

*Communications of the Leader of a Model Community for Community Tourism Management*

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**Abstract**

The objective of this research was to study the tourism management communication of the leaders of two communities that were named as model communities for tourism management in the aspects of 1) communication patterns; 2) content; and 3) choice of media for communication about tourism management. This was a qualitative research based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 10 key informants who were community leaders, committee members and group members of communities that were named as model communities for community tourism management, namely, the Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay Group in Kalasin Province and the Baan Dong Homestay Group in Prajinburi Province. The research tool was a semi-structured interview form. Data were analyzed through descriptive analysis. The results showed that 1) For communication patterns, the leaders of both communities mainly used informal, participatory communication. At Baan Dong Homestay Group the emphasis was on participatory communication with community leaders at all levels and with government agencies, while at Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay Group the emphasis was on communicating with villagers through coffee forums in every neighborhood. 2) For content, community leaders of both groups had similar communications content focusing on the unique features of their communities that made them attractive as tourist destinations, especially the local culture and way of life. 3) As for choice of media, community leaders of both groups used online social media and traditional folk media for communications both within the group and with tourists.

Keywords: Communication, community leader, community based tourism, homestay

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## **Introduction**

Tourism has been used as a tool for national development in Thailand. It is one of the primary strategies for economic development. Tourism generates revenue both directly and indirectly through taxes paid by enterprises in the tourism industry and through taxes paid by tourists, such as the airport tax and VAT on all their purchases of goods and services. Tourism also creates jobs and impacts investment in infrastructure, thereby improving the quality of life of the local people. What's more, any locality that has notable tourism resources can expand on them by promoting specialized tourism services, which bring more revenue into the community and provide tourists with more alternatives (Smith M. K., <https://www.memagazine.co.th/5145> accessed on 25 August, 2019).

Community-based tourism, through which tourists can experience the culture of a rural area and learn about the way of life while sharing their own culture with the locals, is an alternative kind of tourism that is gaining popularity among Thai tourists and those from other countries. Every tourism village uses its local culture, way of life and folk wisdom in communications to promote tourism. Up to now, most community-based tourism, although it is nominally undertaken in the form of group participation, actually depends on the direction of a few community leaders who drive it forward to be successful and sustainable. The leaders understand the context of the community, understand situations that occur and are the closest to the community. They are the centers of coordination for community development work. Community leaders have to use communications to transmit ideas about their policies, visions, and how they are to be enacted. Good communication by community leaders is essential to create good understanding and relations in the community for successful community-centered tourism management.

This led to the researchers' interest in studying the communication patterns community leaders used in their communications for the management of community-based tourism, as well as the content of those communications and community leaders' choice of media for communication about tourism management. The study was based on community leaders from two communities that were named as model communities for community tourism management, namely, the Baan Dong Homestay Group in Prajinburi Province in central Thailand and the Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay Group in Kalasin Province in northeast Thailand. Both of these communities have interesting tourism activities, outstanding, well-organized management, strong group leaders and have passed Homestay Thailand and Homestay ASEAN certification.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To study the communication patterns used by community leaders in the management of community tourism
2. To study the content of communication used by community leaders in the management of community tourism
3. To study the choice of media used by community leaders for communications in the management of community tourism

## **Research Methods**

This was a qualitative research based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The key informants were community leaders, committee members and group members of model community tourism groups (Baan Dong Homestay Group in Prajinburi Province and the Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay Group in Kalasin Province) for a total of 20 people. Research instruments consisted of semi-structured interview forms for both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions. Data were analyzed by descriptive analysis and were affirmed by data triangulation and methodological triangulation.

## Conclusion

### 1. Baan Dong Homestay Group

Baan Dong Homestay Group is located in Dong Kratohngyam Sub district in Sri Mahapho District, Prajinburi Province. Most members of the community are from the Thai Phuan ethnic group who emigrated from Vientiane and they work as farmers. Baan Dong has been recognized as an OTOP Village Champion (OVC) for the local home industries of making takraw balls and wire strainers using folk wisdom. The community also has unique traditions, rituals and cuisine. It is home to a Sufficiency Economy Learning Center and a Thai Phuan Museum. These all make the Baan Dong Community an interesting place to travel to and learn from. The leader of the community tourism group is Mrs. Duenpen Khantong. She founded the group and manages it. Other women householders in the community are committee members who help keep the group going.

**1.1 Communication pattern** Communications consisted mainly of conversations and consultations for planning the group's activities and for other purposes. Most exchanges took the form of informal communication, horizontal communication and participatory communication. Participatory communication included communication with community leaders at all levels and personnel of relevant government agencies involved with tourism management.

**1.2 Content** The group leader used Baan Dong's unique identity and characteristics in communications to promote tourism, linking them to the local culture and way of life. For instance, content about the Thai Phuan way of life, traditions and ceremonies, and local dishes like *madtone* and *khaojao biak* were presented to promote tourism. In addition, content about the community's identity was used to set policies and plans for community activities and to build participation and reinforce unity.



Figure 1: Thai Phuan Dance

**1.3 Media Use** The leader of Baan Dong Homestay Group regularly used social media, mainly Line application, to contact and coordinate with committee members and group members. The group used Facebook to communicate with tourists. In the case of communications to publicize tourism activities at the community, they tended to use mainly folk media. For instance, the story of the community was told through tourism activities, rituals and traditional games.

## **2. Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay Group**

The Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay Group is located in Moo 1, Nohnburi Subdistrict, Sahasakhan District, Kalasin Province. It is a relatively new village that was founded in 1982. Most of the residents fled there from None Sila Subdistrict in Sahasakhan District when their homes flooded. Most of the villagers are farmers or tradespeople. There are many important production groups making local products like woven shirts, processed fish products, and traditional sweets (*saku sai bla*). There are some old houses that are well preserved and shown to tourists and a park with dinosaur replica statues that is the village's main claim to fame. The community has been successful in passing down and maintaining local traditions like the Rum Wong Conga Dance, and they promote newer activities that they are trying to make part of the way of life like wearing traditional skirts to make merit at 9 temples on Dino Road. The community leader is Mr. Sahat Attanetikul, who is the founder and manager. The other committee members represent a broad range of occupations in the community.

**2.1 Communication pattern** Communications consisted mainly of conversations and consultations for planning the group's activities, problem solving and community development at weekly coffee councils every Saturday morning. These were informal communications to build participation in the community tourism activities. They also utilized mainly horizontal communication and participatory communication. They included community leaders both within and outside the village, leaders of groups and organizations, people from relevant government organizations and villagers.



Figure 2: coffee councils on Saturday morning

**2.2 Content** The leader of Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay Group uses the community's identity as a cultural preservation community as the major message in tourism management messages. The cultural heritage characteristics are linked to the way of life in the community, such as through the wearing of traditional skirts to make merit, which is both a tourism activity and a local custom. This activity promotes tourism and also builds participation and reinforces unity in the village.

**2.3 Media Use** The leader of Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay Group regularly used social media, mainly Line application, to contact and coordinate with committee members and group members. The group used Facebook to communicate with tourists. In the case of communications to publicize tourism activities at the community, they tended to use mainly folk media, such as using the dinosaur symbol to grab people's attention and getting publicity from news coverage of local traditions.

In conclusion, for **communication patterns**, leaders of both communities primarily used informal participatory communications. The Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay group mainly used Saturday morning coffee council meetings to generate participation in the community tourism activities. For **content**, the main emphasis for both communities was to use the community's identity and unique characteristics to communicate messages aimed at promoting tourism, and linked this to the people's culture and way of life. As for **choice of media**, they both used social media and folk media to communicate among members, within the community and with tourists.

The communications pattern of Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay was the more organized of the two because they held regular weekly meetings. Even though there was no agenda, just conversations over coffee, still having a regular meeting time and place gave more structure and order to the communications. Sahatsakhan Dino Road Homestay Group also used the dinosaur symbol in their communications with tourists, which made it easier to recognize and recall.

## **Discussion**

Baan Dong Homestay Group's leader used a participatory communication pattern that included community leaders at all levels and personnel of government agencies related to tourism. This kind of communication facilitates true participation by all parties. The people involved can play their roles as media in the community. If they also participate as committee members then they will be more inclined to support and cooperate with the group's operations and activities. This is consistent with the work of Puangchompoo Chaiyasa Saengrungruengroj (2013) who found that for community development it is necessary to promote participatory communication and give opportunities and incentives for all members of the community, village headmen, public health volunteers, members of housewives groups and youth leaders, to be included as committee members in order to continuously move the work forward.

Both groups studied used informal, horizontal communications. This way messages flow within the community and outside the community. There is wide exchange and spread of information. Pavelka (cited in Ploychompoo Tidtiyaprrn, 2010) suggested that the flow of information can also be looked at in terms of the boundaries in the community and outside the community. For example, there is an exchange of information between members of the community and also the use of communications can stimulate more communication within the community, or you can see information flows from outside media into the community and community members can use the same media to spread their messages to an audience outside the community.

Our finding that both communities used horizontal communications are also in agreement with the work of Rasika Angkura (2018), who found that (2561) most community

communications are horizontal communications consisting of conversations, consultations, and formal and informal sub group meetings. Meetings are held to present and explain plans and to make new plans for group management and activities. At meetings members jointly make decisions, organize activities and solve problems as they arise. Personal media is the core media because it is highly efficient. Other media like activities and social media are supplementary.

The choice of media for leaders of both tourism communities was online media and folk media. Social media is modern and has started to play an influential role at many levels. It is easily accessible and everyone can view it at once no matter where they are. It is convenient to use as a management tool. On the other hand, the folk media and activities media used by the tourism communities can always reach people in the village and all community members can engage with them. They reflect the character of the community (Berrigan F.J. ,1979). Also, folk media and activities media can be experienced with all 5 senses and they create an impression (Arunee Horadan, 2017). They are living media with creative energy and can constantly adapt and change (Somsuk Hinwiman, 2007).

The communication patterns and choice of media of the community leaders reflect a communications process that is based on the Alternative Development paradigm. This paradigm emphasizes participatory communication and community-centered development. It emphasizes horizontal communications and the content strategies are community-based. Mixed media are employed in tourism management.

### **Recommendations**

1. The tourism authority can use the Alternative Paradigm in setting its policies and approaches for supporting and promoting community-centered tourism, and such development can be driven by participatory communication.
2. In designing their communications, tourism communities should consider the context, environment, and unique characteristics of their community that might affect communications.
3. Tourism communities can build more participation in communications by opening more public forums for the exchange of information both within and outside the community. They can use digital media for publicizing their activities.

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