



Ecotourism Mix, Good Practice, and Green Marketing: An Approach Towards the Quality Tourism Business

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Abstract

During the past decades, the literature on tourism marketing contributes the knowledge to large businesses in the tourism industry (e.g. hotels, airlines, restaurants). However, the knowledge on green marketing given to a small business like the tour operators in reducing tourism impacts is limited. In addition, the global trend concerns more on the environmental issues. In particular, there are needs for promoting responsible tourism businesses, ethical conducts and green marketing. This article, therefore, has the objectives to 1) introduce the ecotourism mix contributing to the identification of ecotourism good practice for the tour operators and 2) provide green marketing implications that care the environment. Responsible tour operators and ecotourism tour operators may implement the suggested green marketing to develop or improve their tour conducts in order to be the quality tourism business and the alternatives for travelers.

Keywords: Ecotourism (Niche Tourism/Non Consumptive Tourism), Ecotourism Mix, Good Practice, Green Marketing, Environmental Friendly Product, Tour Operator

Introduction

According to the literature, ecotourism is a nature-based tourism that helps to minimize negative impacts on the nature and socio-cultural environment, educates visitors about nature, provides economic and social benefits to local communities, and supports the protection and conservation of natural and cultural assets (Patterson, 2002; Wearing & Neil, 2009). With these aims, ecotourism can be regarded as the **quality tourism** because it cares the quality of the environment and attempts to minimize the tourism impact (Jarvis, Weeden, & Simcock, 2010). However, due to the complicated concept of ecotourism, many people may basically understand ecotourism through its meaning. Moreover, it seems that there is a mis-understanding of ecotourism concept among the academics and industry practitioners. Some may understand ecotourism merely as nature tourism or adventure tourism while the others may perceive ecotourism as environmental tourism or green tourism. Previous research also indicates that there is a mis-use of ecotourism term for marketing and

business purposes due to the lack of true understanding in ecotourism (Armstrong & Weiler, 2002; Sangpikul, 2011). Today, many tour operators have been using ecotourism term to appeal customers without implementing ecotourism practice (Sangpikul, 2011). In particular, the knowledge to thoroughly understand ecotourism and its practice in the business conduct is less emphasized; resulting in the environment impacts/problems in many nature-based attractions as frequently appeared in the current media (e.g. over crowded tourists, natural resources deterioration)

In addition to the above issues, today the tourism industry is more concerning on the demands of quality tourism such as tourism standard (e.g. hotels, restaurants), responsible tourism, ecotourism and sustainable tourism (Wober, 2002; Matysek & Kriwoken, 2003; Kasim, 2006; Hong, 2009; Sangpikul, 2010; Wong, Wan, & Qi, 2015). In the near future, it can be foreseen and expected that the global tourism would be more competitive on this issue, particularly the increasing of the public demands on the environmental-friendly products or green products (Furqn, Mat Som, &



Hussin, 2010; Hong, 2009; Sangpikul, 2010; Tseng & Kuo, 2013). A review of literature indicates that there is an abundance of marketing related studies in tourism businesses (e.g. airlines, resorts, restaurants). However, the literature on ecotourism marketing or green marketing for the business sector is still limited, particularly for the tour operators (Sangpikul, 2016). Since ecotourism is the quality tourism, the tour operators offering genuine ecotourism products (responsible travel) should be promoted, and being marketed as the choice for the public. Given the overall background, this article therefore has the objectives to 1) introduce the ecotourism mix leading to the ecotourism good practice for the tour operators and 2) provide green marketing that cares the environment by focusing on product implications. This article is an extended paper from Sangpikul (2014) that lacks the discussion of important issues such as good practice and green marketing implications. The contribution of this current article will provide the tour operators with the ecotourism good practice and green marketing implications to run a quality tourism business. It also will generate a better understanding on how to run a responsible travel in the nature-based areas by concentrating on the product development with minimal impact. According to the literature, green marketing (a result of social marketing concept) may refer to the activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy customer needs or wants with minimal impact on the natural environment (Polonsky & Rosenbergeer, 2001). With this regard, green marketing

may incorporate a wide range of activities, including product modification, production process, packaging, as well as advertising (Meler & Ham, 2012; Polonsky & Rosenbergeer, 2001). In this article, the green marketing will focus on product modification/development in relation to ecotourism mix and its good practice. The outline of the paper will be in sequence with the discussion of ecotourism mix, ecotourism good practice, and green marketing implications.

The introduction of ecotourism mix

The beginning of the ecotourism mix was done through the analysis of ecotourism definitions (Sangpikul, 2014). Recognizing the growth and contributions of ecotourism, there are a number of ecotourism definitions defined in numerous ways in related literature due to different stakeholders' points of view (e.g. tourism scholars, environmentalists, government agencies, business sector). Despite various ecotourism definitions, little effort has been made on analyzing its elements to yield a thoroughly understanding of ecotourism dimensions and its scope. Without the understanding of ecotourism elements, this may challenge us when discussing about ecotourism (e.g. what makes up ecotourism, what is a scope or boundary of ecotourism). In order to understand the definitions of ecotourism and its elements, selected ecotourism definitions from the literature were reviewed as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Selected ecotourism definitions

Sources	Ecotourism definitions and descriptions
Kutay (1989, p. 30)	Ecotourism is a model of development in which natural areas are planned as part of the tourism base and biological resources are clearly linked to social economic sectors.
Boo (1991, p. 4)	Ecotourism is a nature tourism that contributes to conservation, through generating funds for protected areas, creating employment opportunities for local communities, and offering environmental education.
Sirakaya, Sasidharan, & Sonmez (1999, p. 171)	Ecotourism is a new form of non-consumptive, educational and romantic tourism to relatively undisturbed and under-visited areas of immense natural beauty and cultural and historical importance for the purpose of understanding and appreciating the natural and socio-cultural history of the host destination. Ecotourism is expected to result in minimal negative impacts on the environment, while protecting and conserving the environment including its socio-culture.

**Table 1** (Cont.)

Sources	Ecotourism definitions and descriptions
Blamey (2001, p. 15)	Ecotourism is nature-based, environmentally educated, and sustainable managed in terms of natural and cultural environment.
Martha (2008, p. 217)	Ecotourism is a form of responsible travel to natural attractions with the aims to appreciate and conserve the natural environment, as well as improves the welfare of local people.

According to Table 1, there are several ecotourism definitions that several scholars have attempted to define it in order to suit their needs and disciplines (e.g. environment, tourism, social science). The reasons behind this phenomenon could be explained as follows. **Firstly**, there is a variety of different perspectives and criteria used to distinguish ecotourism including the motivations for initiating ecotourism (e.g. conservation strategy or environmental education), the motivations of users/authors, and the scale of ecotourism development (e.g. focusing environmental or social or economic dimension) (Fennell, 2001). **Secondly**, it could be possible that the aim of ecotourism in each country (or society) can vary from one to another. This might be because ecotourism takes place in many varied environmental, social, economic, cultural and politic contexts depending on each country (Fennell, 2001; Sangpikul, 2008). With these reasons, the focus/meaning of ecotourism in each country could be different. **Thirdly**, ecotourism has been defined in numerous ways or other related fields by various authors such as academics,

government sector or industry practitioners (Blamey, 2001; Fennell, 2001). Thus, its definitions may be more likely to be philosophical, ethical, environmental, sustainable or even tourism-oriented depending on authors' focus (Fennell, 2001). Consequently, this phenomenon **challenges** tourism scholars in several ways. For instance, which definitions should we base on?, what are the key elements of ecotourism?, what are the scope of ecotourism?. With these challenges, it raises a question for us to further identify what is the **common ground** or **key element of ecotourism**. One possible way is to review the above definitions (Table 1) and identify them into common elements as shown in Table 2.

An Identification of Ecotourism Mix

Table 2 presents the identification of ecotourism elements or **ecotourism mix** based on the definitions from Table 1 Various ecotourism definitions are *content analyzed* and *identified* into core elements of ecotourism.

Table 2 The identification of ecotourism mix based on its definitions

Sources of definitions (by authors)	Nature element	Education element	Conservation element	Impact element	Community element
Kutay (1989)	✓	-	✓	-	✓
Boo (1991)	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Sirakaya, Sasidharan, & Sonmez (1999)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blamey (2001)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Martha (2008)	✓	-	✓	-	✓

According to Table 2, it shows that the definitions of ecotourism, defined by various sources, can be viewed from a *narrow* to a *broader scope* with the minimum of **3 elements** (less-structured ecotourism) up to the

maximum of **5 elements** (full-structured ecotourism). Each of them is *essential* to the overall success of ecotourism development. At this point, the identification of ecotourism elements suggests that ecotourism is



different from other forms of tourism because there are various components to make up ecotourism in order to make it *sustainable*. According to Table 2, the five elements are identified, namely, 1) nature element 2) education element 3) conservation element 4) impact element and 5) community element. In details, if we analyze the contribution of each element to the sustainability, it can be argued that the number of the elements affects the degree of sustainability. That is *the more elements of ecotourism, the more likely it would be sustainably managed*. This is because the five elements will constitute the full development rather than three or four elements. Therefore, the elements of ecotourism identified in Table 2 can well reflect the level of sustainability outcomes with the following five elements (ecotourism mix): nature, education, conservation, impact, and community elements. Next part will be the discussion of each ecotourism mix.

Discussion of Ecotourism Mix

1. Nature element: This is the first and the most important element of ecotourism. Without the nature element, ecotourism cannot occur. Generally, it is widely accepted that ecotourism is a form of nature tourism. Ecotourism, therefore, uses natural resources as the major component. According to Table 1, it seems that all authors define ecotourism in relation to natural areas, ecosystem, undisturbed or undeveloped areas. These areas implies something about the nature, particularly, the undisturbed/uncontaminated natural areas. This is because the focus of ecotourism is concerned with the quality of the natural environment and the exposure to an entire ecosystem for learning component (Esparon, Gyuris, & Stoeckl, 2014; Sirakaya, Sasidharan, & Sonmez, 1999; Weaver, 2001). In general, natural areas that ecotourism occur may include national parks or relatively undisturbed areas, protected areas, wetlands, coastal and marine areas, wildlife reserves, and other areas of protected flora, fauna, and habitats (Fennell, 2003). Besides the physical environment, it is argued

that travelers' enjoyment and appreciation of the nature such as wildlife, plants, landscape, and scenery are the supplements of the nature element. As ecotourism is based on the natural environment, it involves with a wide range of nature-based activities. There are a great number of nature-based activities that relate to ecotourism such as seeing wildlife, bird watching hiking, climbing, trekking, nature education/walk, canoeing, sea kayaking, scuba or snorkel diving, cave exploring, etc. In reviewing the literature (Weaver, 2001), the activities that can affect the degree of ecotourism can be divided into 3 groups: *consumptive*, *non-consumptive* and *low consumptive activities*. The **non-consumptive activities** are those in which the organism is not affected by human interaction such as animal watching, nature photography, nature/outdoor education, and nature observation. On the opposite side, **consumptive activities** are the activities that impose certain purposefully intended impacts on the organism such as hunting or fishing. The consumptive activities are usually not recognized as eco-activities (Diamantis, 1999). As for the **low consumptive activities**, they are those activities that the organism is not affected by human interaction but, in some ways, the activities may unintentionally impose some or little impacts on the environment such as mountain hiking/climbing/biking, nature trekking, canoeing/kayaking, scuba/snorkel diving. Following ecotourism principles, low and non-consumptive activities may be provided for tourists to experience ecotourism and natural appreciation.

Besides the natural attractions, many scholars have recognized the importance of culture or associated cultural attractions (e.g. indigenous people, archeological sites) in the areas visited as a part of natural element (Blamey, 2001; Weaver, 2005). Some advocated that ecotourism is based on natural attractions that might incorporate cultural heritage component (Blamey, 2001; Weaver, 2005). They suggested that ecotourism is not only about natural history and protected areas but also about the people (and its culture) who live and have lived in these places (Diamantis, 1999; Blamey, 2001;



Weaver, 2005). Due to this fact, the cultural component associated with a particular natural area may be added to the ecotourism experience. Based on the literature, the ecotourism good practice from the nature element may be summarized as follows:

- a visit to undisturbed/uncontaminated natural areas
- providing nature appreciation/activities through low or non-consumptive activity
- a visit to cultural attraction or community in the area as

2. Education element: In general, learning about the nature is a **primary** concern of ecotourism (Blamey, 2001; Cheung & Fok, 2014; Fennell, 2003). This argument seems to fit with what has been presented in Table 1. According to the literature, learning about the nature **forms** the basis of the ecotourism experience (Diamantis, 1999; Weaver, 2001). Through the learning, it can provide travelers a better understanding and respect for the natural and cultural environment of the destination area, and thereby reduce inappropriate behaviors and negative impacts (Weaver, 2001). With a minimal impact, the quality and the nature of ecotourism destination can be maintained.

Education element is a broad and subjective term, it may involve nature education, environmental learning, nature interpretation or appreciation about the natural attractions and wildlife (Weaver, 2001; Armstrong & Weiler, 2002). However, the degree of nature learning of an individual could be varied depending on low-to-high motivations and interests (Weaver, 2001). Some authors (Wight, 1993; Diamantis, 1999) argued that ecotourism should not only provide education to travelers but also to other related stakeholders (i.e. state agencies/park authorities, non-government organizations, business, and local community) to foster nature respect and sustainable use of natural resources. Another scholar, Weaver (2001) pointed out an interesting issue regarding nature education. He cited that the emphasis of ecotourism should be on the study and/or appreciation

of the resources rather than using the resources as a venue for other activities as in white-water rafting or sunbathing on the beach. This suggests that, in ecotourism frame, travelers visit ecotourism destinations to learn or appreciate the nature, while in the mass tourism, people use the destinations for tourism activities. One important method to support learning experience is through a nature interpretation (Armstrong & Weiler, 2002; Weaver, 2001). Following Armstrong and Weiler (2002), the nature interpretation is an educational activity that promotes learning and understanding between the natural environment and the visitors by delivering messages or explanation about something. In a simple word, interpretation is to make something easier to understand. It is expected that effective nature interpretation (performed by a tour guide) will encourage appropriate behaviors of visitors and responsible travel that minimizes the negative impacts of visitation (Diamantis, 1999; Weaver, 2001). Following the literature, the ecotourism good practice drawn from the education element may be summarized as follows:

- providing natural/environmental learning
- promoting/creating natural appreciation, awareness, and respect for natural environment
- fostering nature interpretation

3. Conservation element: Some scholars advocated that conservation is regarded as another primary concern of ecotourism (Diamantis, 1999; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1997). The reason may be explained in this way. According to Matysek and Kriwoken (2003), ecotourism is different from nature tourism in that ecotourism focuses on the quality of the natural environment such as well-preserved or protected natural areas and wildlife habitat. When concerning the quality of ecotourism destinations, there is no doubt that it should be directly involved with the conservation of those resources (Wall, 1994 as cited in Diamantis, 1999). This is because conservation will help maintain, protect and enhance the quality of the ecotourism destinations



from misconducts and inappropriate behaviors of related stakeholders (e.g. travelers, tourism operators, and local people). Several scholars claimed that to be qualified as the ecotourism destinations, conservation is needed to protect the natural environment and the resources of the areas (Tourism Authority of Thailand 1997; Diamantis, 1999). Following the literature, it can be referred that the conservation of resources should be undertaken in the ecotourism destinations or the areas being visited (Valentine, 1993; Wearing & Neil, 2009).

When considering the word 'conservation', it seems to be a broad term encompassing different approaches of conserving and protecting natural resources. To simplify this, according to the literature (Smith & Wishnie, 2000 as cited in Fennell, 2008), conservation may include something like the protection, maintenance, management, sustainable use, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment as well as it may cover the prevention of resource depletion, species extirpation or habitat degradation. Furthermore, conservation also covers that resources should be used, managed, and protected so that they will not be degraded and unnecessarily wasted and will be available to present and future generations (Wearing & Neil, 2009). It is also interesting to note that physical assistance (e.g. volunteers), financial or other assistances (e.g. research, donation, sponsorship) that positively contribute to the conservation of the ecotourism areas may be included as a form of conservation (Chester & Crabtree, 2002). Based on the literature, the ecotourism good practice from the conservation element may include:

- wildlife and/or plant conservation
- maintenance and/or enhancement of ecosystems and natural environment
- incorporation and/or implementation of preservation/conservation into business' plans
- providing physical, financial or other assistance in conservation projects

4. Impact element: In order to support the conservation, the impact element should be involved in

order to reduce the negative impacts from visitors' behaviors and tour operations (Haysmith, 1995 as cited in Diamantis, 1999). Hetzer (1997 as cited in Fennell, 2003) identified that responsible tourism is needed to have four fundamental pillars, one of them is the minimum impacts to the environment and host community; suggesting the role of impact consideration. Other scholars have advocated the role of impact toward ecotourism in several perspectives. Ziffer (1989), for example, addressed that ecotourism is not only concerned with the well-being of natural resources conservation and local economy, but is also involved with maintaining a minimum impact on the resources base. Whilst Figgis (1993 as cited in Diamantis, 1999) pointed out that when visiting ecotourism destinations, damage and deterioration of the environment should be avoided. Interestingly, Wallace and Pierce (1996) argued that impact consideration is one of the principles that qualify as true ecotourism.

When discussing about the impact, it often refers to "*personal impact*" resulting from "*tourists*". Thus, the tourists play an important role toward the degree of making impacts to the environment or the areas visited. According to Swarbrooke (1998), sustainable tourism (including ecotourism) cannot be achieved by regulating or lecturing tourists. Instead, it should be developed in a form which gives tourists a "feel good experience" reflecting from social and environmental values. This suggests that tourists should be motivated to feel "willing" or "cooperative" to reduce their personal impacts to the environment. Swarbrooke further suggested that tourists have their basic responsibilities in tourism or when traveling such as the responsibilities for obeying local laws and regulations, not deliberately harming the local physical environment, minimizing the use of scarce local resources, and protecting the natural wildlife and environment. Therefore, the concern of impact could be regarded as the part of tourists' responsibilities. When visiting ecotourism destination, Weaver (2001) noted that ecotourism should be coherent with the notion of



sustainable tourism by adhering to the *carrying capacity* of the destination. Another view to reduce the personal impact is to take a small group of people with a minimum impact on the physical, social and cultural environment (Wearing & Neil, 2009). The small group of travelers generally generates less impact than a larger group. According to the literature review, the ecotourism good practice from the impact element may be as follows:

- maintaining low/minimal impacts to the environment
- consideration of area's carrying capacity
- consideration of tourists' activities
- consideration of small group of visitors
- avoiding the damage and deterioration of the area being visited

5. Community element: One of the essential elements of ecotourism is the improvement of local community. Generally, it can be referred that ecotourism should involve the local community as a key player in the sustainable development. There are several reasons behind this. For instance, when local people in a particular area have a better quality of life generated by ecotourism activities (e.g. tourists' spending, local employment), it is expected that they would view ecotourism as an important asset that should be taken care of and protected as well as may generate a feeling of ownership of the areas (their community). In such belief, local people would take an active role to participate in ecotourism related-activities. As long as they take a good care of their areas including natural and cultural attractions, this would be regarded as the key factor contributing to the success of ecotourism development in the long term.

In order to get the local people involved with ecotourism, we need to sustainably develop them in terms of economic, social, and environment dimensions. According to the literature, **local community refers to local people or residents who live in or close to ecotourism destination where ecotourism is based on** (Buckley, 1994; Sangpikul, 2014). Thus, the

development of local community should be aimed at those residents living in that area (or nearby). Now we will explain how ecotourism relates to the local community. The relationship may be explained in several ways. Firstly, the *economic and environmental dimensions*, according to the literature, some scholars argue that the involvement of local community in ecotourism is important because the local people play an important role in protecting and conserving natural resources in their areas (Snyman, 2014; Weaver, 1999). Following a United Nations report, local people are likely to protect natural resources when they receive some benefits from tourism (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). Similarly, the Biodiversity Conservation Network reported that if local communities receive sufficient benefits from an enterprise (e.g. tour companies) that depends on biodiversity in the natural surroundings, then they will act to protect that biodiversity (eco-destinations). Furthermore, ecotourism income can minimize dependence on certain activities that exploit natural resources such as commercial agriculture, logging, and hunting (Langholz, 1999; Snyman, 2014). The study of Stronza and Gordillo (2008) may support the above argument in that ecotourism can prevent local residents from exploiting natural resources. According to Stronza and Gordillo's study in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, the study reported that ecotourism was a catalyst for positive changes in the communities. For example, it revealed that former hunters now change the jobs to be birding and wildlife guides, fishermen now do a living by driving tour boats, and those who were unemployed now sell handicrafts to tourists.

Secondly, in addition to the economic and environmental perspective, ecotourism may contribute to the socio-cultural benefits by improving intercultural appreciation and understanding between host community and travelers (McNeely, Thorsell, Ceballos-Lascurain, 1991 as cited in Ross & Wall, 1999). For instance, when travelers visit a village, they may have a change to meet, interact or learn something from the locals



(e.g. culture, ways of life, food, performance), and even buy something as a souvenir. Certainly, ecotourism not only generates local economy, but it may instill a sense of local pride to villagers, and may promote or strengthen cultural heritage awareness among the local residents. In order to support socio-cultural benefits, it is interesting in what scholars (Snyman, 2014; Ziffer, 1989) addressed about the role of travelers to the local community. When visiting eco-destinations, travelers or eco-tourists may contribute to the areas visited through labor or financial ways that can benefit the conservation of the site and economic well-being of the local residents (Snyman, 2014; Ziffer, 1989). This suggests that travelers are an important player to the development of local community in some ways if they wish. For example, they can help the community in some projects such as being a volunteer or donate some money in wildlife conservation project, forestry planting, and school project or buy local products. This example could be another way to promote mutual understanding and social relationship between travelers and hosts. More importantly, it can promote a positive side of ecotourism on local residents' view. According to the literature, the ecotourism good practice from the community element may be summed up as follows.

- promoting local employment
- enhancing local involvement and partnership of ecotourism related-activity
- giving local empowerment

- purchasing/using local products and services
- supporting local conservation / cultural appreciation

Ecotourism Good Practice and Green Marketing Implications

This section will address the contributions of ecotourism good practice to the development of green marketing implications, particularly for the product modification (ecotourism trips). As the ecotourism good practice is relatively related to tour conduct (what to see and experience), it is therefore appropriate to discuss the green marketing implications in terms of **product development** or **improvement**. This will greatly benefit the ecotour operators in order to modify or improve their ecotourism product which is the main focus of ecotourism experience. In the green marketing, the ecotour operators should view the ecotourism mix as the marketing tools in helping them to compete with the traditional tour operators (mass market) in terms of product quality and product differentiation (Sangpikul, 2011). The ecotourism mix is expected to help them in running the green tourism business, and stay competitive in the market due to product differentiation and good image (Sangpikul, 2016). In this section, the **selected good practice** from each ecotourism element will be presented together with the suggestions on product development (Tables 3–7).

Table 3 Nature element

Good practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Offer a trip to visit uncontaminated or protected natural areas through a wide ranges of natural attractions● Arrange a nature-based activity for natural enjoyment, experience and learning purposes by emphasizing on less impact and low/non-consumptive activity● In some programs (when appropriate), a visit to associated cultural attractions or local community may be promoted
Green marketing implications
Prior research has revealed that most tourists participating in ecotourism trips are mainly motivated by rest, relaxation or recreation motives rather than other objectives (Kerstetter, Hou, & Lin 2004; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2004; Sangpikul, 2007). The marketing implication here is that once tourists join the tours, it is the duty of the tour operators to make them experience ecotourism trip (nature element). It is suggested that the ecotour operators should link tourists' motives (e.g. rest, relaxation, recreation,

**Table 3** (Cont.)

experiencing the nature) to the nature element (natural attractions) by employing marketing messages. The tour operators may add a selling point by using the special characteristics of ecotourism focusing on undisturbed areas, well protected areas to attract customers by conveying the appealing messages in the marketing media through the sense of “pure nature”, “natural authenticity”, “natural primitiveness”, or “wild nature”. In the meantime, a low consumptive or less impact tourism activity (e.g. trekking, bush walking, bird watching, canoeing, elephant riding, etc.) should be offered to supplement the above motives and promote natural appreciation and enjoyment. In addition, a concept of product differentiation (making the product different from others) may be employed through an arrangement of community visits (e.g. cultural, minority, agricultural communities). Past research indicates that most tour operators do not offer community visits (Sangpikul, 2010), they seems to mainly offer day trip (Sangpikul, 2015). Adding a program to visit the local community may be viewed as a value added product because tourists can gain both natural and cultural experiences in one tour program.

Table 4 Education element**Good practice**

- Brief tourists a tour program and inform them about the destinations and the surrounding environment including its significance or value
- Provide tourists additional knowledge regarding the natural environment of the areas visited (e.g. biodiversity, ecosystem, plants, wildlife)
- Supply tourists additional information to promote learning or interest in the natural environment (sheets, brochures, books, pictures)
- Nature interpretation should be delivered when arriving at ecotourism destinations or while doing nature-based activity through various techniques (e.g. verbal, picture, reference, comparison or sign)

Green marketing implications

The next supplement to make ecotourism experience happen is **education element** which is the major feature that distinguishes ecotourism from other types of tourism (Fennell, 2003; Weaver, 2001). This is a reason why a **genuine** ecotour operator should implement the education element, and separate themselves from the fake one. Real ecotourism experience (natural appreciation & awareness) may not occur without the education element. The tour operators may choose several ways of conduct to implement the natural education through the above good practice. An effective way to provide a better understanding between humans and nature is through the *nature interpretation*. Nature interpretation may be viewed as another selling point of ecotourism product. This enrich educational activity is rarely found or implemented in other forms of tourism (Armstrong & Weiler, 2002). Therefore, it represents the *product differentiation* for tour operators, and also adds the value to a product. It is the job of the tour operators to point out (communicate) this key feature to their potential customers in the market about their tour conduct. The nature interpretation may be designed and delivered in various forms to add both knowledge and enjoyment during the trips. A well-trained tour guide will play an important role to deliver interesting or attractive nature interpretation.

Table 5 Conservation element**Good practice**

- Determine the conservation as a part of business ethics or corporate social responsibility
- Choose the conservation activity that relates to company's policy or operation
- Be a contributor on conservation through various supports (e.g. physical or financial means as well as direct or indirect method)
- Encourage tourists' participation in conservation (when appropriate)
- Alternatively, do the conservation with other stakeholders (e.g. community, government, NGOs or private sector) relating to business operation

**Table 5** (Cont.)**Green marketing implications**

In relation to **conservation element**, there are several reasons why eco-tour operators should undertake the conservation. First, it is the mindset of the business owner (or manager) in the way they think about the nature. If people have the mindset about the nature, they would do something back to the nature such as maintaining or restoring the areas they operate. This is like the way people feel grateful (thankful) to someone and then they return something when appropriate. Second, the conservation should be viewed as a part of their business ethics. Business ethics is dealing with what are right and wrong in doing the business. It applies to all types of business including tourism. Business ethics help guide the company how to appropriately deal with the world (e.g. customers, public, society, environment). Thus, conservation as being the part of business ethics should be a common thing for ecotour operators who use and consume natural resources as a part of their benefits (profit making). Third, since eco-tour operators consume natural resources from taking tourists to visit the natural areas, the deterioration of the areas visited may occur from tourists' visitation and their operations. According to a common rule, business should be accountable to the natural and social environment in which it survives (Wearing & Neil, 2009). With this regard, the tour operators may implement the conservation element through an approach of **corporate social responsibility (CSR)** by taking care of the destinations being visited. These places are the source of their income because this is a place where the tour is operated. It should be noted that conservation element may not directly involved with the product itself because the practice of this element cannot be visibly seen by customers. Therefore, it is suggested to undertake the conservation element through the CSR which can be advertised or marketed to the public. Today, a company with CSR receives a favorable or good image in the market, particularly the tourism business, due to the increasing public's awareness on environmental issue. Conducting the natural conservation may be done in several ways through the given good practice. In terms of marketing, once the tour operators undertake the conservation project/activity, it depends on them to plan how to deliver that conservation project/activity to get the public acceptance, recognition, and company's image.

Table 6 Impact element**Good practice**

- Comply the existing rules and regulations of the areas visited to reduce unflavored impacts
- Advise tourists regarding proper travel behaviors during the trips (including what they can do and should not) to reduce negative impacts on ecosystem, wildlife, flora, fauna, or habitat
- Tour guides should be a role model for conducting the proper travel behavior
- Manage waste or garbage occurring during the trip in an appropriate way
- Use biodegradable or recyclable products when possible
- Consider the carrying capacity of the visited areas by implementing a small group conduct to reduce physical and environment impacts
- If there is a local visit, the proper advice on the community and local culture should be given to tourists

Green marketing implications

Generally, the **impact element** is closely related to education element in terms of knowledge and behavior. For example, when tourists are educated to better understand about the nature heritage (from education element), they are more likely to have positive attitudes toward the natural environment. With positive attitudes, they tend to respect the nature and behave more appropriately when visiting natural areas. Therefore, if tour operators do a good job on the education element, this will significantly support the impact element as well. When arriving at ecotourism destinations, tour guides *just remind* tourists to minimize their personal impacts to the environment. Once the company implements the impact good practice (as given), it may claim (promote or market) itself as a **responsible tour operator** because the company really does its job in educating tourists in order to reduce their impact to the environment. The practice of impact element may assist tour operators in building the **product or company positioning** in the market in terms of being the responsible tour operator. Fewer tour operators can claim for this practice due to the lack of impact element. Another product positioning may be done through the management of a small group of travelers (consideration of carrying capacity at the destination). The small group management may be viewed as a product advantage over the traditional tour operators as well in terms of more personal service. Generally, it can be argued that a smaller group will receive a better personal service

**Table 6** (Cont.)

(attention) from tour guides than a larger group. This better service may generate a widely word-of-mouth among customers, and may bring new ones to the business. In terms of marketing, the company maintaining small group may attract several segments that prefer a better service quality such as high-end customers, seniors, honeymooners or European markets. The impact element therefore can help the business to carefully select the right target market.

Table 7 Community element**Good practice**

- Generate local economy through local purchase and use patronized by tourists and tour operators
- Arrange the activity for tourists to learn and appreciate local culture or the local way of life
- Give the opportunity for local residents to involve with tour activities and planning when appropriate (e.g. local guides, guide assistants, service staff, cultural performance)
- Consider other community-based tourism experience such as volunteer tourism, agricultural tourism and home stay (when appropriate)

Green marketing implications

Community element should be viewed as another key selling point for ecotourism product, especially the overseas markets who are interested in experiencing Thai culture and local people. Several given good practices may help create product differentiation. They may include an opportunity to experience local culture, local learning or way of life, home stay, and volunteer tourism. All of these activities are expected to enhance the cultural experience or community-based tourism during the trip. Ecotour operators may promote the community element through a sense of **local authenticity (original culture)** by visiting an actual cultural village during the trip. Moreover, the community element will help ecotour operators earn more income by arranging an overnight trip with the local community (e.g. 1–2 nights). In particular, the ecotourism trip with a local visit will provide tourists with both nature and culture experience. This type of tour may be called “2 in one tour program” which may enhance the product differentiation and competitive advantage over the competitors.

Table 8 Summary of the contributions of ecotourism mix to the good practice and green marketing implications

Ecotourism mix	Good practice	Green marketing implications
1. Nature element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A trip to visit uncontaminated or protected natural areas – Nature-based activities with less/low impact – A visit to associated cultural attractions or local community 	Selling an ecotourism trip with a pure nature through a variety of low-impact activities and local visit.
2. Education element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Brief tourists a tour program and destination – Provide/supply tourists with additional knowledge of the destination and proper behavior – Encourage nature interpretation 	Enhancing ecotourism experience by educating tourists with nature appreciation and interpretation.
3. Conservation element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Set the conservation as a part of business ethics – Choose the conservation activity relating to company's policy – Be a contributor on destination conservation and encourage tourists' participation in conservation – Promote the conservation with other stakeholders relating to business operation 	Informing the public about business ethics and CSR through the implementation of company's conservation projects.
4. Impact element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Comply the rules and regulations of the areas – Advise tourists regarding proper travel behaviors – Promote a role model for tour guides – Manage waste or garbage during the trip 	Positioning the company as the responsible tour operator through the low impact practices.



Table 8 (Cont.)

Ecotourism mix	Good practice	Green marketing implications
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use biodegradable or recyclable products - Consider the carrying capacity 	
5. Community element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote local economy/local patronage - Encourage local cultural activities - Promote local participation - Encourage community-based tourism experience 	Marketing/offering a special product with community-based tourism or cultural tourism.

In conclusion, Table 8 summaries the contributions of ecotourism mix to the identification of good practice and the green marketing implementation. This article in overall has analyzed ecotourism literature and introduced the ecotourism mix to yield a thoroughly understanding of ecotourism dimensions. Ecotourism mix is the essential elements of ecotourism that serves as the foundation to the sustainable tourism development. It consists of five elements: nature, education, conservation, impact, and community. The analysis of ecotourism mix contributes to a better understanding of ecotourism dimensions and ecotourism good practice. The ecotourism good practice not only contributes to the ecotourism development but it also gives *the marketing implications* for the ecotour operators to market their ecotourism products as the unique travel experience with responsible practice. Indeed, the suggested good practices do not really incur additional costs for the business. Most of these practices are concerned with the approaches (way of doing things) to manage or conduct the responsible tours by following the ecotourism good practices. What this paper suggests is just to make some changes or improvements on the current tour practices which require a little effort on the tour management with few additional tasks. The ecotourism good practices should be viewed as the value added components and the strengths that distinguish ecotourism from other nature tourism products. They may assist the ecotour operators in product development, product positioning and product differentiation in order to stay competitive in the current market. Several good practices may represent the **core competency** of the company since other competitors (fake ones) cannot easily imitate them such as nature education, conservation

commitment, impact concern, and small group conduct. *The key point is that the ecotour operators should be strategic thinking on the product development by adhering to the true concept of ecotourism and the application of good practices into their product planning and marketing as the examples given* (Sangpikul, 2011). It is hoped that the above marketing implications will help the business to better understand the benefits and the importance of the ecotourism good practices that may help them to improve the product quality and enhance the chance of business success; thereby promoting the quality tourism business and being the choice for the customers.

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