



Entertainment Complexes and Tourism Development in Thailand: A Conceptual Framework Based on the Experience Economy Theory

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Abstract

Thailand's tourism industry faces several structural challenges, including low per capita visitor expenditure, severe overcrowding at major attractions, and a high vulnerability to external disruptions. While entertainment complexes have proven effective as strategic instruments for tourism development across various Asian destinations, scholarly understanding remains limited regarding how these facilities can specifically support Thailand's tourism transformation within established theoretical frameworks.

This paper develops a conceptual model that integrates B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore's Experience Economy with J. R. Brent Ritchie and Geoffrey I. Crouch's Destination Competitiveness Framework to explain value-enhancement mechanisms in Thailand's tourism sector. Moving beyond existing studies that primarily emphasize economic impacts or architectural design, the model highlights the critical role of institutional arrangements and policy conditions in enabling the creation of authentic and differentiated tourism experiences.

Drawing on comparative case studies of Marina Bay Sands, Cotai Strip, and Paradise City, the analysis identifies critical success factors and potential risks associated with large-scale entertainment developments. Using a conceptual synthesis approach, the study integrates theoretical insights with empirical evidence drawn from international case studies.

The findings suggest that entertainment complexes can enhance tourism competitiveness when supported by strong governance, alignment with local cultural identity, and effective integration with local economies. The framework contributes to tourism research by contextualizing experience economy principles within the context of large-scale tourism development in emerging Asian markets.

Keywords: *Entertainment Complex, Experience Economy, Tourism Development, Thailand*

1. Introduction

Tourism in Thailand is undergoing significant transformation. Rather than focusing solely on increasing visitor numbers, attention has shifted toward creating meaningful and memorable experiences for tourists. Tourist destinations are no longer relying solely on their natural or scenic attractions to attract visitors. Instead, they are increasingly focusing on designing unique and memorable visitor experiences. In this context, entertainment complexes play an important role in attracting tourists by offering diverse recreational activities, relaxation spaces, social interaction areas, and retail opportunities within a single integrated environment.

Despite growing interest in entertainment complexes as tools for tourism development in Asia, there remains limited conceptual understanding of how these developments can address Thailand's specific tourism challenges within the Experience Economy framework. Most existing tourism research focuses on developed destinations such as Singapore or specialized gaming hubs like Macau, with comparatively less attention given to contexts such as Thailand, where cultural tourism, local economic linkages, and policy governance play critical roles.

This creates a theoretical gap in understanding how entertainment complexes can be effectively applied in the Thai context. In particular, limited research on how these developments can function as "experience platforms" that enhance tourism value and destination competitiveness.

To address this gap, this paper asks: How can entertainment complexes support tourism development in Thailand by creating memorable experiences within the Experience Economy framework, and what



institutional and policy conditions are required for their success? The study proposes a conceptual framework that links entertainment complex development, experience creation, and tourism outcomes within the Thai context.

Thailand remains a highly attractive tourism destination due to its rich cultural heritage and diverse natural landscapes. However, the rapid growth of tourism has also created several structural challenges, including low per capita spending, overcrowding at major attractions, and a high vulnerability to external disruptions. This paper therefore aims to explain how entertainment complexes can enhance Thailand's tourism sector by supporting a transition toward a more value-driven and experience-based approach.

2. Objectives

To examine how entertainment complexes, contribute to tourism development in Thailand by delivering engaging and memorable experiences within the Experience Economy framework.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Entertainment Complex in Tourism

Entertainment complexes are large-scale tourism developments that integrate multiple functions, including accommodation, entertainment venues, retail spaces, convention facilities, and lifestyle attractions within a single location. These developments are often designed as integrated resorts or as part of urban regeneration strategies to enhance a destination's attractiveness and economic performance (Henderson, 2014). By consolidating diverse tourism activities within a single destination, these developments aim to increase visitor length of stay and overall expenditure.

Recent tourism research suggests that entertainment complexes are no longer merely physical infrastructure. For example, studies by Lee and Jung (2022) indicate that modern integrated resorts increasingly utilize digital technologies and hybrid experiences to meet post-pandemic tourist expectations. Similarly, Park, Kim, and Xu (2023) highlight that the quality of experience, rather than the scale of facilities, plays a more significant role in shaping visitor satisfaction. This shifts the role of entertainment complexes from physical attractions to "experience platforms" that facilitate immersive, interactive, and personalized tourism experiences.

Within the Destination Competitiveness Framework, entertainment complexes are considered "created resources," meaning that they are intentionally developed to enhance tourism value, in contrast to natural or cultural attractions (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). They can also function as iconic landmarks while supporting related sectors such as hospitality, events, and business tourism.

However, these developments also present several important challenges. Researchers such as Hall (2011) caution that large tourism developments may not equally benefit local communities. Other studies highlight risks such as economic dependency, social impacts, and governance challenges, particularly in Asian destinations (Henderson, 2014; Siu, Wan, & Dong, 2016).

Recent studies also emphasize the importance of experience design in shaping tourism outcomes. For instance, Ji and Li (2024) identify key elements of an "experience escape," including social interaction, cultural connection, and multisensory engagement. In addition, consumer research indicates that tourism experiences are influenced by social and cultural factors, rather than solely by individual preferences.

Finally, effective governance and policy frameworks play a critical role in ensuring long-term success. Without appropriate planning and regulation frameworks, entertainment complexes may generate only short-term economic benefits. Therefore, these developments should be integrated into broader tourism strategies that balance economic, social, cultural, and environmental objectives.

3.2 Experience Economy

The concept of the experience economy was introduced by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, who argue that economic value has evolved from commodities and goods to services and, ultimately, to experiences. Within this framework, businesses create value by designing memorable and meaningful



experiences that actively engage consumers. They identify four main types of experiences —entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism —which are widely applied in tourism.

Tourism is closely linked to the Experience Economy, as tourists increasingly seek emotional and memorable experiences rather than merely functional services such as transportation or accommodation. These experiences are often co-created through interactions among tourists, service providers, and the destination environment (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Campos et al., 2018). This highlights that tourists are active participants in shaping their own experiences.

Recent research indicates that experience quality is influenced by several factors, including social interaction, cultural connection, and multisensory engagement. For example, Ji and Li (2024) identify key elements of an “experience escape,” including hospitality, cultural proximity, and facility convenience. In addition, digital technologies play an increasingly significant role in shaping tourism experiences. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, smart tourism systems, and real-time services enable the delivery of personalized and interactive experiences (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Gretzel et al., 2020).

However, the Experience Economy has also been subject to critical examination. Scholars such as Miles (2021) argue that experiences may become overly commercialized, with a greater emphasis on consumption than meaningful engagement. Other researchers highlight that tourism experiences are shaped by social and cultural factors, and that not all experiences are equally accessible across different groups (Gladstone & Bellezza, 2025; Bastos & Machado, 2025).

From a sustainability perspective, experience-based tourism can contribute to destination resilience when it incorporates cultural authenticity, community participation, and environmental awareness (Hall, Scott, & Gössling, 2020). This suggests that well-designed experiences can support sustainable, long-term tourism development.

Overall, the Experience Economy provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding how entertainment complexes can create value in tourism. By combining multiple types of experiences within a single location, these developments can function as “experience platforms.” However, their success depends on the extent to which they effectively integrate cultural, social, and technological elements to create meaningful and sustainable experiences.

4. Conceptual Framework for Analyzing Entertainment Complexes

This paper argues that entertainment complexes should not be viewed merely as physical tourism facilities, but rather as strategic platforms for experience creation and tourism value generation. Unlike traditional attractions that focus on a single activity, entertainment complexes integrate multiple functions, including leisure, accommodation, events, and retail, within a single location. This integration enables destinations to offer more diverse experiences, thereby encouraging longer stays and higher levels of tourist expenditure.

However, the contribution of entertainment complexes to tourism development cannot be explained solely by physical infrastructure. Tourism outcomes are also shaped by broader institutional and policy environments, including governance systems, tourism planning processes, and development strategies. As highlighted by J. R. Brent Ritchie and Geoffrey I. Crouch, destination competitiveness depends on the extent to which different elements of a tourism system are effectively coordinated. Therefore, the effectiveness of entertainment complexes depends on the extent to which they are integrated within broader economic, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Drawing on the Experience Economy Framework developed by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, this paper further conceptualizes entertainment complexes as “experience platforms.” These developments go beyond merely providing entertainment by enabling the staging and co-creation of tourism experiences. By integrating entertainment, cultural activities, lifestyle services, and commercial offerings, these developments create more immersive and engaging tourism experiences.

From an analytical perspective, entertainment complexes can be understood through two key dimensions. The first dimension is **tourism infrastructure and activity integration**, which includes



accommodation, entertainment attractions, event spaces, retail areas, and lifestyle services. These elements collectively form the physical and functional foundation for diverse tourism activities.

The second dimension is **experience design**, based on four experiential realms — entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism. When these elements are effectively integrated, they enhance visitor engagement and contribute to the creation of memorable tourism experiences.

Importantly, the creation of tourism experience does not occur automatically. The success of entertainment complexes depends on strong institutional support, including clear regulations frameworks, effective tourism policies, cultural integration, and linkages with local economies. Without effective governance, such developments may fail to deliver sustainable and inclusive benefits.

When supported by appropriate institutional conditions, entertainment complexes can generate positive tourism outcomes, including enhanced visitor experiences, increased tourist expenditure, and longer lengths of stay. In the long term, these developments can also enhance destination competitiveness by diversifying tourism products and strengthening the destination image. Therefore, entertainment complexes can play a significant role not only in tourism growth but also in supporting long-term sustainability and destination resilience.

5. Conceptualizing Entertainment Complexes as Experience Platforms

This study proposes a conceptual framework to explain how entertainment complexes contribute to tourism development through the creation of experiential value. The framework integrates insights from the Experience Economy with destination competitiveness and tourism governance perspectives. Rather than viewing entertainment complexes merely as large-scale infrastructure, this study conceptualizes them as “experience platforms” that enable the creation of diverse and meaningful tourism experiences within a destination.

The framework consists of three interconnected components: tourism infrastructure integration, experience design, and institutional governance.

First, tourism infrastructure integration refers to the physical and functional elements that form the foundation of entertainment complexes. These elements include entertainment facilities, accommodation, meetings and events venues, retail areas, dining options, and lifestyle attractions. By integrating these elements within a single environment, entertainment complexes enable destinations to offer a wide range of activities, thereby encouraging longer lengths of stays and more diverse tourism consumption patterns.

Second, the framework highlights the importance of experience design, based on the Experience Economy proposed by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore. According to this perspective, tourism experiences are created through four key realms —entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism. When these elements are effectively integrated, entertainment complexes can provide immersive and memorable experiences that enhance visitor satisfaction. In this way, these developments function as spaces where experiences are staged and co-created among tourists and service providers.

Third, the framework emphasizes institutional governance, which plays a critical role in shaping the success of entertainment complexes. Tourism development is influenced by policies, regulatory frameworks, cultural integration strategies, and linkages with local economies. As highlighted by J. R. Brent Ritchie and Geoffrey I. Crouch, effective governance ensures that tourism development contributes not only to economic growth but also to sustainability and community well-being.

These three components interact to produce key tourism outcomes. When supported by integrated infrastructure, effective experience design, and strong governance, entertainment complexes can increase tourist expenditure, extend length of stay, and enhance destination image. In addition, diversified tourism experiences can enhance destination resilience by reducing dependence on single attractions and fostering more flexible tourism systems.



Overall, this conceptual framework provides a clear and structured approach to understanding how entertainment complexes can function as strategic tools for tourism development. It highlights that their success depends not only on physical development but also on the effective design of experiences and the institutional conditions that support sustainable tourism development.





Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of Entertainment Complex –Driven Tourism Development

5. International Case Studies

5.1 Singapore: Marina Bay Sands

Marina Bay Sands in Singapore is a prominent example of an entertainment complex that has been used to promote destination identity and competitiveness. The Marina Bay Sands project was designed as a global landmark and is closely aligned with national tourism strategies and urban development plans (Wong, 2017). Its success can be attributed not only to substantial financial investment but also to well-planned experience that aligns with national policy objectives (Henderson, 2014). This case demonstrates how strong policy support and strategic planning can enable an entertainment complex to achieve long-term success.

5.2 Macau: Cotai Strip

A different approach can be observed in Macau, where the city has been transformed into a one-stop tourism destination, primarily through entertainment complexes located in the Cotai Strip area. These developments have significantly increased visitor numbers and tourist expenditure. However, scholars argue that heavy reliance on entertainment-driven development may lead to economic and sustainability risks in the long term (Siu et al., 2016). This case highlights the importance of balancing entertainment-led development with long-term sustainability objectives.

5.3 South Korea: Paradise City

Paradise City in South Korea is a notable example of the application of Experience Economy concepts. This entertainment complex integrates cultural arts and creative tourism to offer unique and high-quality experiences. As a result, it attracts higher-value tourists and expands the market beyond mass tourism (Kim & Kang, 2020). Overall, this case demonstrates how integrating culture and creativity into entertainment complexes can generate more diverse and sustainable tourism experiences.

6. Discussion and Implications of the Conceptual Ideas for Thailand

Through a comprehensive analysis the theory of Experience Economy and international case studies, this paper demonstrates that entertainment complexes can be utilized as a strategic tool for tourism development across multiple key dimensions.

The first dimension relates to experiential dimension. Entertainment complexes can create integrated, one-stop service experiences that meet the needs and expectations of tourists, particularly higher-value market segments. By offering entertainment, accommodation, events, retail, and lifestyle activities within a single environment, these complexes can enhance overall visitor satisfaction.

The second dimension relates to economic performance and competitiveness. Entertainment complex can increase average tourist expenditure, reduce demand fluctuations during low seasons, and enhance the national image as an international tourism destination. However, these positive outcomes can only be achieved if such developments are effectively integrated with national tourism strategies and supported by robust institutional and policy frameworks (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Hall, 2011).

As demonstrated in the cases of Singapore and Macao, entertainment complex can be used as a strategic tool for tourism development when supported by appropriate policy frameworks. At the same time, these cases also reveal potential risks related to long-term sustainability and over-reliance on a limited number of large-scale developments (Siu et al., 2016). This highlights the need for careful planning and balanced tourism development.

In the Thai context, the development of entertainment complexes should focus on creating experiences that reflect local cultural identity and support local entrepreneurs. It is also important to ensure the equitable distribution of economic benefits in order to avoid isolated developments and long-term



sustainability risks. Therefore, lessons from other countries should be applied cautiously and adapted to Thailand's specific socio-economic and institutional conditions.

Although this paper does not present an empirical case study of Thailand, the country is used as a policy-relevant context for discussing the development of entertainment complexes in response to the structural transformation of tourism—from a focus on visitor quantity to value creation and higher-quality tourism experience.

Thailand's situation differs from that of developed countries and global tourism destinations such as Singapore or Macau. While Thailand possesses strong cultural and social capital, it continues to face challenges such as low tourist expenditure, overcrowded destinations, and vulnerability to external tourist expenditure. As discussed in this paper, entertainment complexes in Thailand should not be viewed merely as commercial or entertainment investments. Instead, they should be strategically integrated with national urban and tourism policies and designed to ensure the equitable distribution of economic benefits to local communities.

From this perspective, Thailand can be viewed as a conceptual testing ground for adapting Experience Economy strategies to tourism development, particularly in the context of large-scale projects that require strong governance and regulatory oversight. These conceptual ideas do not propose a universal model applicable to all countries; rather, they emphasize the importance of applying the concept of entertainment complexes in ways that align with Thailand's cultural context, economic structure, and policy framework.

7. References

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