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EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF LAMPANG'S HORSE CARRIAGES: A SWOT ANALYSIS FOR ENHANCING CREATIVE TOURISM

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates how to enhance creative tourism in Lampang, Thailand. The research integrates SWOT analysis and the TOWS matrix, using the horse carriage tradition as a case study. A qualitative methodology was employed, incorporating secondary data and fieldwork from May 2024 to October 2024. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus groups, workshops, and participatory observation involving 10 key opinion leaders from diverse stakeholder groups. The SWOT analysis revealed robust historical continuity, significant organisational capacity, and high operational expertise as key internal strengths. Conversely, challenges such as an ageing workforce and the risk of knowledge loss were identified as critical internal weaknesses. In addition, the analysis elucidated a range of external opportunities and threats that further contextualise the strategic environment. These findings contributed to developing a TOWS matrix, which resulted in eight actionable strategic recommendations: Utilising heritage for branding and marketing, educational expansion, enhancing tourist experience through safety and education, maintenance and sustainability initiatives, youth engagement and workforce development, lowering costs for residents, knowledge preservation and documentation, and improving compliance and regulation, respectively. The integrated heritage branding approach demonstrates that aligning traditional cultural assets with modern strategic frameworks facilitates sustainable tourism development. This study contributes to the literature by providing a replicable model for balancing cultural preservation with economic growth in creative tourism.

KEYWORDS: Creative Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Lampang Horse Carriages, SWOT Analysis

Introduction

Creative tourism (CT) is a niche that emphasises visitor engagement through direct interaction with local culture and heritage (Duxbury et al., 2021). CT also focuses on active involvement and co-creation, allowing travellers to gain new skills and form meaningful connections with local heritage instead of passively consuming attractions (Carvalho et al., 2023). The effectiveness of the CT approach model enhances the overall visitor experience, supports sustainable cultural preservation, and boosts economic growth for host communities (Chen et al., 2021). Previous studies in the tourism industry explore the empirical and robust nature of traditional tourism revitalisation in this context through immersive cultural experiences that align with contemporary tourist preferences (Getz & Robinson, 2014).

SWOT analysis systematically examines Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats and is critical in aligning local cultural assets with prevailing market demands (Gürel & Tat, 2017). With unique heritage attributes and addressing infrastructural challenges, SWOT analysis facilitates the development of innovative and sustainable tourism initiatives (Richards, 2018). Strategic planning grounded in community-based knowledge is key to sustainable tourism development. Engaging local stakeholders in decision-making ensures that tourism strategies are tailored to preserve cultural heritage while addressing community needs. Communities can mitigate cultural commodification and environmental degradation with local wisdom and traditional practices in tourism development (Lumbanraja et al., 2025; Surata et al., 2024).

The extant literature focuses on broad-based tourism strategies, often neglecting the incorporation of specific traditional cultural elements within creative tourism frameworks (Olivadese & Dindo, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). The unique role of Lampang's horse carriages, a central aspect of the region's cultural identity, has been largely overlooked in academic discourse (Karapan et al., 2022). Empirical studies that connect traditional practices, such as horse carriage tours, to developing creative tourism strategies remain limited (Hutchison, 2010; Taş Gürsoy, 2020). SWOT analyses possess the potential to reveal best practices for sustainably managing cultural tourism (Mondal, 2017; Navarro-Martínez et al., 2020; Stoica et al., 2022). Integrating SWOT analysis into creative tourism strategies emerges as a critical approach to preserving cultural authenticity and driving sustainable tourism growth (Tajidan et al., 2024). In the context of Lampang, leveraging SWOT analysis could be instrumental in positioning its horse carriage tradition as a cornerstone of the region's creative tourism offerings, thereby generating benefits for local communities and international visitors.

The research aimed at addressing the balance between creative tourism, economic growth, and heritage preservation, applying SWOT and TOWS matrices with qualitative methodology, helps bridge existing gaps. This approach provides a comprehensive view of the tourism landscape, promoting sustainable practices that support economic growth and heritage preservation while ensuring community engagement. This research may contribute to the creative tourism literature by integrating traditional cultural elements into strategic tourism planning. The study advances the field of strategic tourism management through the application of SWOT and TOWS analyses, which facilitate a nuanced balance between cultural preservation and tourism growth. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of community-based tourism in safeguarding heritage while providing valuable insights into sustainable tourism practices. The findings may also yield a comparative analysis of international case studies, contributing to identifying the best practices in tourism development.

Literature

SWOT analysis and TOWS matrix help organisations develop clear, strategic action plans by identifying the best ways to match their internal capabilities with the external environment (Aslan et al., 2012). The TOWS Matrix can significantly impact the **creative economy**, mainly when applied to tourism, cultural, and creative industries. In **creative tourism**, for example, the TOWS Matrix allows destinations to identify how their unique cultural assets, such as historical sites, traditional practices, or local arts, can be utilised to attract niche markets interested in authentic and immersive experiences (Dandage et al., 2019). By pairing the **strengths** of a destination, like its rich cultural heritage, with **external opportunities**, such as growing and attracting niche markets interested in authentic

and immersive experiences; by combining the strengths of a destination, such as its rich cultural heritage, with external opportunities like the increasing global demand for sustainable and creative travel experiences, destinations can develop strategies that enhance their cultural offerings while ensuring economic viability.

The TOWS Matrix is a strategic management tool utilised to evaluate and develop actionable strategies based on the insights derived from a SWOT analysis (Wehrich, 1982). While SWOT emphasises identifying an organisation's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, the TOWS Matrix utilises this information by pairing internal and external factors to generate specific strategies. The TOWS Matrix consists of four quadrants. These insights also assist in crafting targeted marketing strategies that focus on the destination's strengths while addressing potential challenges and weaknesses that amplify their cultural offerings, while ensuring economic viability. These insights also help craft targeted marketing strategies, focusing on the destination's strengths while addressing potential weaknesses, such as limited infrastructure or a lack of modern amenities. Furthermore, in the creative economy, the TOWS Matrix can assist local governments, businesses, and cultural organisations in developing strategies as prototypes that adapt to market trends while protecting and enhancing cultural assets (Karapan et al., 2022).

Transforming the results of a SWOT analysis into a TOWS matrix is a crucial methodological step that turns raw analytical data into actionable strategic recommendations within the broader context of tourism (Oner et al., 2024). This process involves identifying inherent advantages and assessing how these strengths can be leveraged to address external challenges and reduce potential threats. Ultimately, the TOWS-based approach provides a nuanced framework for formulating strategies that support sustainable tourism development (Hekmat, 2023). The actionable strategies derived from this process aim to balance cultural preservation with economic growth, thereby enhancing the creative tourism potential of Lampang's iconic horse carriages.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative methods approach, incorporating secondary data and fieldwork research conducted in Lampang, Thailand, from May 2024 to October 2024. The research focused on using horse carriage tours as a case study for creative tourism. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participatory observation with local stakeholders, residents, and heritage experts. The study's participants are selected based on their active involvement in, knowledge of, and regional tourism and heritage management, with criteria ensuring that only those with relevant experience contribute to the data. The traditional SWOT method provides a foundation for understanding the factors affecting sustainable tourism from the past to the present (Ghazinoory et al., 2011). Building on the SWOT analysis, the TOWS matrix is then used to generate actionable strategies that address the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats with a typified 2x2 framework (Rianawati et al., 2024). The combined use of these tools offers a structured approach to formulating strategic recommendations that can help achieve economic growth and heritage preservation in creative tourism.

Therefore, the Association of Horse Carriage members played a pivotal role, participating in workshops and brainstorming sessions to uncover insights into this traditional practice's cultural and historical dimensions through a designed research methodology. Focus groups were established to ensure a multi-stakeholder perspective. The workshop comprised 10 key opinion leaders, including representatives from the horse carriage sector (n=2), the tourism industry (n=2), government tourist officers (n=2), governance officers (n=2), and researchers specialising in cultural heritage and creative economies (n=2). This study employed a focus group comprising 10 key opinion leaders (KOLs) as the saturated sample for qualitative research. The saturation is achieved when additional data collection yields no new insights, a condition observed during the focus group sessions (Creswell, 2013). This finding from 10 KOLs aligns with focus groups of 10 to 30 participants, which are usually adequate when participants share similar expertise (Guest et al., 2006).

The comprehensive discussion analysis of stakeholder perspectives as a cultural asset introduces the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis to evaluate the current state of the creative economy in Lampang. The SWOT analysis served as the foundation for a subsequent TOWS

Matrix strategy, which was utilised in the concluding phase of the research, enabling the identification of strategic pathways to leverage existing strengths and opportunities while addressing inherent weaknesses and mitigating potential threats (Dandage et al., 2019).

Results

The Historical Evolution of Horse Carriages in Lampang

Chao Boonwat Wongmanit, the ruler of Lampang, introduced the first horse-drawn carriage in Lampang in 1949. This four-wheeled carriage, used as his vehicle, closely resembled the modern horse carriages of Lampang. Initially, it was operated by a hired coachman from Bangkok. Over time, these coachmen built connections with the local Indian community in Hua Wiang, importing additional carriages from Bangkok to serve as passenger vehicles. The popularity of these carriages quickly grew, as transportation options in Lampang were limited at the time. Eventually, the horse carriage industry expanded, employing residents as drivers and encouraging the purchase of more carriages from Bangkok, making the profession widespread.

In 1947, there were 185 horse carriages in Lampang. This prompted carriage owners to propose the establishment of an association, with the assistance of Khun Uthankadi, a well-known lawyer, who drafted its regulations. By 1949, the association was formally recognised as the “Lampang Province Cart Labour Association,” with Khun Uthankadi as its first president and over 300 members. Subsequently, in 1952, the association was renamed the “Lampang Horse Carriage Association,” focusing on supporting its members and promoting the profession.

In 1958, the association gained significant recognition when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, a former Prime Minister, became its patron and provided financial support. By 1964, the association presented a special two-wheeled horse carriage named “Balang Phet” to their Majesties, the King, Queen, and Crown Prince, during their visit to Lampang. This event brought great honour to the association. In 1987, the iconic horse carriage was officially included in Lampang’s provincial slogan as one of its key symbols. Under successive leadership, such as Akarin Pichayakul’s presidency in 1996, the association expanded its activities to include community outreach, youth education, horse health and welfare, and tourism promotion. Initiatives like providing horse insurance, organising horse fairs, and collaborating in provincial events have further cemented the horse carriage’s role in Lampang’s cultural identity. Today, the horse carriage remains a hallmark of Lampang, celebrated as part of its creative economy and a living heritage that reflects the city’s unique cultural and historical legacy. The history of the horse carriage is illustrated in Figure 1.

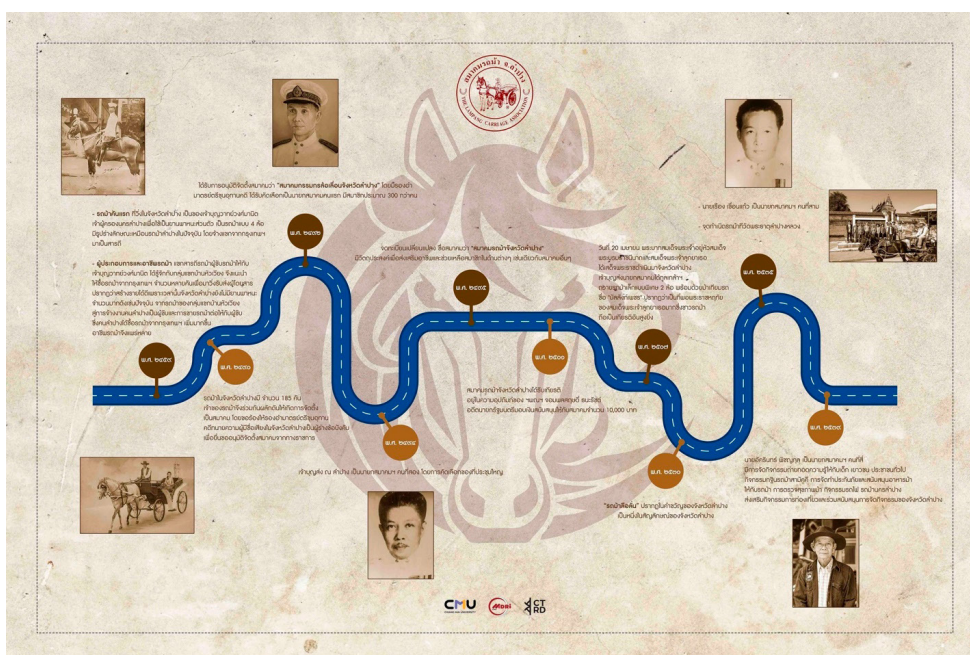


Figure 1. History of Lampang Horse Carriage

SWOT Analysis results

Lampang's horse carriages, the most numerous in Thailand and in service for over 108 years, provide a unique attraction and represent cultural heritage. Analysing their potential and associated costs reveals key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

Table 1. SWOT analysis results

Strength	Weakness
Historical Continuity: The Lampang Horse Carriage Association was established in 1949, marking 75 years of tradition, culture, and activities associated with horse carriages. It maintains an active heritage. Rich Heritage: With over 108 years of history, Lampang remains the only province with a sustained carriage tradition, adding to its tourism appeal. Association and Workforce: Currently, the association comprises 102 carriages and 109 trained drivers. Expertise and Safety: Carriage drivers are well-trained in horse handling and repair skills, ensuring tourist safety and a quality experience. Learning Centers: Lampang offers educational centers about horse carriages for all ages. These centers include the Lampang Horse Carriage Association, Lampang Museum, Pony Camp Farm, and various local stables. Insurance for Safety: Carriages are insured to ensure tourists' safety, enhancing their confidence in touring the city by carriage. Continuous Attraction: Horse carriages operate year-round, contributing to Lampang's tourism and events. Leadership and Management: The association is led by a strong figure, ensuring effective queue management for carriages.	Aging Workforce: Most carriage drivers are elderly and may lack proficiency in modern technology and foreign languages for effective tourist communication. Decline in New Drivers: There is a decreasing interest among younger generations in becoming carriage drivers. High Local Fare: Residents seldom use the carriages due to high fare prices. Risk of Knowledge Loss: Traditional knowledge among drivers is at risk of being lost without proper documentation. Compliance Issues: Some drivers may not adhere strictly to the association's rules and objectives. Traffic Knowledge: Drivers may lack sufficient training in tourist service standards and signaling. Traffic Congestion: Carriages contribute to traffic congestion during peak hours. Horse Health and Hygiene: Maintaining cleanliness and managing waste (urine and feces) to prevent odor and pollution can be challenging.
Opportunity	Threat
Designated Tourist Routes: Marked routes for carriage tours enhance the tourist experience. Support from Stakeholders: Continuous government, private sector, and local community support fuels tourism growth. Coexistence with Modern Traffic: Carriages can travel alongside regular traffic. Economic Contributions: The government and nonprofit organizations provide jobs and income, strengthening Lampang's tourism sector. Educational Collaborations: Institutions produce media to document and improve knowledge about Lampang's horse carriages.	Weather Limitations: Carriages cannot operate during the rainy season, leading to fewer tourists. High Maintenance Costs: Carrying for horses and maintaining carriages are high, including food, health care, insurance, shoeing, and repairs. Standards and Regulation: Government support is needed to upgrade carriage stations to meet safety standards. Legal Issues: The association has faced legal disputes related to carriage management.

According to table 1. The SWOT analysis of Lampang's horse carriage tradition reveals a multifaceted landscape of internal strengths and weaknesses, alongside external opportunities and threats. On the strength side, the Lampang Horse Carriage Association boasts a long historical continuity with 75 years of active heritage and a rich cultural legacy spanning over 108 years. The strength point is supported by a robust organisational structure comprising 102 carriages and 109 trained drivers, high levels of expertise and safety in horse handling, and a network of educational centers and insurance measures that enhance tourist confidence and ensure year-round operational continuity. Conversely, significant weaknesses include an aging workforce with declining interest among younger generations, high local fares that limit resident usage, risks of knowledge loss, compliance issues, inadequate training in traffic management, congestion during peak periods, and challenges in maintaining horse health and hygiene. Externally, opportunities are evident in the establishment of designated tourist routes, sustained support from government and private stakeholders, the feasibility of

coexisting with modern traffic, and collaborative efforts that contribute to economic growth and knowledge dissemination. These prospects, however, are offset by threats such as weather-related operational limitations, high maintenance costs, the need for upgraded standards and regulatory frameworks, and legal disputes concerning carriage management. Collectively, these findings provide a comprehensive foundation for developing strategic, sustainable tourism initiatives that balance cultural preservation with economic development.

TOWS Matrix

After identifying the SWOT, the research team created the TOWS matrix by systematically aligning internal factors with the external environment. This mapping is organised into four strategic quadrants: Strengths-Opportunities, Strengths-Threats, Weaknesses-Opportunities, and Weaknesses-Threats.

Strengths-Opportunities (SO) Strategies

(S01) Leveraging heritage for branding and marketing

This enduring historical continuity can be strategically positioned to develop robust marketing campaigns that target both domestic and international tourists who are increasingly seeking authentic cultural experiences. By highlighting the storied legacy and artisanal craftsmanship inherent in the horse carriage tradition, promotional efforts can underscore the uniqueness of Lampang's cultural offering and differentiate it from more conventional tourism products. Furthermore, developing designated tourist routes incorporating key historical sites and culturally significant landmarks related to the horse carriage tradition can enhance the overall visitor experience. These routes should be designed to ensure optimal safety and comfort while providing a narrative that educates tourists on the historical and cultural importance of the practice. Integrating these elements into a coherent tourism strategy taps into Lampang's deep-rooted heritage and aligns with the global trend toward heritage tourism. By capitalising on these strengths, Lampang can effectively harness the growing demand for culturally immersive experiences, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of its creative tourism sector.

(S02) Educational expansion

The enhanced educational opportunities strategy encompasses the development of interactive programs and learning modules delivered through established cultural centres such as the Lampang Horse Carriage Association, Lampang Museum, and Pony Camp Farm. These initiatives are designed to engage tourists and students in immersive, hands-on experiences that illuminate the rich history and cultural significance of Lampang's horse carriage tradition. The strategy seeks to create dynamic learning environments that foster a deeper appreciation for local heritage by integrating practical demonstrations, guided tours, and workshops into the educational offerings.

Partnership development with local universities and international cultural organisations is critical to this strategy. Such collaborations can facilitate advanced research and innovative media development, generating new scholarly insights into the historical evolution and socio-cultural impact of horse carriages in Lampang. These academic partnerships promote the documentation and dissemination of traditional knowledge and encourage the development of digital archives, educational videos, and interactive online platforms. This comprehensive approach to education will facilitate continuous knowledge exchange, ensuring that emerging generations of scholars and practitioners are well-equipped to sustain and advance the region's cultural legacy. Integrating enhanced educational programs with robust academic collaborations is anticipated to reinforce the industry's sustainability and cultural importance. By cultivating a well-informed community of stakeholders and fostering an environment of continuous learning, this strategy contributes significantly to preserving Lampang's unique heritage while bolstering its creative tourism sector.

Strengths-Threats (ST) Strategies

(ST1) Enhancing tourist experience through safety and education

The focus is on maintaining a well-trained workforce, with drivers receiving additional training in tourism service standards and traffic management to improve communication, foreign language skills, and overall service quality. This approach reduces the risk of an ageing workforce deterring tourists and ensures consistent service quality, even during adverse weather conditions. Furthermore, ongoing professional development equips drivers with the skills to navigate complex traffic scenarios and effectively engage with an international clientele, enhancing the overall tourist experience. The comprehensive training strategy also facilitates intergenerational knowledge transfer, ensuring that traditional practices are preserved and emerging talent is nurtured to sustain the legacy of Lampang's horse carriage tradition. In this way, a focus on a well-trained workforce serves as a cornerstone of sustainable tourism development, balancing the goals of cultural preservation with modern service expectations.

(ST2) Maintenance and sustainability initiatives

Strengthening partnerships with local veterinarians, agricultural experts, and government bodies is vital for creating a sustainable system that ensures the health and hygiene of the horses supporting Lampang's carriage tourism. This collaborative approach entails integrating eco-friendly practices in waste management and horse care, such as adopting sustainable feeding strategies, implementing effective manure management protocols, and utilising environmentally responsible cleaning techniques. By leveraging the leadership of the Horse Carriage Association and establishing enhanced standards and regulatory measures for horse and carriage maintenance, the risks associated with contamination and odours can be significantly minimised. These measures improve animal welfare, bolster public confidence, and encourage ongoing participation in carriage tourism. Moreover, aligning these initiatives with government policies and financial incentives that promote sustainable tourism will further enhance the industry's resilience. Ultimately, drawing on best practices from international case studies and establishing rigorous regulatory frameworks will ensure that Lampang's traditional carriage industry remains both environmentally responsible and economically sustainable, thereby contributing to the long-term success of its creative tourism sector.

Weaknesses-Opportunities (WO) Strategies

(WO1) Youth engagement and workforce development

To address the decline in new drivers, targeted initiatives must be implemented to actively engage younger generations through structured training programs and clearly defined career pathways in tourism and heritage preservation. Collaborative partnerships with local schools, universities, and tourism organisations are essential to generate sustained interest in carriage driving, thereby establishing it as a viable career option within the expanding creative economy. Such initiatives could include developing apprenticeship programs integrating traditional carriage handling techniques with contemporary customer service and technological competencies. Moreover, incorporating digital media and social networking strategies in recruitment may enhance the visibility and appeal of driving carriage among youth. Partnerships with governmental agencies and non-profit organisations could further support these efforts by providing financial incentives, such as scholarships, grants, and subsidised vocational training, and promoting job stability. These strategic interventions are critical for preserving traditional carriage driving practices and their evolution into a dynamic and economically sustainable component of Lampang's cultural tourism industry.

(WO2) Lowering costs for local residents.

Introducing discounted fares for residents is a strategic initiative aimed at increasing the local population's usage of horse carriages by the local population, thereby contributing to the sustained viability of the business. This approach incentivises residents to engage with the traditional carriage service, generating steady revenue and reinforcing the cultural significance of the practice within the community by lowering financial barriers. The purpose can be achieved through robust community

partnerships and targeted government support, both of which recognise the substantial economic contributions of Lampang's tourism sector. Local stakeholders, civic organisations, and governmental bodies can facilitate collaborative efforts to allocate subsidies or other financial mechanisms to maintain affordable fare structures. The horse carriages remain accessible to residents across all socioeconomic strata, promoting inclusivity and fostering a sense of communal ownership of this cultural asset. Therefore, Lampang can enhance local engagement, support economic sustainability, and further integrate traditional practices into the broader framework of sustainable tourism development.

Weaknesses-Threats (WT) Strategies

(WT1) Knowledge preservation and documentation

To mitigate the risk of knowledge loss, it is imperative to prioritise the systematic documentation of traditional practices by establishing a comprehensive digital archive. This archive should capture detailed accounts of traditional carriage handling techniques, horse care protocols, and other culturally significant practices unique to Lampang. Collaborating with universities, cultural institutions, and research centres, these resources should be meticulously compiled, digitised, and disseminated through accessible online platforms. Employing a variety of multimedia formats, such as video demonstrations, oral histories, and interactive modules, will enrich the archival content and enhance its educational value. This approach safeguards indigenous knowledge, facilitates intergenerational transfer, and supports scholarly research. Ultimately, such a strategy ensures that the traditional understanding of Lampang is preserved for future generations, thereby countering the inevitable loss of expertise as the older workforce retires and contributing to the sustained cultural heritage of the region.

(WT2) Improving compliance and regulation.

The proposed strategy seeks to enhance internal compliance by implementing stricter regulatory measures for drivers, particularly concerning safety protocols, behavioural standards, and customer service practices. In addressing persistent legal disputes and the regulatory void at carriage stations, the strategy emphasises collaboration with local governmental authorities to develop and enforce transparent, comprehensive guidelines. These guidelines are designed to regulate the management of carriages, facilitate the enhancement of associated infrastructure, and ensure conformity with internationally recognised safety standards. The strategy is anticipated to cultivate a more professional image of the carriage industry, thereby increasing tourist confidence and mitigating risks related to legal non-compliance and operational deficiencies.

Furthermore, this approach aims to create a stable and predictable regulatory framework that promotes accountability and nurtures a culture of continuous improvement within the sector. Integrating these strong compliance protocols reduces legal vulnerabilities and aligns the industry with global best practices in tourism safety and service quality. Ultimately, by harmonising local operational practices with international standards, the strategy supports the sustainable development of Lampang's cultural tourism industry, ensuring that the unique heritage of its horse carriage tradition is preserved and enhanced for future generations.

Discussion

Heritage for branding and marketing can significantly influence the international tourism industry by enhancing a destination's uniqueness and appeal (Del Barrio-García & Prados-Peña, 2019). The international tourism industry increasingly favours destinations that provide authenticity and cultural immersion. Lampang can build a strong, recognisable brand that appeals to tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds seeking to connect with local traditions and historical significance. The branding strategy encourages word-of-mouth communications, positive reviews, and revisit intentions (Chen & Law, 2016; Phillips et al., 2013; Suo & Huang, 2023), all contributing to long-term tourism growth (Tovmasyan, 2020). Promoting the traditional horse carriage ride as an experience deeply rooted in Lampang's history and community encourages visitors to appreciate the importance of

preserving cultural practices for future generations. This form of heritage tourism not only contributes to economic growth but also supports the local community by creating jobs related to cultural preservation while raising awareness of the environmental impacts of tourism.

Lampang's horse carriages, it is possible to tap into international tourism networks as the power of digital marketing and social media, stories, images, and videos that highlight the unique features of a destination can go viral and attract tourists from various parts of the world (Dewantara et al., 2022; Raji et al., 2024). Heritage-focused branding benefits the tourism industry and encourages collaborative partnerships between public and private sectors, non-governmental organisations, and international cultural institutions (Afren, 2024). These partnerships often result in investments in infrastructure, capacity building, and tourism services that improve the overall tourist experience. For example, international partnerships with museums, universities, and cultural organisations may result in funding, collaborative events, and educational programs, elevating Lampang's profile in the international tourism market. These investments can ensure Lampang's tourism sector's continued growth and sustainability.

The strategic focus on branding and marketing helps Lampang stand out in the crowded international tourism market and nurtures a sustainable, culturally rich, and economically viable tourism industry. The heritage for branding and marketing can significantly impact the international tourism industry by attracting niche markets, strengthening destination identity, promoting sustainability, and fostering global reach. By focusing on unique local traditions, such as Lampang's 75-year horse carriage tradition, destinations can draw tourists seeking cultural immersion and authenticity, a growing segment in the tourism market (Morrison, 2023). This heritage-based branding enables a destination to differentiate itself in the competitive global market, creating a memorable identity that resonates with tourists looking for genuine, culturally rich experiences (Morgan et al., 2011). Additionally, heritage tourism inherently promotes sustainability by encouraging the preservation of local culture while benefiting the local economy. Lampang's focus on its horse carriage tradition can support the community's economic and cultural well-being, ensuring a long-term positive impact (Amloy et al., 2024).

Branding harnesses the capabilities of digital marketing to connect with global audiences (Herhausen et al., 2020; Shankar et al., 2022). The destination can draw international tourists through social media and digital platforms by creating engaging content about Lampang's cultural significance, such as its historic horse carriage rides. This digital engagement broadens the destination's reach, making it more visible and appealing to tourists seeking authentic, off-the-beaten-path experiences. Additionally, heritage branding can promote collaborative partnerships with governments, international cultural organisations, and the private sector, leading to investments in infrastructure and services that enhance the tourist experience. In summary, utilising heritage for branding and marketing offers a comprehensive strategy to bolster international tourism while preserving and celebrating local culture.

Theoretical implication

This study contributes to collaborative tourism development, identified in the SWOT analysis, such as an ageing workforce and environmental risks. Through collaboration, these stakeholders can drive investments in infrastructure and capacity building that improve the tourist experience and ensure the sustainable management of cultural resources. The TOWS matrix suggests leveraging these partnerships to capitalise on opportunities like government support and international tourism demand, ultimately fostering economic growth and artistic preservation.

Practical implication

This study underscores the important advantages of collaborative tourism development and heritage sustainability for Lampang's tourism industry. By promoting partnerships among the public sector, private businesses, and cultural organisations, Lampang can tackle issues like an ageing workforce and reduce environmental risks through better infrastructure and capacity building. Further-

more, by capitalising on Lampang's cultural assets, such as its horse carriage tradition, the city can attract visitors in search of authentic experiences. Enhancing visibility through digital marketing will allow Lampang to stimulate economic growth while safeguarding its cultural heritage. This approach not only generates job opportunities and supports local communities but also ensures sustainable tourism development.

Conclusion

This study underscores the significant potential of enhancing creative tourism in Lampang by strategically integrating historical insights, SWOT analysis, and TOWS matrix methodologies. The historical evolution of Lampang's horse carriage tradition, which dates back over 108 years, reveals a deep-rooted cultural heritage maintained and institutionalised through the efforts of the Lampang Horse Carriage Association. This rich legacy is reflected in the robust organisational structure, extensive expertise in carriage handling, and ongoing community engagement that have positioned the industry as a vital component of Lampang's creative economy. The SWOT analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the internal strengths, historical continuity, a well-trained workforce, and active heritage preservation, as well as weaknesses, including an ageing workforce and knowledge loss risks. Externally, the study identified opportunities, such as designated tourist routes and stakeholder support, as well as threats like weather-related disruptions and high maintenance costs. These findings form the basis for the subsequent TOWS matrix, which systematically translates these insights into actionable strategies. The matrix's proposed interventions, from leveraging heritage for branding and educational expansion to enhancing compliance and regulatory frameworks, offer a balanced approach to sustaining and advancing the industry. The integrated methodological approach employed in this research contributes to the theoretical framework of creative tourism and provides practical strategic recommendations. By aligning cultural preservation with economic growth, the study demonstrates that strategic planning, informed by both historical context and rigorous analytical tools, is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability and global competitiveness of Lampang's unique horse carriage tradition.

Limitations

This qualitative study relied on data from key opinion leaders and self-reported information, which could introduce subjective bias and limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, concentrating on Lampang's horse carriage tradition reduces the relevance of the findings to other areas or tourism contexts. Constraints related to resources and time further limited the data collection process, indicating that future research should include a wider variety of stakeholders and regions to improve the representativeness of the findings.

The research greatly advances learning by providing insights into collaborative tourism development and sustainable heritage tourism, illustrating how cultural preservation aligns with economic growth. By highlighting the importance of cross-sector partnerships and heritage branding, the study enhances the theoretical framework for developing tourism strategies through SWOT and TOWS matrices. These tools offer practical strategies for safeguarding cultural heritage while fostering sustainable tourism.

Future research may build upon this study by investigating the application of collaborative tourism strategies across various regions, particularly those characterised by comparable heritage tourism dynamics. A mixed-methods approach would benefit from encompassing various perspectives and minimising potential biases. Furthermore, subsequent studies could emphasise the significance of digital marketing in enhancing the global visibility of heritage sites and analyse the enduring economic and social impacts of heritage tourism on local communities. Research could also scrutinise how environmental sustainability within heritage tourism can alleviate the challenges of mass tourism and climate change.

Research should focus on how Thailand can adapt strategies to prevent massification, particularly as new trends in digital tourism and social media create more opportunities for vulgarization

such as the TIN model (Think, Integrate, Network) can guide the development of short-term strategies that integrate sustainable tourism practices, heritage preservation, and local development (Remoaldo et al., 2022). These approaches can be implemented globally, especially in regions facing similar challenges in balancing tourism expansion with heritage conservation. Thailand can contribute to addressing the complex dynamics associated with global tourism trends and digitalisation in the 21st century.

The contribution of the authors

Conceptualization, R.K, K.S., S.K., A.T., and T.C.; literature K.S., T.C., P.S., and R.K.; methodology, T.C., R.K., and K.S.; SWOT analysis, R.K, K.S., S.K., A.T., and T.C.; writing, T.C. and R.K.; conclusion and discussion, R.K, K.S., and T.C.

The authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgment

This research was completed with funding from Chiang Mai University; the researcher would like to extend the highest respect and sincere gratitude for this support.

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