

Strategic Media Production for Tourism Promotion in Bangkok, Thailand: A Case Study of “Taste and Trails City Run Banthat Thong”

R-titaya Supsinwiwat, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Khuttipong Namjarutjareonkit, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Pasraporn Phandech, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Sarisa Natesawang, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
Duangnapha Binloy, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

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Abstract

Urban destinations increasingly use experiential events and digital media to diversify tourism identities and encourage new forms of place engagement. This study examined how strategic media production, experiential tourism, gamified urban running, and community participation were integrated into the Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong, a creative tourism project in Bangkok, Thailand. The project addressed the temporal imbalance of Banthat Thong Road, which is widely recognized as a popular evening food destination but attracts limited tourism activity in the early morning. A qualitative practice-based case study was employed. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews with purposively selected stakeholders, documentation of community co-creation, analysis of creative artefacts, official social media analytics, and publicly available user-generated content. The data were analyzed thematically across the pre-production, event production, and post-production phases. The findings show that strategic media production functioned not only as a promotional tool but also as an experience-design process. Gamified checkpoints, retro-game aesthetics, local breakfast experiences, cultural routes, and community interaction transformed running into a participatory form of urban exploration. Community collaboration strengthened the authenticity of the experience, while official and participant-generated media extended audience engagement beyond the event. The project introduced an alternative representation of Banthat Thong as a creative morning tourism destination, although the findings do not demonstrate a permanent change in destination image. This study highlights the potential of practice-based strategic communication to activate neighborhood tourism through the integration of creative experience design, community participation, and participatory digital media.

Keywords: strategic media production, experiential tourism, urban running, gamification, user-generated content, destination image, Banthat Thong Road

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Introduction

Digital communication technologies have substantially transformed how tourism destinations are promoted, experienced, and represented. Destination communication is no longer limited to official advertising or the one-way transmission of tourism information. Contemporary tourists obtain information from interconnected digital environments that include social media platforms, online communities, short-form video, electronic word-of-mouth, and user-generated content. These communication channels shape destination awareness, expectations, travel planning, and post-visit evaluations. Digital media therefore operate not only as promotional tools but also as spaces in which destination meanings are continuously produced and negotiated.

Tourism itself has also shifted from passive sightseeing toward experience-oriented travel. Contemporary visitors increasingly seek opportunities to participate in local culture, interact with residents, explore everyday environments, taste local food, and create personally meaningful memories. Kim et al. (2012) identified hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty as important dimensions of memorable tourism experiences. These dimensions suggest that destinations create value not only through physical attractions but also through the emotional, cognitive, social, and participatory qualities of the visitor experience.

Creative tourism extends this perspective by emphasizing active participation and the co-creation of experiences. Richards and Wilson (2006) argued that creative tourism can respond to the repetitive reproduction of cultural tourism products by providing more interactive and locally distinctive experiences. Instead of positioning visitors as passive observers, creative tourism allows them to engage with local knowledge, practices, stories, and communities.

Bangkok provides an appropriate setting for examining these developments. The city is characterized by cultural heritage, gastronomy, diverse communities, commercial districts, creative spaces, and contrasting forms of everyday urban life. In addition to major landmarks, neighborhood-scale destinations have become important locations for tourists seeking localized cultural and culinary experiences.

Banthat Thong Road, located in Pathum Wan District, has developed into a well-known food and lifestyle area. Its destination identity is strongly associated with restaurants, cafés, street activity, and a lively evening atmosphere. However, the use of the area remains temporally unbalanced. Tourism and commercial activities are concentrated during the afternoon and evening, while the early morning is comparatively inactive. This condition raises a practical tourism-development question: how might the area's local food, culture, community, and urban environment be activated and communicated as a morning tourism experience?

Urban running offers one potential response. Running has expanded beyond exercise and competition into active and experiential forms of tourism. Running through a neighborhood allows participants to encounter a destination through embodied movement, street-level observation, social interaction, and place-based discovery. When connected with local food, cultural interpretation, community encounters, and creative storytelling, a running event can become a platform for exploring and communicating urban identity.

The Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong project was developed from this premise. The project integrated urban running, local breakfast experiences, cultural and heritage exploration,

community interaction, gamified route design, and strategic digital media. It was intended not merely to organize a sporting event but to test how a creative tourism experience could introduce a different temporal representation of Banthat Thong.

Previous studies have addressed experiential tourism, creative tourism, destination image, social media, user-generated content, and sport-related travel. However, limited research has examined how these elements can be integrated through a practice-based communication project at the neighborhood scale. In particular, there remains insufficient understanding of how strategic media production can simultaneously support experience design, community co-creation, event implementation, digital participation, and the communication of an emerging destination identity.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how strategic media production was planned and implemented before, during, and after the Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong event.
2. To explore how experiential tourism, gamified urban running, local food, cultural exploration, and community participation were integrated into the event and media production process.
3. To examine how the event and its associated media contributed to an emerging representation of Banthat Thong Road as a creative morning tourism destination.

Literature and Conceptual Foundations

Strategic Media Production

Strategic communication involves the deliberate coordination of communication activities to achieve defined organizational or social objectives. Applied to tourism, it includes audience analysis, stakeholder engagement, destination storytelling, media selection, content production, distribution, interaction, and evaluation. Contemporary media production should consequently be understood as more than the technical creation of promotional materials. It is an integrated process through which destination meanings and visitor expectations are designed and circulated. In the present study, strategic media production consisted of three interconnected phases.

- Pre-production included field research, audience and contextual analysis, stakeholder consultation, route planning, communication objectives, content strategy, and visual identity development.
- Production included the implementation of the tourism experience, on-site media creation, real-time communication, participant interaction, and event storytelling.
- Post-production included editing, content distribution, social media monitoring, evaluation, and the analysis of user-generated content.

This three-phase structure positions media production as both a communication process and a component of tourism experience design.

Experiential and Creative Tourism

Experiential tourism emphasizes active, meaningful, and memorable engagement with destinations. Visitors participate in activities that connect them with places through emotion, learning, sensory involvement, social interaction, and personal interpretation. The significance

of local culture, involvement, novelty, and meaningfulness in memorable tourism experiences supports the integration of neighborhood stories, food, interaction, and exploration into destination activities. Creative tourism further emphasizes co-created experiences that are connected to the distinctive qualities of a destination. Creative place-making can involve local businesses, cultural actors, residents, designers, and visitors in the construction of tourism meanings. Such approaches shift destination development from standardized cultural consumption toward participatory experiences grounded in local resources and identities. In this study, experiential tourism was operationalized through four components: urban running and physical exploration; local breakfast and food experiences; cultural and heritage interpretation; and direct interaction with local businesses and community members.

Gamified Tourism Experience

Gamification refers to the use of game-related elements in non-game settings to encourage motivation, participation, progression, exploration, and engagement. A tourism experience may be gamified through checkpoints, levels, tasks, discoveries, rewards, achievement symbols, route progression, and interactive storytelling. The project's use of gamification extended beyond decorative graphics. Retro-game culture and pixel-art aesthetics informed the event's visual identity, but game structures were also incorporated into the route. Participants moved through sequential checkpoints, while food stations and cultural locations became points of discovery and experiential reward. The distinction is methodologically important. Visual references to games alone do not constitute substantive gamification. In this project, the term is justified because progression, checkpoints, symbolic achievements, discoveries, and rewards were embedded in the participant journey.

Community Co-creation

Community participation is essential when tourism experiences draw upon local knowledge, food, stories, commercial resources, and everyday environments. Local stakeholders can provide practical and cultural information unavailable through desk research, including operating patterns, neighborhood narratives, route conditions, community sensitivities, and appropriate forms of visitor engagement. Co-creation also reduces the risk that destinations will be represented entirely through externally imposed imagery. Marques and Borba (2017) demonstrated that creative tourism and digital technology can support collaborative urban experience development. In the present project, local businesses and stakeholders contributed to food selection, route planning, cultural content, operational arrangements, and participant interaction.

User-Generated Content and Destination Image

Social media enables tourists to act as destination content producers. User-generated content includes photographs, videos, captions, reviews, hashtags, geotagged posts, and stories created by visitors. Such content can expand the circulation of destination experiences beyond official communication channels.

UGC is relevant because participants do not simply reproduce official messages. They select, interpret, and publicly represent aspects of an experience that they consider meaningful. The destination image appearing online is therefore co-created through interactions among official organizations, local stakeholders, participants, and digital audiences.

For Banthat Thong, the research did not begin from an absence of destination image. The area already possessed a recognizable culinary and evening-oriented identity. The project instead sought to introduce an additional temporal association: Banthat Thong as a location for morning running, breakfast, cultural exploration, and community interaction.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative practice-based case study design. Practice-based research is appropriate when creative practice functions as both the object of investigation and a method through which knowledge is produced. The value of the research therefore lies not only in the resulting artefacts or event but also in the documented processes of researching, designing, implementing, observing, evaluating, and reflecting on practice.

Candy and Edmonds (2018) explain that practice-based research in the creative arts can generate scholarly knowledge through systematic investigation embedded in creative production. This approach requires the creative process to be documented and critically interpreted rather than presented merely as professional practice.

The bounded case was the Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong. The study examined the project across three phases: pre-production, production during the event, and post-production.

Research Context and Participants

The research site was Banthat Thong Road, Pathum Wan District, Bangkok. The area was selected because of its established food identity, active evening economy, community-based businesses, urban heritage, and comparatively limited morning activity.

Participants and stakeholders included: local business owners and community representatives; event organizers; creative and media-production personnel; collaborating organizations; runners and visitors participating in the activity; and individuals responsible for route, food, communication, and operations.

Interview participants were selected through purposive sampling according to their direct involvement in or knowledge of the project.

Data Collection

Multiple data sources were employed to enable methodological triangulation.

Participant observation was conducted during site preparation, route development, and the event. The researchers examined environmental conditions, morning and evening patterns of activity, route accessibility, participant movement, checkpoint interaction, engagement with food and cultural materials, community encounters, and media-creation behavior.

Field notes, photographs, video recordings, route documentation, and reflective records were used to document observations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders.

Co-Creation and Process Documentation: The researchers examined meeting notes, route-development documents, communication plans, stakeholder feedback, design drafts, and revisions. These materials documented how the project evolved through collaboration and how local knowledge influenced the event.

Creative Artefacts: Artefacts included the event name, logo, visual identity, promotional materials, route maps, checkpoint graphics, medals, participant materials, official photographs, videos, and social media content. They were analyzed as parts of the experience and communication design rather than merely as promotional outputs.

Social Media Analytics and UGC: Post-event evidence included available metrics from official media channels, such as reach, impressions, views, reactions, comments, shares, saves, and engagement rate.

Publicly available UGC was identified through designated hashtags, geotags, tagged accounts, photographs, short-form videos, captions, and participant stories.

Creative Production Process

During pre-production, the project team conducted site observation, stakeholder consultation, co-creation, route planning, concept development, and visual identity design. Retro-game culture and pixel-art aesthetics were selected to communicate movement, playfulness, progression, accessibility, and nostalgia.

Figure 1

Retro-Game Visual Identity Developed for the Taste and Trails City Run



The project title combined two experiential dimensions. Taste referred to local breakfast, culinary heritage, and food businesses. Trails referred to running, movement, local stories, cultural places, and urban discovery.

During production, participants followed a route connecting food stations, cultural locations, neighborhood spaces, and community hosts. Checkpoints operated as experiential levels, while food and cultural encounters functioned as discoveries or symbolic rewards. Researchers observed participant behavior, interactions, emotional responses, media creation, and route engagement.

During post-production, media materials were edited and distributed, platform performance was reviewed, and participant-generated content was collected and categorized.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts, observations, field notes, planning documents, artefacts, and UGC were analyzed using thematic analysis. The procedure involved familiarization, preliminary coding, category development, theme generation, comparison across sources, and interpretation in relation to the conceptual framework.

A combined deductive–inductive approach was used. Deductive categories were informed by strategic media production, experiential tourism, gamification, community participation, UGC, and destination image. Inductive coding identified patterns that emerged from stakeholder accounts, observed behavior, and digital content.

Official social media metrics were analyzed descriptively. They were treated as evidence of communication exposure and interaction, not as proof that the event caused long-term destination-image change.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Credibility was strengthened by comparing interviews, observations, creative artefacts, project records, official digital metrics, and UGC. An audit trail of major production decisions and design revisions should be maintained. Selected stakeholder interpretations may also be reviewed through member checking.

Reflexivity was necessary because the researchers participated in both project implementation and evaluation. This dual role was addressed through reflective documentation, triangulation, and the avoidance of unsupported promotional claims.

Formal interviewees were informed about the research and asked to provide consent. Identifying information should be removed from quotations and UGC unless explicit permission has been obtained.

Findings and Discussion

Strategic Media Production Operated as Experience Design

The findings indicated that strategic media production extended beyond event promotion. It connected field research, stakeholder consultation, route planning, visual communication, experience implementation, and post-event storytelling.

Local food, neighborhood narratives, community knowledge, and spatial conditions informed both the event and its media identity. Communication artefacts therefore did not merely

advertise a pre-existing experience; they helped structure how the experience was understood and navigated.

Before the event, promotional media created awareness and introduced the combined running, food, and cultural concept. During the event, maps, checkpoint materials, signage, visual identity, and real-time content shaped participant interpretation. Afterward, edited and participant-generated media extended the symbolic duration of the project.

Strategic media production consequently performed three related functions: attracting participation, organizing the visitor journey, and extending destination storytelling.

Gamification Transformed Running Into a Tourism Journey

The route transformed running from an exercise-centered activity into a sequence of urban encounters. Participants progressed through checkpoints linking local food, cultural locations, and community stories.

The retro-game concept established a coherent narrative of movement and discovery. Pixel-art graphics made the project recognizable, while checkpoints and rewards translated the visual theme into the physical structure of participation.

Observation indicated that participants actively stopped at checkpoints, interacted with local businesses, photographed cultural locations, and shared their experiences through social media.

Food and Community Interaction Grounded the Experience in Place

Local breakfast differentiated the project from conventional running events and connected physical activity with the culinary identity of Banthat Thong. Food was presented not only as refreshment but also as a form of local heritage and a medium of interaction between participants and businesses.

Community stakeholders supplied practical and cultural knowledge related to route conditions, business operations, food selection, and neighborhood narratives. Their participation increased the local relevance of the activity and reduced dependence on externally constructed representations.

During the event, residents, business owners, and community participants acted as hosts and interpreters of place. The destination was therefore experienced through interpersonal encounters as well as through physical sites and media content.

Digital Participation Extended the Event

Official media established a consistent representation of the event, while UGC introduced personal interpretations. Participant-created content represented elements such as running, breakfast, retro-game graphics, social interaction, cultural locations, and Banthat Thong's morning atmosphere.

UGC extended the event beyond the physical site and allowed participants to become co-communicators. However, the analysis should distinguish between communication reach and

deeper destination effects. High reach or engagement does not independently demonstrate destination-image change.

The Project Introduced an Emerging Morning Identity

Across the experience design, observations, stakeholder accounts, official media, and participant content, Banthat Thong was represented differently from its established evening image. During the project, the area appeared as a place for morning exercise, breakfast, neighborhood discovery, cultural engagement, and community interaction.

The evidence supports the conclusion that the project introduced and tested an alternative destination representation. It does not demonstrate that Banthat Thong's long-term public image was permanently transformed. Such a claim would require longitudinal evidence, repeated activities, comparative visitor data, or pre-event and post-event image measurement.

The academically defensible interpretation is therefore that strategic media production and creative event design contributed to an emerging morning tourism identity.

Conclusions

This study examined how strategic media production was integrated with experiential tourism, gamified urban running, local food, cultural exploration, and community participation through the Taste and Trails City Run: Banthat Thong project.

The study produced three principal conclusions. First, strategic media production functioned as an experience-design mechanism rather than solely as event promotion. Research, planning, visual identity, route materials, on-site communication, digital distribution, and evaluation collectively shaped the tourism experience.

Second, the gamified route transformed running into a participatory form of urban tourism. Movement was connected with checkpoints, food, stories, cultural locations, and community encounters. The project illustrates that gamification is most meaningful when game elements are embedded in the participant journey rather than used only as visual decoration.

Third, community co-creation and digital participation expanded the range of actors involved in destination communication. Businesses and local stakeholders contributed place-based knowledge and hosted experiences, while participants extended the project through UGC and electronic word-of-mouth.

The theoretical contribution lies in positioning strategic media production as an integrative process linking experience design, community participation, embodied tourism, and participatory digital communication. The practical contribution is a neighborhood-scale approach that urban destinations may use to activate underused periods of the day without replacing their established identities.

The study is limited by its focus on a single event and destination. The researchers' simultaneous roles as creators and evaluators may also have introduced interpretive bias. Social media evidence represented only publicly visible users and could not capture all participant experiences. Most importantly, the design assessed short-term representations and did not measure long-term destination-image transformation.

Future studies should employ repeated events, longitudinal digital analysis, pre-event and post-event surveys, visitor interviews, control or comparison areas, and economic indicators relating to local business activity. Such research would clarify whether an emerging morning identity becomes sustained over time.

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Contact email: noon_imp@hotmail.com