



The Use of Communication Strategies and Digital Media as Tools to Promote Agro Tourism Managed by Community Enterprises in Phetchaburi Province

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Abstract

Digital media and internet networks in today's world has made the world smaller and has had a great impact on our daily lives. They have renovated the way we communicate with individuals, groups, and public. The use of social media in tourism has been increasing, as tourists tended to use social and digital media to search for information, location, and promotion before making decision.

This research aimed to study how communication strategies and digital media were used to promote agro tourism managed by community enterprises in Phetchaburi and to study similarities and differences between community enterprises on using communication strategies and digital media to promote agro tourism in Phetchaburi Province. A purposive random sampling method was applied to select four famous agro tourism community enterprises. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. The study revealed that those community enterprises knew how social and digital media were so important to their business but they had a limited ability to use or create digital media to help promote their business. Most popular digital media used in their business were their personal Facebook and Line because they were simple but significant. Community enterprises were seeking for professional help to teach and train them about digital media production and usage.

Keywords: *Communication strategy, Digital media, Agro tourism, Community enterprises*

1. Introduction

Now we all are living in the digital and social media world where new technology and innovation has become more and more important to our daily lives. Many studies revealed that people, in general, spent more than two hours a day on online activities, while teenagers spent up to nine hours a day on social media platforms. Surprisingly, the number of hours of social media use is increasing (Azano, 2017). The emerging of digital media world has transformed our traditional communication style we used recently; from text messages sending and receiving, to modern and effective online communication patterns; for instance, Line Application, Facebook, or Twitter platforms. These up-to-date social media applications have become major communication tools we use to communicate in the business world. Here and now, we cannot deny that our everyday life, our lifestyle, and our business-doing methods are driven by modern technologies and innovations.

Phetchaburi, a rich beautiful natural resources province, located on the central-west region of Thailand, which is only 168 km. or only 2.5-hour drive from Bangkok. This western region province is known, domestically and internationally, for having many different types of attractions and features to serve each taste for tourists. Cha-Am Beach; a gleaming white sand beach resort, Phranakorn Khiri Historical Park; a memorial historical park built on top of the mountain by King Mongkut or King Rama IV, and Chung Hua Mun Royal Project; an agricultural project initiated by King Rama IX, were mostly known among tourists. In addition, Phetchaburi also has numbers of manmade tourist attractions such as water and amusement parks, fashion outlet malls, and exotic farms located on almost every single district for tourists to visit.

Apart from natural resources and manmade amusement parks, Phetchaburi is known for a place that produces numbers of high-quality local agricultural products such as Khanom Morgang or Phet Mungbean Thai Custard, Phet Rose Apple, a special and unique taste of rose apple that grows along Phet River Basin, Phet Palm Sugar, Sweet Pineapple, and Local White Jasmine Rice. It is remarkable that many agro tourism-based providers in Phetchaburi are managed by local communities.



Agro tourism providers need to put an effort to use social media as one of the communication strategies and marketing campaigns to promote their products and services to attract their potential tourists. In the world of digital era today the Internet can help making people's lives easier (Anamika, 2017). The Internet can be used as a marketing tool for product value creation. Agro tourism farmers and operators may take advantage of using the Internet as one of the fast and convenient communication platforms to communicate with their potential customers. They may simply use the Internet to update their products and services daily and to build a strong relationship with their customers. Using digital media as a tool to promote agro tourism could help increase additional revenue for local farmers and entrepreneurs. The extra income gained by using these online tools could also help improving local communities in return as well.

1.1 Community Enterprise

Community enterprises, it is sometimes also called small and micro community enterprises or social enterprises. This term may sound unfamiliar for people who have never gotten involved with community activities before. They may have no idea of what this term means and how important agriculture is. In many countries, community enterprises were set up by applying commercial strategies (Wikipedia, 2019), in order to help strengthen the community, help protect the environment, improve local people's well-being, and make social changes. The concept of having social media or communities involved with social aims and social profit making is emerging as a new trend in the world today (Poon, 2011).

Samples of community or social enterprises, categorized by Wikipedia (2013) were such as Trading enterprises, financial institutions, community organizations, non-government organization and charities. Middlesex University Business School (2019), considered the following activities as social enterprises: a credit union; a cooperative financial institution helps community save and borrow money, community-based organization, non-governmental organizations with commercial arms, cooperative, Fairtrade, microfinance, and social firm.

Community enterprise concepts in Thailand occurred years ago and it was announced and promoted all over Thailand, especially in up country, where there were numbers of outstanding local products and services, in order to help support the government policy that gave a priority to self-sufficiency economy. Community enterprises were set up under government policy and regulation must be founded and managed by a group of people in each particular area.

According to the government, the community enterprise was expected to grow together with the mainstream economy (Tanaisri, 2012). The objective of promoting community enterprises is to encourage a potential community to form their own group and run their own business, like a private business sector, to strengthen themselves and their community. Most of the products or services sold are local agricultural products produced with special characteristics from each certain area. Currently there were 122, 571 registered community enterprises in total. Business activities run by community were separated into two main categories: 1) product manufacturing group and service providing group, which numbers of each group were 106,467 and 2)16,104 community enterprises respectively (doae.go.th, 2019).

1.2 Communication Strategy

Johns (2016) defined a communication as a process of exchanging information between sender and receiver that previous people might worry about face-to-face techniques or paper writing. However, advanced technology in this modern world has transformed the way people communicated with each other completely. Instead of focusing communication techniques or paper, people now focus on reliability of news, as they consume information from various sources. People nowadays are concerned with the most effective source for sharing news and information because there are plenty of choices to use new skills needed to learn and apply. This is why communication strategies is brought to the attention. Zkjadoon (2015) defined communication strategy as a method of how people plan to share their information. It referred to the choice of selecting the most effective method when communicating with individuals, people, and the public. According to Zkjadoon (2015), communication strategy was divided into three categories: visual, verbal, and non-verbal. Communication strategies can be used as a tool for individuals and business sectors to communicate effectively and meet goals. Tools to develop communication strategies included



language style, color, pattern, graphic design style, photography, font, layout, and symbols and icons (Bekhor, 2019).

1.3 Agro Tourism

People called and defined agro tourism in many different ways such as agri tourism, farm tourism, farm-based tourism, rural tourism (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). Arroyo, Barbieri, and Rich (2013) defined agro tourism as a visit to an agricultural place for recreation or an education purpose. It is one kind of tourism industry based on both tangible and intangible typical agricultural products and services provided to impact tour operators and agro tourism tourists. It covers traditional nature and location, unique culture, local people's way of life, old traditional farming operation methods, beautiful river and scenery, natural waterfall, greenery paddy farm, and rich and beautiful environment in community or around farmer's farms. It also refers to tourist activities of a small-scale that was created by agriculturists in rural areas (Kizos & Iosifides, 2007). Agro tourism also provides tourists to have a once-in-a-life-time opportunity to experience farm stay, to taste and try quality farm products grown locally by using local wisdom practices. Tourists also have a chance to be parts of specific agricultural activities and services available at each farm.

1.4 Definition of terms

Communication Strategies refers to concept, method, process, action, or any kind of activities that community enterprises used to communicate with their group members, potential customers, government officials, and the public.

Digital Media refers to any kind of content including data, text, information, figure, number, graphic, picture, sound, motion picture, VDO, audio, news, Line, Line stickers, and etc. that transmitted through internet or networks.

Community Enterprises refer to business units owned and managed by a community that set up or founded under the government policy in order to help support community to grow with self-sufficiency economy philosophy. Most community enterprises provide products and services related to local agriculture products and activities, which are ways of life of local people in each particular area. Community enterprises in this study refer to:

1) Ban Khum Phet Rose Apple Community Enterprise located in Muang Phetchaburi District. A community enterprise that produces only-at-Phetchaburi Phet Rose Apples; a typical well-known Rose Apple fruit that is grown along Phet River Basin. Phet Rose Apple was registered as a geographical indication product by the Department of Intellectual Property, Ministry of Commerce. A farm tour activity to visit Phet Rose Apple garden, a geographical indication fruit is also provided.

2) Ban Napho Herbal Products Community Enterprise located in Ban Laem District. This community enterprise is known and accepted in the countrywide about its local herbal products grown in Phetchaburi and nearby provinces. Famous and bestselling products such as herbal tea, herbal balm, herbal shampoo and hair conditioning cream, and supplementary health food nutrition.

3) Ban Laad Agricultural Productivity Efficiency Increasing Learning Center is located in Ban Laad District. This center is known and accepted among Thai and international rice experts as a paddy farm rice producing good quality of local rice. It is a place for learning and demonstrating how to grow a quality of rice by using sufficiency economy philosophy.

4) Suan Taan Narong Palm Sugar Learning Center located in Ban Laad District. This center promotes agro tourism together with ecotourism concepts. Tourists who visit this place will have a chance to learn the history of palm and palm sugar together with a chance to taste and try foods and drinks made from fresh palm sugar. Unique furniture made from dry palm sugar leaves and stems are also demonstrated.

Agro tourism refers to a kind of tourism industry that is based on both tangible and intangible typical agricultural products and services. In this study, it refers to any agricultural product, service, and activity provided for tourists who visit Phetchaburi Province.



2. Objectives

1. To study how community enterprises in Phetchaburi Province used communication strategies and digital media to promote agro tourism
2. To study similarities and differences between community enterprises on using communication strategies and digital media to promote agro tourism in Phetchaburi Province

3. Materials and Methods

This study applied a qualitative research method included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. Population of the study were founders and members of four outstanding community enterprises, recommended by the Office of Agricultural Extension. Each community enterprise representing major agricultural products of Phetchaburi Province and they started managing their agro tourism business for a while. These enterprises were known among government and private sectors as agro tourism attractions run by communities as well. Purposive random sampling technique was applied to this study. The population were presidents, members of each community enterprise, including a government officer who was involved with agro tourism promotion. The total population involved in this study were nine. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, which were conducted in Thai language under a face-to-face communication approach. Observations were taken at each particular community enterprise at their convenient times. The study focused on communication strategies and digital media used as marketing tools to promote agro tourism and how digital media could add value to agricultural products and services. Data gathered from in-depth interviews and observations were interpreted, determined, and summarized by using a content-analysis approach.

4. Results and Discussion

This study aimed: 1) to study how community enterprises in Phetchaburi used communication strategy and digital media to promote agro tourism and 2) to study similarities and differences between community enterprises on using communication strategy and digital media to promote agro tourism in Phetchaburi Province. Research findings will be divided into three parts and will be presented as follows:

4.1 Communication Strategies Used to Promote Agro Tourism

From in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, it found that community enterprises in Phetchaburi used all three main strategies of communication to communicate with individuals, groups, and public. Verbal communication was basically used in daily routine works, as it was simple and fast. Non-verbal communication was used together with verbal communication to show feeling or to confirm the meaning of the spoken word. It was also used to communicate with non-Thai tourists in some situations.

Written communication was less used among community enterprises compared to other types of communications included when contacting with government sectors because it was fast, convenient, and acceptable. Moreover, it took time and effort to write or type (Amchan, 2018). Paper letters and memos were rarely used except for some certain agreements needed to be made or recorded. If possible, they preferred using short messages such as SMS, Messenger, personal Line, and Email because they did not have to worry about the format or message delays. Details of communication strategies used among community enterprises in Phetchaburi were summarized in Table no. 1 below.

**Table 1** Communication strategy used to promote agro tourism in Phetchaburi






Communication Strategy	Sample	Reason for Using
Verbal Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spoken words - Telephone - One-on-one conversation - Group and public communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fast and simple to use to communicate - Everyday conversation with team and customers - Sharing information within a short time - More convenient than written communication - Help fast solving an important issue
Non-verbal Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Body Language - Gesture - Eye Contact - Facial Expression - Physical Touching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help make verbal communication more clear or to confirm the meaning - Try to communicate with none-Thai speakers in some situations - Express feeling
Written Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Email - Brochure - Letter/memo - Line - Personal Facebook - Visuals, graphic, and Signs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal Contact (PR & Marketing) - To give clear message - To make sure everyone understands - To give more official information - To record documents - Make an official confirmation and agreement - Describe brands, products, and activities

4.2 Digital Media Used to Promote Agro Tourism among Community Enterprises in Phetchaburi Province

Most of the popular digital media used to promote agro tourism managed by community enterprises in Phetchaburi were their personal Line and personal Facebook accessed through their mobile phone application. They said these media types were simple, significant and popular among tourists. Community enterprises in Phetchaburi communicated with individuals and group via their personal Line more than 8 times a day, via Messenger less than 5 times a day, and updated their Facebook about 2-3 times a week or more. They used YouTube only for uploading their VDO clip.

When asking about using other types of digital media they said even though the other digital media tools such as websites, Page, electronic magazine, or QR codes were interesting and are more powerful for customers, for them they found it hard to produce and use them as tools to promote their business. In addition, there would be some costs for updating and maintaining those media as well. From observations and interviews, there was only Ban Laad Agricultural Productivity Efficiency Increasing Learning Center that had posted its location on Google Maps but it was in Thai. Details of digital media used among four community enterprises were summarized and presented in Table 2 below:

**Table 2** Digital media used to promote agro tourism industry in Phetchaburi

Digital Media Type	Using Frequency	Using Purposes
	More than 8 times a day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicate with individuals, team, customers - Easy to use but meaningful - Popular among social media users
	Less than 5 times a day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicate with ones who preferred using this type of media - Answer message sent from customers
	2-3 times a Week or more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Check message posted by visitors - Answer some questions and concerns - Updated farm activities
	Occasionally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VDO clip uploaded
	Once	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indicate location

4.3 Similarities and Differences of Media Used among Community Enterprises





Research results showed that all four community enterprises used verbal, non-verbal and written communication strategies to communicate with people. From interviews and observations, it found they used formal written communication less such as letter or memo because they felt it took time for them to write or type formal language. They found using informal language with a proper body language or a proper manner was faster and more convenient. In addition, when communicating with people, they preferred using Line, Messenger, and email because it was faster and more convenient and they did not have to worry about the format and style. Research results showed that the popular digital media used to promote agro tourism in Phetchaburi Province were personal Facebook and Line.

The other types of social media were rarely used because they thought it was inconvenient for them. From observations, Ban Laad Agricultural Productivity Efficiency Increasing Learning Center had various kinds of digital media used compared to the other three enterprises because this community enterprise was well known among the government and private sectors and they received good support from many different sources. However, a set of specific Sticker Line had been created for each community enterprise to use as tools to promote their business, I found that all of them were extremely delightful. They said it was incredible to have their own community enterprise Line stickers like this and they thanked me for creating such a wonderful gift for them.

A month later, at the focus group discussion, Bunpod Mamak, the president of Ban Laad Agricultural Productivity Efficiency Increasing Learning Center and Thanachai Amchan from Bankhum Phet Rose Apple Community Enterprise shared their experiences after sending these 'special Sticker Line' to say good morning to friends and customers; they said people always asked with several questions such as where did you get this Sticker?. Who made it for you? Could you make me one, etc.? They said people got jealous of them because of this Sticker Line and this Sticker Line had made their community enterprises more recognized among tourists and government officials Urai Kalpak, Chief of Ban Laad District Agricultural Extension Office, said it was incredible. She never realized that a tiny little thing like Line stickers would have more powerful influence on people and business. The use of media in promoting agro tourism were summarized as follow:



Table 3 Similarities and differences of media used among community enterprises

Enterprise	Communication strategy	Digital Media Used	Traditional Media Used
 Ban Khum Phet Rose Apple Community Enterprise	- Verbal - Non-verbal - Written	- Personal Facebook - Personal Line - Messenger	- Telephone, letter - Printed Brochure - Paper sicker
 Ban Napho Herbal Products Community Enterprise	- Verbal - Non-verbal - Written	- Personal Facebook	- Telephone, letter - Brochure - Plastic bag with logo - Bulletin board - Printed brochure
 Ban Laad Agricultural Productivity Efficiency Increasing Learning Center	- Verbal, - Non-verbal - Written	- Business Facebook - Personal Line - VDO via YouTube - Messenger - Google Map Location	- Telephone, letter - Bulletin board - Price Tag - Product Details Tag - Poster
 Suan Taan Narong Palm Sugar Learning Center	- Verbal, - Non-verbal - Written	- Business Facebook - Personal Line - Messnger	- Visual and signs - Bulletin Boards - Poster - Vinyl Billboard

5. Conclusion

This qualitative research method was designed to use in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations as tools to determine and summarize how communication strategies and digital media were used to promote agro tourism in Phetchaburi and the similarities and differences of communication strategies and digital media used between each community enterprise. Research results revealed community enterprises used verbal, non-verbal, and written communication to communicate with their members and customers. Popular digital media used were Line and their personal Facebook because they were simple but significant. They knew how important digital media could help promote their agro tourism business and increase interaction among customers and public but for some community enterprises they felt it was hard for them to start learning and producing those types of digital media to use for promoting their business. They were seeking professional help with digital media from external organizations.

Since, we all are living in the world of digital media where the Internet can help making our lives easier (Anamika, 2017) and influencing our daily live. Digital and internet platforms have completely transformed the way people communicate with each other and to the public. People have plenty of choices to choose a channel and platform to share their information. Tourists in the digital world seek information, location, and promotion from social media before making decisions. They seemed to like to share pictures and comments after experiencing each particular destination. This would help attract a new target group as well as provide an opportunity for potential tourists to absorb some experiences before going to a particular destination. Digital media could be used as a marketing tool for product value creation as well. To support the government policy of expecting community enterprises to grow along with mainstream economy (Tanaisri, 2012), as it is necessary to help community enterprises to produce and use digital media as a tool to promote its business.

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