potential areas for empirical investigation include examining the impact of these strategies

on perceived deep value, long-stay decisions, and brand loyalty. Such scholarly pursuits will be instrumental in enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the proposed models,

ultimately ensuring their inclusive application in fostering the sustainable development of the wellness tourism industry.

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