

# Tradition and Innovation in Thai Tourism: A Role of Reverse Mentoring

*The research examines the role of reverse mentoring as an effective method to overcome the generational digital adoption challenges within Thailand's tourism industry. Traditional knowledge held by senior tourism stakeholders in Thailand remains valuable despite the digital transformation of the tourism sector, which causes difficulties in technology adaptation. The study has employed a qualitative approach that investigates reverse mentoring by having youngsters in the tourism sector train senior adults in digital skills, which produces shared advantages, protects traditional expertise, and encourages mixed-age teamwork. The study highlights that reverse mentoring incorporated into tourism development initiatives helps to achieve sustainable growth by combining traditional practices with modern innovative technologies.*

**Keywords:** *Reverse Mentoring, Tradition and Innovation, Aging Population, Thai Tourism.*

## Introduction

Tourism is one of the most significant and emerging sectors after COVID-19. When it comes to tourism, Asian countries are leading the market. Specifically, Thailand is one of the top tourist destinations in the world. Thailand is famous for its natural beauty, sea, sun, and sand (Yuan, 2010). Tourism is one of the most significant economic drivers in Thailand. The rise of digital platforms, specifically after the pandemic, and smart tourism presents opportunities and challenges unexpectedly. Thailand leads the tourism market because of its traditional methods, such as traditional massage parlours, native cuisine, and local medicine, and it aims to provide tourists with traditional and modern offerings (Novelli and Tisch-Rottensteiner, 2012). International travellers have been drawn to these elements, which simultaneously drive socioeconomic advancement in countryside areas dedicated to their cultural heritage. Traditional service providers who maintain valuable traditional knowledge demonstrate limited understanding of digital marketing procedures, online booking management, and social media platforms. Due to their preference for tech-enabled personalized services, Gen Z travellers find it challenging to interact with tourism workers from the older generation who prefer different modes of service delivery. The research examines how reverse mentoring functions as a solution to bridge the generational gap for achieving sustainable, inclusive growth in the Thai tourism sector (Huang et al., 2024). The government's push for a digital economy targeting 50% digitization by 2030 has spurred significant changes in tourism strategies (Leesa-nguansuk, 2023; Nation Thailand, 2025).

However, international travellers who value technology now expect touch-free banking operations combined with virtual tour aids and personalized trip management software to be standard features when traveling. The transition of smart tourism tools into local and community-based tourism occurs only in a

1 fragmented and inconsistent manner (Ambarwati et al., 2023). Apart from  
2 integrating and implementing digitalization, this revolution faces challenges due to  
3 different age groups having varying technological understanding. The generational  
4 gap exists because younger persons better understand new technology systems, but  
5 older tourism operators either refuse to learn new skills or cannot obtain these  
6 capabilities (Gonda and Rátz, 2023). Dealing with this challenge requires more than  
7 technological solutions because it is an issue of cultural and social acceptance. The  
8 successful implementation of top-down policies needs trust, meaningful  
9 communication, and mutual respect between younger and older tourism operators,  
10 which tend to be ignored in traditional hierarchical approaches (Patterson and Pegg,  
11 2013). Therefore, this study proposed the implementation of reverse mentoring in  
12 the tourism sector to match tradition with innovation.

13 The mentorship strategy called reverse mentoring enables digital technology  
14 training from younger people to their elders. The process allows both parties to learn  
15 from each other since digitization skills benefit older tourism operators or seniors  
16 linked with the tourism business, and the younger tourism businessmen or  
17 entrepreneurs gain understanding of cultural heritage alongside business  
18 proficiency, generational experience, and interpersonal wisdom (Jovicic, 2019).  
19 Through its reciprocal structure reverse mentoring has the capability to develop an  
20 equilibrium environment that supports innovation working alongside traditional  
21 practices. This study aims to understand how reverse mentoring applies to  
22 Thailand's tourism industry, specifically for community-based and cultural tourism  
23 areas. This study identifies how reverse mentoring supports sustainable  
24 development and enhances competitiveness, as well as supports digital economy  
25 initiatives. This study demonstrates operational strategies for reverse mentoring in  
26 Thailand's tourism market through qualitative research analysis.

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## 29 **Literature Review**

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31 The tourism industry in Thailand has always promoted cultural heritage as its  
32 core attraction. Ancient temples, royal ceremonies, local crafts, and traditional  
33 medicine practices have been key elements of the Thai tourism experience. The  
34 country established itself as an exclusive global tourism hotspot through its cultural  
35 assets. However, as international travel preferences evolve, particularly with the  
36 emergence of digital-native tourists, the pressure to modernize and digitize becomes  
37 increasingly evident (Ajanapanya, 2023). Recent industrial reports show an  
38 increased push toward digital tourism, focusing on promoting smart tourism  
39 infrastructure and innovation zones in key cities. Despite these efforts, digital  
40 illiteracy among the aging population, many of whom serve as local guides,  
41 traditional therapists, and community leaders, poses a significant challenge.  
42 According to Jantavongso, (2022) the digital literacy rate among Thais over 60, it is  
43 significantly low. This generational digital difference hampers community-based  
44 tourism's ability to fully benefit from online tools, digital marketing, and data  
45 analytics, which now define global competitiveness.

1 In organizational settings, reverse mentoring has been introduced as a  
2 transformative model to address knowledge gaps. As part of corporate innovation  
3 strategies, the concept has emerged to let younger people with technical expertise  
4 mentor older colleagues. The literature has described reverse mentoring through  
5 intergenerational learning principles to improve employee skills in professional  
6 expertise, cultural understanding, and flexibility (Chen, 2013). The study of  
7 Chaudhuri et al., (2022) explained how reverse mentoring functions as an inclusion  
8 tool to develop capabilities in digital transformation processes. Successful reverse  
9 mentoring initiatives in Thai culture depend on organizational management support  
10 and employee understanding about respectful communication, since age-hierarchy  
11 values make this collaboration process sensitive. The practice of reverse mentoring  
12 in the tourism sector delivers unique dual advantages to tourism stakeholders. The  
13 reverse mentoring empowers older stakeholders to understand digital tools while  
14 encouraging younger learners to learn cultural practices (Gannon et al., 2021).  
15 Modern tools become channels for transmitting intangible heritage such as  
16 storytelling, music, and local rituals, making them accessible to broader audiences  
17 through digital platforms. According to the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky,  
18 learning is inherently social and context-bound. Applied through this method,  
19 reverse mentoring in tourism appreciates the elder's knowledge and the youth's  
20 technological competence (Cismaru and Iunius, 2019). Literature and community  
21 initiatives support these initiatives, strengthening resilience, innovation, and  
22 inclusivity throughout traditional tourism systems by integrating digitalization.

## 23 24 25 **Methodology**

26  
27 A qualitative case study design is applied to investigate the outcomes of  
28 implementing reverse mentoring within Thai community-based tourism. This  
29 method is appropriate for tackling the exploratory question about understanding  
30 how generational groups interact in their native settings. Research data was obtained  
31 through semi-structured interviews of twelve participants selected by purposeful  
32 sampling. The key participants of this study are youngsters related to the tourism  
33 sector. They were asked about teaching tech knowledge to the aging group and, in  
34 return, what they gain from the generational experience of the elder generation. The  
35 study attempted to approach 20 respondents to ask about their tech knowledge or  
36 teaching use of innovative technologies, and how they benefit from the experience  
37 of senior businessmen, colleagues, and entrepreneurs in the tourism sector.  
38 However, the saturation point was obtained in 12 interviews with respondents in  
39 Phuket, as the destination was selected because it actively participates in cultural  
40 and community tourism and maintains traditional knowledge holders together with  
41 youth-led innovation groups. The researcher used Thai during the interviews, which  
42 participants consented to record and translated into English before further analysis.  
43 The study assured the respondents about the confidentiality of their data, and their  
44 anonymity was ensured (Allmark et al., 2009). After the analysis, the personal  
45 information and recordings were removed to ensure no identifiable information was  
46 provided.

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### 3 **Analysis and Results**

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5 Qualitative data analysis used thematic analysis with NVivo software for  
6 management and organization purposes. Qualitative data enabled the researcher to  
7 investigate the results of reverse mentoring and the emotional and social factors that  
8 shape its outcomes or failure. The findings revealed that reverse mentoring creates  
9 collaborative environments among generations within a workplace. The senior  
10 participants develop advanced digital skills during the program, and young adults  
11 learn about traditional cultural values through this experience. The interview results  
12 revealed several themes, which are discussed as follows.

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#### 14 *Digital Literacy Development among Older Participants*

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16 The Participants mentioned that aging people in the tourism industry  
17 experience better competence with digital tools following reverse mentoring  
18 collaborations. Through reverse mentoring, many senior members have initiated  
19 smartphone skills that enable them to make Facebook platform posts and  
20 communicate with customers. The senior cooking instructor experienced a higher-  
21 class reservation rate when their profile appeared on TripAdvisor due to guidance  
22 from a younger mentor about technological tools. Reverse mentoring within trust-  
23 based community work demonstrates how it transforms digital technology from  
24 reluctance to being seen as a beneficial opportunity. After the pilot phase ended,  
25 some mentoring relationships carried over into long-term personal connections and  
26 the findings are aligned with Breck et al., (2018).

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#### 28 *Cultural Knowledge Transfer to Youth*

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30 The young members demonstrated gratitude because they received valuable  
31 traditional knowledge that is not easily available through learn, which improved  
32 their creative work on a tourism application. Through reverse mentoring,  
33 participants experienced reciprocal learning, which Chaudhuri et al., (2022)  
34 mentioned as talent development and knowledge sharing between different  
35 generations.

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#### 36 *Enhanced Community Cohesion and Visibility*

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38 Through the mentoring sessions, older practitioners gain better exposure  
39 through digital platforms. Many senior members who operated tourism services  
40 shared their services and knowledge and, in return, learned how to advertise on  
41 social media, which enhanced the resilience of their business. These mentoring  
42 sessions led the services to gain prominence online, followed by online social media  
43 networks, and appear on Google Maps. The elevated online presence enabled  
44 tourism businesses to obtain more reservations and service requests from younger  
45 travelers who depend on internet search and trip evaluator platforms.

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## 1 *Challenges and Considerations*

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3 Overall, the mentoring session remains successful, yet the research pointed out  
4 barriers to achievement. Some older adults first showed reluctance to accept youth  
5 advice because age precedes in their traditional cultural hierarchy. Multiple  
6 mentoring relationships face limited sustainability because senior members are  
7 reticent to adopt new technologies and deviate from the marketing norms that they  
8 inherited from their elders.

## 11 **Implementation and Conclusion**

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13 The study mentions that reverse mentoring provides an effective solution to  
14 combining ancient customs with novel approaches in Thai tourism management.  
15 Young tourism businessmen or employees can assist elders in adapting to digital  
16 technologies and achieving cultural insight by establishing joint intergenerational  
17 tourism learning programs. Moreover, the study shows that reverse mentoring  
18 efficiently implements digital capabilities throughout the tourism industry,  
19 especially in community-based and cultural tourism. The two-fold strategic  
20 approach of reverse mentoring supports Thailand in achieving market leadership in  
21 tourism and protecting its traditional cultural essence. Additionally, the successful  
22 implementation of reverse mentoring programs requires the support of destination  
23 stakeholders through supporting policies. Further, community-based tourism  
24 organizations and vocational training institutes must incorporate these mentoring  
25 approaches when delivering outreach programs to the community. In this way, these  
26 initiatives can gain additional value by associating them with academic service-  
27 learning and internship placements in the tourism industry. Therefore, the tourism  
28 industry benefits from reverse mentoring, which allows younger staff to instruct  
29 senior leaders in a way that exchanges wisdom for both parties in an evolving sector.  
30 In addition to reverse mentoring, experienced professionals can experience digital  
31 tools, including social media platforms, mobile booking applications, and virtual  
32 reality products, which now play essential roles in travel planning and marketing. In  
33 order for tourism organizations to maintain market competitiveness through digital  
34 strategies, reverse mentoring provides them. Younger staff members emphasize  
35 sustainable initiatives in travel practices, so they lead older colleagues in supporting  
36 operational sustainability. So, through this exchange, both parties develop expanded  
37 workplace cultures that merge different generations into one inclusive environment.

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