The Contemporary Identity Communication Models of Thai Phuan in the Digital Era: A Case Study of Nakhon Nayok

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Abstract

This research is a qualitative research. There are 2 objectives: 1) to study contemporary identity communication models of Thai Phuan in the digital era, and 2) to design media and messages for contemporary identity communication of Thai Phuan in the digital era. The study shows that to create effective contemporary identity communication models of Thai Phuan in the digital era, there should be an improvement in all communication elements as follows 1) Analyze the target audience, specifically new-generation tourists, to identify their preferences and demands for tourism experiences 2) Design messages that align with the needs and expectations of new-generation tourists 3) Utilize communication channels frequently used by new-generation tourists, selecting platforms that effectively reach and engage this audience and 4) Shift the role of the communicator to new-generations who understanding of both the content and the preferred communication channels. The study also found that the media and message design for contemporary identity communication of Thai Phuan in the digital era should determine the use of elements of the graphic appearance from local wisdom as follows: 1) Graphic appearance should be composed of artistic elements that effectively convey objects, activities and stories of local cultural wisdom 2) Layout composition that consist of logo, key visual, color, pattern, picture and artwork should applying knowledge of art and culture as a guide for design.

Keywords: identity communication, contemporary art, Thai Phuan, design

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Introduction

The Thai Phuan community is a long-established ethnic group with art and culture that has been inherited across generations. The Thai Phuan people possess a strong sense of pride in their unique cultural heritage. The community has received tourism promotion support from government agencies. However, these aspects are facing potential loss due to the aging population challenges arising from a high aging society the pervasive influence of modern digital technology replacing traditional analog social structures.

Research Objective

1. To study contemporary identity communication models of Thai Phuan in the digital era.
2. To design media and messages for contemporary identity communication of Thai Phuan in the digital era.

Methodology

1. Document Analysis: A comprehensive analysis of relevant documents and existing research was conducted to establish a theoretical framework and contextual understanding.
2. Semi-structured Interviews: Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including community leaders, local residents, and representatives from cultural networks.
3. Focus Group Discussions: Focus group discussions were held with residents from four distinct villages within the community to gather diverse perspectives and insights.
4. Media Production for Dissemination: The findings of this research informed the production of media materials specifically designed for dissemination to the target audience of younger generation tourists.

Result and Discussion

This study successfully achieved its two primary objectives by providing a comprehensive understanding of contemporary identity communication models for the Thai Phuan in the digital era and offering practical guidelines for designing effective media and messages. The research was a qualitative study focusing on the Thai Phuan in Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok Province.

Contemporary Identity Communication Models of Thai Phuan in the Digital Era

The contemporary identity communication model for Thai Phuan in the digital era must encompass all communication components: 1) studying the receiver group, specifically new-generation tourists, 2) identifying message content rooted in identity that can create unique selling points for the Thai Phuan community, and 3) selecting channels that effectively reach new-generation tourists, suitable for the digital age. Communication across these three components ensures a complete dimension of Thai Phuan identity communication.

Studying the Receiver Group: New-Generation Tourists

In studying contemporary Thai Phuan identity models in the digital era, focusing on the communication components of sender, receiver, message, and media, the receiver is the critical initial component. Data from the Public Policy Studies Institute Foundation (Komkrit,

2022) identified 11 types of future tourists based on their expected values when visiting Thailand. For the Thai Phuan community tourism, it addresses four specific tourist personas: (1) World Protector, (2) Relationship Builder (tourism for fostering relationships, valuing atmosphere, and spending time building familial and friendly ties), (3) Believer (tourism connected to religion, valuing sacred sites and peaceful environments), and (4) World Explorer. Community leaders from all four villages unanimously agreed that the Thai Phuan community in Nakhon Nayok effectively meets the characteristics of these future tourist personas.

Studying Message Content Rooted in Identity to Create Unique Selling Points for the Thai Phuan Community

The long-standing Thai Phuan cultural way of life, with content selected by the community as "good things" according to Phuan culture, forms the basis of their selling slogan: *"Enjoy Phuan fun delight by the canal bank visit the museum, meet Phuan in Pak Phli savor cultural ways indulge in local 'tok' meals join in preserving local wisdom."* Analyzing this slogan reveals that while Thai Phuan communities in the same area share a collective identity, each community—Faang Klong, Ko Wai, Ban Mai, and Tha Daeng—possesses unique strengths highlighted as their distinct Thai Phuan selling points. In this research, students from the College of Social Communication Innovation experimentally produced media content and provided it to the communities for promotional use, demonstrating that each area has non-overlapping selling points. Communicating these distinct local identities can further enhance value through differentiation.

Selecting Channels to Reach New-Generation Tourists

Data on communication channel selection was gathered through interviews with community leaders, with media production carried out by the younger generation, considering the variable of time. Details are as follows:
  (1) Media for tourists seeking cultural tourism information: This media is for pre-travel research and decision-making. It should convey impressions, enjoyment, and a promise of the experiences awaiting them. Channels for this group include social media platforms like TikTok, infographics, and YouTube content from previous visitors.
  (2) Media for visitors already at the location: This aims to enhance learning, especially for groups on study tours organized by entities like local administrative organizations or educational institutions (primary, secondary, and non-formal education). Essential media for this segment includes a video introduction to the area, presented as a documentary providing comprehensive basic community information that can serve as a starting point for further learning within the community or for discussions with local experts.
  (3) Media for sharing experiences and impressions after visiting: This media is crucial for communicating post-visit experiences, enabling tourists to check-in, review, and recommend the destination to others. These are primarily social media channels such as TikTok, YouTube, and infographics.

Designing Media and Messages for Contemporary Thai Phuan Identity Communication in the Digital Era

The cultural identity of the Thai Phuan people in Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok Province, currently comprises their language, food, customs and traditions, performing arts, and attire.

Based on this study, the use of graphic appearance elements derived from local wisdom can be defined. Graphic design for communication is categorized into three parts to represent the organizational identity of the Thai Phuan cultural group in Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok:

1. Primary Components: Graphic elements constructed from artistic components that can effectively communicate objects, activities, and stories of local cultural wisdom.
2. Secondary Components: Graphic elements constructed from artistic components used as supplements or explanations to the primary components, clarifying objects, activities, and stories of local cultural wisdom.
3. Layout Composition: The arrangement of primary and secondary components to communicate objects, activities, and stories of local cultural wisdom.

Organizational identity is a crucial characteristic that displays or indicates the prominent and accepted art, culture, resources, environment, local wisdom, community, and social ways of life. These elements can represent the Thai Phuan cultural group by applying knowledge of art and culture as a guide for designing cultural identity communication for the Thai Phuan in Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok, both in terms of art and culture and for commercial purposes.

The components of organizational identity for communicating Thai Phuan cultural identity in Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok, include:

1. Logo: Composed of a primary symbol shared by the community as a symbolic representation of the Thai Phuan community in Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok, and a secondary symbol related to community activities or administrative divisions.
2. Key Visual: Includes icons as graphic prototypes for communicating the Thai Phuan community in Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok.
3. Color Identity: Defines the characteristic colors.
4. Pattern Identity: Defines characteristic patterns.
5. Picture: Refers to photographic or illustrative elements.
6. Artwork: Specifies proportions and examples of artwork layout for promotional media (e.g., brochures, posters, signs, tourist maps, packaging, attire, souvenirs).

Discussion

1. **The presentation of Thai Phuan cultural identity in Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok, focuses on tangible cultural aspects** such as language, food, customs, performing arts, and attire. These elements are readily accessible for tourists within a limited timeframe, aligning with a tourism approach that emphasizes sensory immersion for a memorable experience. Using tangible culture to express identity rapidly engages visitors, consistent with Thanaphet's (2022) study on cultural identity promotion for Thai Yuan community tourism in Ton Tan Subdistrict, Sao Hai District, Saraburi Province. That study suggested that physical tourism identity includes allowing tourists to experience the ancient Ton Tan Floating Market, the Thai Yuan Folk Culture Hall, temples,

and community structures, alongside cultural identity aspects like language, performance, attire, and food.

2. **Communicating Thai Phuan identity in the digital era requires comprehensive communication elements**, including sender, receiver, message, and media. The process of producing digital media must identify the receiver, their tourism needs, and their preferred media channels. Social media remains highly popular, consistent with Saengduangkae's (2021) study on local identity communication to promote tourism in Ko Mak Subdistrict, Pak Phayun District, Phatthalung Province. That study found that Facebook pages and video media were effective, with community members actively participating in media production from planning to execution. While the context of the Thai Phuan community involves tourism managed by the elderly, making direct media production by them challenging, a clear communication design and shared objectives, combined with external contributors (e.g., university students) who understand digital audience needs, can be highly effective. When these external collaborators learn cultural content and the community verifies accuracy, it ensures targeted communication without cultural distortion.

3. **Cultural Identity of Thai Phuan in Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok.** The study found that the Thai Phuan in Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok, actively strive to preserve their traditional beliefs and customs through the Phuan language, food, traditions, performing arts, and attire. These elements of identity transmission in Pak Phli Thai Phuan align closely with findings from studies on Thai Phuan in the Northeast, which show that Thai Phuan have cultural products resulting from social interaction that reflect their identity and have become their cultural heritage (e.g., language, hand-woven fabrics, pha khama e-po, pha sin, mongkol 9 si, Phuan Ka-ler (Wiwatpatapee et al., 2022). Specifically, the continued use of the Phuan language or Thai Phuan language in communication within the Thai Phuan group supports George Herbert Mead's concept that language is central to self-creation, serving as a channel to transmit systems into shared symbols and social rules. Furthermore, this similarity reflects that despite living in different areas, Thai Phuan communities continue to inherit similar cultural products, characteristic of an ethnic community with three shared dimensions: a common name (Thai Phuan), shared myths of origin and descent, and a shared history (Smith, 1986, as cited in Suntornpesaj, 2005).

4. **Designing Organizational Identity for Thai Phuan Cultural Identity Communication.** The logo incorporates graphic shapes of a man playing the *khaen* and a Thai Phuan woman performing the Phuan dance, a prominent tradition of the Pak Phli Thai Phuan. This aims to communicate a memorable image of the Pak Phli Thai Phuan, consistent with the distinct characteristics of traditional media that reflect ethnic identity and ways of life unique to each locality (Kaewthep, 2002).

5. **Key Visual and Color Identity** utilize elements from the community for designing icons and defining primary communication colors, such as community architecture, attire, and Thai Phuan textiles. Selecting community-specific elements for design reflects the Pak Phli Thai Phuan's identity through visible signs that convey their unseen, unique identity. This aligns with Hall's (1977) concept that self-definition through representation involves selecting distinct, vibrant, easily understandable, and widely recognized characteristics while downplaying less interesting aspects of identity.

6. **Pictures and Artwork** for promotional media integrate other organizational identity components with design principles such as color usage, image composition, and proportion. This is consistent with Sirichana's (1996) principles of artistic composition for print media promotion, which outlines six key criteria: 1) Proportion in determining sizes and proportions for elements like logos; 2) Balance in arranging elements for visual

equilibrium; 3) Emphasis to highlight important sections; 4) Rhythm through repetitive and continuous movement; 5) Unity in harmonizing various elements; and 6) Harmony in the appropriate fit of components for coherence. All these aim to create, maintain, protect, and promote a positive image, ensuring the Thai Phuan of Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok, leave a favorable impression on society.

7. **Organizational identity design** also resulted from the researchers' fieldwork and the community's involvement in selecting cultural identities for communication. This aligns with Intanai et al. (2021), who found that community-participatory media development clearly showcases tourist attractions, lifestyles, and cultures. Such community involvement also empowers the Thai Phuan of Ko Wai Subdistrict, Pak Phli District, Nakhon Nayok, to recognize their self-worth and gain confidence. Community communication initiatives, even from a small part of the community, can elevate awareness and responsibility across the entire community to address issues and increase the volume of meaningful media (Kaewthep, 2002).

Conclusion

1. Analyze the target audience, specially new-generation tourists, to identify their preferences and demands for tourism experiences
2. Design messages that align with the needs and expectations of new-generation tourists
3. Utilize communication channels frequently used by new-generation tourists, selecting platforms that effectively reach and engage this audience
4. Shift the role of the communicator to new-generations who understanding of both the content and the preferred communication channels Thai Phuan in the digital era should determine the use of elements of the graphic appearance from local wisdom as follows
5. Graphic appearance should be composed of artistic elements that effectively convey objects, activities and stories of local cultural wisdom
6. Layout composition that consist of logo, key visual, color, pattern, picture, and artwork should apply knowledge of art and culture as a guide for design

Limitations of the Research

1. This is a qualitative research study. Data was collected from community leaders who primarily define concepts, directions, and cultural ways of life. While they are insiders and owners of the culture, most are elderly, which may present some generational limitations. Therefore, further survey research with younger generations who inherit Phuan culture would be beneficial. However, during the fieldwork, many young people were working outside the community, limiting data collection from this group of cultural inheritors.
2. It would be valuable to collect data from policy-level stakeholders at the provincial level regarding their approaches to developing Thai Phuan culture. This would allow the research findings to inform the design of cultural initiatives in the area.

Recommendations From the Research

1. Academic Aspect: The research yielded findings on cultural identity communication models tailored to tourist personas, highlighting tourism characteristics that align with the area's capital or potential. This will be a crucial variable in communicating and creating sustainable tourism experiences.
2. Social and Community Utilization: The relevant communities can utilize the developed media and message sets for presenting contemporary Thai Phuan identity in various digital

contexts, such as tourism promotion, empowering modern communities, and passing on Thai Phuan ways of life to future generations.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

I used Gemini, a generative AI, for translation assistance and to verify reference formatting (APA style) in this manuscript. The content and intellectual contributions remain my own.

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