THE SUCCESS OF COMMERCIAL MARITIME TRANSPORT ENTREPRENEURS

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ABSTRACT
This study aimed to: 1) examine the level of success of commercial maritime transport entrepreneurs, and 2) investigate the factors influencing the success of commercial maritime transport entrepreneurs. Data were collected using questionnaires distributed to executives, managers, and employees of both Thai and international shipping companies, totaling 400 respondents. Statistical analyses included frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that: 1) the overall success of commercial maritime transport entrepreneurs was high, particularly in repeat service usage, economic value added, compliance with international standards, and minimizing marine pollution, respectively; and 2) factors such as entrepreneurial potential, technology utilization, marketing strategies, and environmental sustainability (minimizing marine pollution) significantly influenced the success of commercial maritime transport entrepreneurs.
Keywords: Factors Influencing Success, Entrepreneurial Success, Commercial Maritime Transportation

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INTRODUCTION

International business refers to the conduct of business activities that extend beyond the boundaries of a single nation. It typically encompasses two major categories: 1) international trade, which involves the import and export of goods or services across countries, and 2) international investment, which refers to the allocation of capital in foreign countries, such as establishing production facilities abroad. Consequently, operating an international business requires the development of appropriate methods and strategies to enhance business competitiveness and reduce various constraints associated with cross-border operations. A key strategy widely adopted is forming business partnerships, which facilitates better access to consumer needs in foreign markets. Moreover, ensuring organizational preparedness—such as in human resources, production, information management, product development, marketing, investment capital, logistics, and corporate reputation or customer trust—is also crucial for successful international business operations (Fongsuwan, 2020).

In the field of transportation, the term logistics refers to the process of planning, executing, and controlling the flow of goods, storage, services, and related information from the point of origin to the point of consumption to meet customer requirements. Logistics management is considered a component of supply chain management (Bunla & Nimitphuwadol, 2020: 26).

International freight transportation encompasses several modes, including motor carriers, rail transport, air carriers, pipelines, container transport by rail, and water carriers. Approximately 90 percent of international cargo is transported by sea. Countries with extensive coastlines or river and canal systems conducive to navigation tend to rely heavily on waterborne transport. Maritime transport is widely preferred because it accommodates large shipment volumes, offers relatively low freight rates, and ensures a high level of safety. Consequently, international business operations predominantly utilize maritime transportation as their primary logistical method (Kritchakaris Na Wattanaprasert, 2016).Although Thailand has long implemented the Navigation Promotion Act B.E. 2521 (1978), the country's merchant fleet remains relatively small, possessing limited cargo capacity and being unable to operate long-distance routes. Thai vessels account for only 9 percent of the nation's maritime import-export transport, leaving the remaining 91 percent dependent on foreign vessels. As a result, Thailand incurs a substantial freight deficit of approximately 90 percent, equivalent to around 1.33 trillion baht. In recent years, concrete progress has been made toward establishing a national shipping line. The Ministry of Transport has mandated the Port Authority of Thailand to expedite the creation of this national carrier as a matter of urgency. This initiative aligns not only with the development of maritime transport but also with the significant growth observed across all transport sectors during the COVID-19 crisis, which presents a strategic window for advancing Thailand's logistics and transportation system comprehensively. Building on past policy challenges, the Ministry of Transport established a preparatory committee responsible for accelerating and driving the establishment of the national shipping line. At the initial stage, the Minister of Transport instructed the committee to operate across all relevant dimensions. Preliminary findings indicate that two major routes should be developed: 1) a domestic marine line connecting mobility within the Gulf of Thailand, implemented through cooperation with both domestic and international private sectors, with the Ministry supporting necessary infrastructure and port facilities as well as regulatory approvals; and 2) an international marine line, divided into an eastern route—linking Cambodia, Vietnam, South Korea, China, and Japan—and a western route connecting Africa, Europe, and the BIMSTEC region. The initiative is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2022 (Ministry of Transport, 2022). The Port Authority of Thailand (PAT) organized a market sounding event to assess investor interest prior to establishing the national shipping line. Mr. Kriangkrai Chaisiriwongsuk, Director of the Port Authority of Thailand, revealed that in accordance with the resolution of the Ministry of Transport's Preparatory Committee for the Establishment of a

National Shipping Line, issued on 30 June 2021, PAT has been tasked with conducting a feasibility study on the establishment of a national carrier and promoting the Thai merchant fleet. The initiative aims to increase the share of domestic coastal shipping and international maritime transport operated under the Thai flag, enhance competitive capacity, reduce freight payment deficits, and maximize the utilization of Thailand's maritime transport infrastructure. Furthermore, the establishment of a national shipping line and the enhancement of Thailand's merchant fleet competitiveness are expected to benefit PAT's service operations and create new business opportunities across maritime-related industries. These include the development of skills and professional expertise in the Thai maritime sector, the promotion of the shipbuilding industry from upstream to downstream, and greater investment in commercial shipping activities. To advance the project, PAT commissioned the Chulalongkorn University Academic Service Center and Trans Consult Co., Ltd. to conduct a feasibility study. The study covers legal frameworks, regulations, Cabinet resolutions, operational criteria, and the lawful establishment of the company, as well as an examination of past opportunities and obstacles related to the creation of national shipping lines in Thailand and other countries (Port Authority of Thailand, 2022).

The study found that a substantial number of entrepreneurs and investors expressed interest in participating in the national shipping line project; however, they emphasized the need for government support, such as dredging navigation channels, addressing encroachment on public waterways that obstruct vessel movement, and promoting public awareness of maritime transport to enhance competitiveness. A market sounding event has already been conducted to assess stakeholder interest, after which suitable investors will be selected to join the national shipping line venture. The study is expected to be completed by May 2022, after which the results will be submitted to the Ministry of Transport for consideration and subsequently proposed to the Cabinet for approval. The domestic shipping routes are anticipated to commence operations within the year, with an initial target to increase the market share of water transport from the current 4-5 percent to 7-8 percent. Further expansion into international shipping routes will follow in the next phase (Duangpastra, 2022).

The maritime transport service industry is facing several research-relevant challenges, as projections for 2023 indicate that freight revenue will likely remain elevated compared with pre-COVID-19 levels, while the supply of cargo vessels is increasing at a slower pace. Nonetheless, the industry is expected to encounter several negative factors: 1) intensified price competition as new vessel supply gradually enters the market and additional operators emerge; 2) rising cost burdens, particularly due to volatile fuel prices driven by the prolonged Russia-Ukraine conflict, as well as expenses related to compliance with emissions control regulations for aging vessels; and 3) the relatively small market share of Thai shipping operators, resulting from the limited size of the Thai merchant fleet compared with the volume of Thailand's global trade. These constraints suggest that the industry's long-term growth potential may remain modest (Krungsri Research, 2023).

From the aforementioned issues, a research gap has been identified regarding the success of Thai commercial shipping businesses. This success is associated with entrepreneurial capabilities, government policies, marketing strategies, and the use of advanced technology. Therefore, there is a strong interest in conducting research on this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Concepts and Theories on the Success of Commercial Maritime Transportation Entrepreneurs

The success of commercial maritime transport operators is a critical component of the marine logistics system, playing a vital role in driving economic development and supporting global supply chains. The literature highlights four key dimensions that reflect such success: repeat

service usage, economic value creation, international standard compliance, and marine environmental protection. 1) Repeat Service Usage serves as an essential indicator of customer trust. The Marine Department (2021) reports that operators capable of maintaining service quality, punctuality, and cargo safety are more likely to achieve higher levels of repeat usage, a finding supported by Li and Chen (2020), who demonstrate that service quality within smart port systems significantly influences customer loyalty. 2) Economic Value Creation represents another dimension in which maritime transport operators play a vital role. The Office of Transport and Traffic Policy and Planning (2022) indicates that maritime transport can reduce logistics costs by 30-50% compared with land transport, thereby enhancing national economic competitiveness. Consistent with this, Wang and Liu (2021) found that investments in smart-port technologies increase productivity and enable operators to create greater value for customers. 3) International Standard Compliance is fundamental to ensuring operational reliability. The World Maritime Organization (2020) emphasizes the importance of safety standards, container-handling protocols, and vessel tracking systems for global market acceptance. This aligns with Zhang (2020), who asserts that compliance with international standards enhances operators' ability to access international markets and establish global partnerships. 4) Marine Environmental Protection reflects the sustainability of maritime operations. The Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (2021) reports that operators adhering to measures such as waste-oil reduction, on-board waste control, and the use of environmentally friendly fuels significantly mitigate marine pollution. Similarly, Chai et al. (2021) find that reducing marine environmental impacts enhances corporate reputation and strengthens public trust.

The success of entrepreneurs is shaped by multiple interrelated factors operating systematically, including entrepreneurial competency, government policy support, marketing strategy, and technology adoption. A substantial body of domestic and international literature highlights the significance of these determinants for business competitiveness and sustainability. 1) Entrepreneurial Competency: Entrepreneurial competency influences managerial effectiveness, decision-making, and innovation capacity. The Department of Business Development (2021) notes that entrepreneurs with strong planning, problem-solving, and creative skills are more likely to achieve superior business outcomes. Similarly, Li and Chen (2020) found that managerial and leadership skills exert a direct impact on business performance and competitive advantage. 2) Government Policy Support: Government policies play a crucial role in fostering a supportive business environment through tax incentives, financial assistance, and infrastructure development. According to the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (2022), clear and consistent government policies reduce business risk and strengthen entrepreneurial confidence. Wang and Liu (2021) further report that countries with strong SME-support policies tend to exhibit significantly higher entrepreneurial growth. 3) Marketing Strategy: Marketing strategies enable entrepreneurs to understand customer needs and gain competitive advantage. The Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion (2020) states that businesses employing proactive marketing approaches—such as brand development, value-based pricing, and digital channel expansion—demonstrate stronger growth potential. Zhang (2020) also confirms that flexible, customer-centric marketing strategies enhance sales performance and customer loyalty. 4) Technology Adoption: In the digital era, technology adoption is essential for improving efficiency, reducing costs, and strengthening competitive advantage. The Department of Primary Industries and Mines (2021) reports that entrepreneurs adopting digital tools—such as tracking systems, online platforms, and data-management systems—achieve noticeably better performance. Chai et al. (2021) also highlight that the use of information technology enhances speed, accuracy, and customer satisfaction.

From the literature review, it can be concluded that entrepreneurial potential, government policies, marketing strategies, and technology utilization are key factors influencing business success. All of these factors must be developed in a coordinated and mutually supportive manner to enhance competitiveness and ensure the long-term sustainability of the business.
Based on the literature review, the research hypotheses can be formulated as follows:
H1 From the literature review, it can be concluded that entrepreneurial competency, government policy, marketing strategies, and technology utilization influence the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs. Based on this, the conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

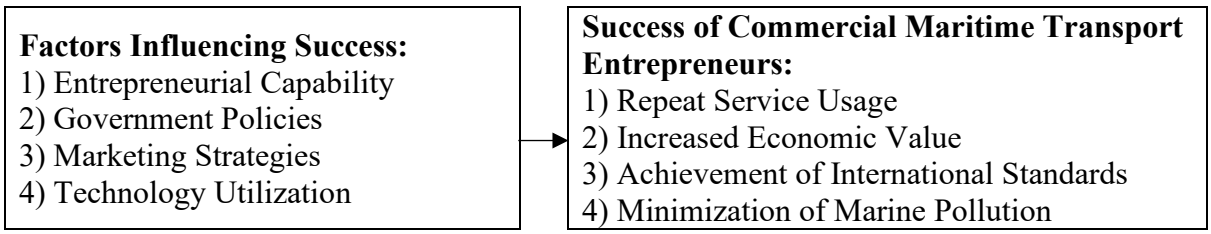

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population in this study consisted of executives, managers, and employees of maritime business companies, both Thai and foreign, totaling 3,500 individuals. The sample size was determined according to Kline's (2005) guideline, which recommends 20 times the number of observed variables. In this study, there were 20 variables, resulting in a sample of 400 participants. Stratified sampling was employed to select the sample.
The research instrument was a questionnaire consisting of three parts. Part 1 addressed the personal factors of the respondents, using a multiple-choice format. Part 2 examined factors influencing success, using a Likert-scale format with a 5-point rating: the highest = 5, the high = 4, the moderate = 3, the low = 2, and the lowest = 1. Part 3 measured the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs, also using a Likert-scale format with the same 5-point rating system: the highest = 5, the high = 4, the moderate = 3, the low = 2, and the lowest = 1.
Prior to data collection, the research instruments were systematically tested for content validity using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method and for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The IOC value was 0.845, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.910, indicating that the instruments were of sufficient quality (Polit & Beck, 2006; Hair et al., 2012). To obtain the data, questionnaires were distributed to executives, managers, and staff of both Thai and international commercial shipping companies. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, as well as multiple regression analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

1) The majority of respondents were male (68%), aged between 41 and 50 years (53.33%), held a bachelor's degree (60%), and had an average monthly income ranging from 200,001 to 300,000 baht (50.65%).
2) The success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs was found to be high overall and across specific dimensions, particularly in repeat service usage, economic value addition, adherence to international standards, and marine environmental responsibility, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Mean and standard deviation of the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs

Aspect	Description	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Result
1.	Repeat Service Usage	3.81	0.60	Much
2.	Increased Economic Value	3.68	0.50	Much
3.	Achievement of International Standards	3.62	0.45	Much
4.	Minimization of Marine Pollution	3.52	0.58	Much
Total		**3.66**	**0.53**	**Much**

3) Entrepreneurial competency had a β value of 0.232, government policy had a β value of 0.317, marketing strategies had a β value of 0.142, and technology acceptance had a β value of 0.231, indicating that all factors had a significant positive influence on the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs at the 0.05 level, with significance values (Sig.) of 0.001, 0.000, and 0.000, consistent with the proposed hypotheses. The correlation coefficient (R) was 0.856, suggesting a strong relationship between the group of independent variables and the dependent variable. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.641, indicating that the independent variables collectively accounted for 64.1% of the variance in the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs.

The equations can be expressed in the following order:

$Y = 0.947 + 0.317X_2 + 0.232X_1 + 0.231X_4$

Based on the multiple regression analysis, it was found that entrepreneurial competency, government policy, marketing strategies, and technology utilization collectively predict the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs. Among these factors, entrepreneurial competency had the strongest predictive power (Beta = 0.123), followed by technology utilization (Beta = 0.121), marketing strategies (Beta = 0.092), and government policy (Beta = 0.043), as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 Multiple regression analysis of factors influencing the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs

Factors	Unstandardized (b)	SE	Standardized (β)	t	Sig.
(Fixed value)	1.121	0.106		10.632	0.000
Entrepreneurial Capability	0.123	0.023	0.232	8.662*	0.001
Government Policies	0.043	0.021	0.317	7.865*	0.000
Marketing Strategies	0.092	0.042	0.142	1.002	0.723
Technology Utilization	0.121	0.106	0.231	10.632*	0.000
$R = 0.856$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.641$, $R^2 = 0.730$, SE = 0.142					

* Statistical significance at the 0.05 level

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In the study on the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs, the researcher discussed the key issues in accordance with the research objectives as follows:

1) The success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs was found to be high overall and across specific dimensions, particularly in terms of repeat service usage, economic value addition, adherence to international standards, and environmental responsibility. This finding is consistent with the report of the Marine Department (2021), which stated that safe, standardized services that minimize environmental impact enhance customer confidence and encourage repeat usage by entrepreneurs. It also aligns with Li and Chen (2020), who found that smart port standards and efficient service provision directly contribute to customer loyalty. In addition, the Office of Transport and Traffic Policy and Planning (2022) confirmed that

maritime transportation helps reduce the country's overall costs and adds greater economic value compared to other modes of transport. Regarding marine environmental responsibility, the World Maritime Organization (2020) reported that operations adhering to international environmental standards, such as MARPOL, enhance credibility in the global market and reduce the impact of marine pollution. Moreover, Chai et al. (2021) indicated that reducing ship emissions and using clean energy contribute to a positive corporate image and the sustainability of entrepreneurs.

2) The factors of entrepreneurial competency, technology utilization, marketing strategies, and marine environmental responsibility directly influence the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs. This finding is consistent with the report of the Department of Business Development (2021), which stated that entrepreneurs with knowledge, managerial skills, and problem-solving abilities have a higher likelihood of success. It also aligns with Li and Chen (2020), who found that entrepreneurial competency affects competitive capability. Regarding technology utilization, the results correspond with Wang and Liu (2021), who indicated that the adoption of smart port technology enhances efficiency, reduces errors, and strengthens competitive advantage. Meanwhile, marketing strategies are crucial for increasing repeat service usage and fostering customer relationships, consistent with Zhang (2020), who noted that proactive, customer-focused marketing strategies significantly impact sales and business growth. In summary, the findings suggest that the success of commercial maritime transportation entrepreneurs results from the integration of multiple factors, including entrepreneurial competency, technology, marketing, and environmental responsibility, all of which contribute to long-term sustainability and competitive capability.

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