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Development of Brand Communication for Pla Meng in Surat Thani Province

Thatsanawadi Kaeosanit*

Faculty of Management Sciences, Surat Thani Rajabhat University, Surat Thani, 84100 Thailand

Abstract

This study aimed to (1) examine the local identity of Pla Meng (Stinging Catfish) in Surat Thani, (2) develop brand communication guidelines for Pla Meng, and (3) evaluate the effectiveness of these guidelines. The research was grounded in theories of marketing communication, communication development, brand identity, and related empirical studies. A mixed-methods design was employed. The qualitative phase involved documentary research, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participant observation, engaging a total of 54 key informants. The quantitative phase consisted of a questionnaire survey administered to 400 respondents, comprising local residents and tourists in Surat Thani. The findings indicate that the identity of Pla Meng is defined by its status as a native freshwater species of Surat Thani, distinguished by its firm, fibrous flesh, low fat content, and non-mushy texture, as well as its traditional processing methods based on local wisdom. The proposed brand communication guidelines consist of five components: fish farming, smoked Pla Meng production, product processing, menu innovation, and market distribution, with information disseminated primarily through social media platforms. Hypothesis testing indicated that personal variables, such as age, education, occupation, income, and place of residence, significantly influence levels of brand awareness of Pla Meng through digital marketing communication. Overall brand awareness remains relatively low; however, a strong positive correlation was found between brand awareness and consumer perceptions of the Pla Meng brand. The study proposes communication strategies that foreground local identity and cultural value to strengthen brand positioning and enhance the capacity of community-based entrepreneurs, thereby supporting regional resource utilization and local economic development.

Keywords: Communication, Digital marketing communication, Brand, Pla Meng

* **Corresponding Author**
e-mail: thatsanawadi.kae@sru.ac.th
ORCID iD: 0009-0008-2751-6898

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Introduction

Strengthening local community economies is a strategic approach to enhancing competitiveness, fostering self-reliance, and improving household income, thereby supporting national development from the grassroots level. In Thailand, such efforts also contribute to the emergence of innovative, resilient communities.

Surat Thani, the largest province in the upper southern region, has undergone extensive agricultural and agro-industrial development. The province benefits from abundant natural resources, particularly the Tapi and Phum Duang river basins, which play a crucial role in shaping the region's agricultural systems. These rivers supply nutrient-rich sediments that support local livelihoods, especially in areas such as Ban Na Doem district. One notable resource linked to this riverine ecology is Pla Meng (Stinging Catfish), which has long served as both a cultural asset and a significant source of income for local residents (Department of Freshwater Aquaculture Research and Development, 2020).

In 2022, Pla Meng from Surat Thani received Geographical Indication (GI) certification, becoming the province's sixth registered GI product. The fish, a scaleless freshwater species similar to catfish, is valued for its firm texture, low-fat content, and versatility in fresh and smoked forms produced through traditional community-based methods. Its cultivation and processing currently span eight districts: Chaiburi, Phrasaeng, Wiang Sa, Ban Na San, Khian Sa, Ban Na Doem, Phunphin, and Mueang Surat Thani (Department of Intellectual Property, 2022).

As a culturally rooted food product, Pla Meng embodies regional identity, traditional knowledge, and local culinary heritage, while offering economic potential through value-added processing. Developing brand communication for Pla Meng aligns with national policy promoting cultural capital under the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) economic model and the 5F soft power framework—Food, Film and Video, Fashion, Fighting, and Festivals (National Science and Technology Development Agency, 2021).

To elevate community products into commercially competitive brands, strategic brand building is required to establish brand equity and consumer recognition. Aaker (1991 as cited in Editorial Board of Brand Age Essential Magazine, 2010) identifies four core dimensions of brand equity—brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty—all of which must be supported through coherent and sustained marketing communication. For Pla Meng, effective communication is essential not only to expand market reach beyond local distribution but also to convey the product's cultural relevance and geographical identity.

Despite its economic and cultural value, Pla Meng production remains primarily small-scale and family operated, creating challenges in standardization, branding, and market expansion. To address these gaps, the present

study employs a research and development–based communication framework to explore the local identity of Pla Meng and develop strategic brand communication guidelines.

The study was conducted in two phases. First, documentary research, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions were carried out with 12 Pla Meng farmers to investigate local identity. Second, a participatory brand communication development process was implemented in collaboration with 30 university students, Pla Meng producers, and three marketing communication experts. The study also assessed the effectiveness of current communication strategies through questionnaires administered to 12 producers and 400 consumers. Additionally, the study tested whether personal demographic factors influence consumer perceptions of Pla Meng through digital marketing communication.

The expected contribution of this research is twofold: (1) to expand academic understanding of participatory, community-based brand communication, and (2) to support local enterprise capacity-building through knowledge-based innovation, strengthening grassroots economies in line with the philosophy of sufficiency economy and the promotion of Surat Thani's culinary heritage.

Objectives

1. To study the local identity of Pla Meng in Surat Thani.
2. To develop a brand communication guideline for Pla Meng in Surat Thani.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the brand communication for Pla Meng in Surat Thani.

Literature Review

This study on brand communication for Pla Meng (Stinging Catfish) in Surat Thani draws upon concepts and theories related to marketing communication, communication development, identity, branding, and community-based product research. The following section synthesizes the key theoretical foundations and related empirical studies that inform the present research.

Marketing Communication

Marketing communication refers to the strategic use of communication tools to support marketing activities, in which producers or marketers act as message senders and consumers as receivers who provide feedback after message exposure (Sinsuwan, N. 2022). Digital and social media platforms now play a central role in brand communication, with Facebook, LINE Official Account, YouTube, X (Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok identified as Thailand's most widely used platforms for business and marketing communication (Triphobsakul, 2022). These platforms enable targeted, interactive, and cost-effective communication, which is particularly relevant for community enterprises seeking wider brand visibility.

Communication Development

The development of an effective communication strategy requires careful consideration of message content, communication objectives, audience characteristics, and the levels of communication involved. Message design should be grounded in the analysis of contextual factors and aligned with the characteristics of the selected communication channels (Kleechaya, 2021). Establishing a clear communication strategy ensures message consistency, audience engagement, and effective perception management. A systematic message design process is therefore necessary to guide the development of brand communication for Pla Meng.

Identity

Identity refers to the combination of distinctive characteristics that make an object, group, or community recognizable and memorable. Cultural identity, in particular, evolves in response to external influences, including globalization (The Royal Society of Thailand, 2015). Plienrung (2021) emphasizes that identity is fundamentally rooted in the desire for distinction and uniqueness. For local products, identity reflects both place-based characteristics and cultural meaning, forming an essential component of value creation and branding.

Brand

A brand represents the perception, emotional response, and associations held by consumers when encountering a product name or symbol. It integrates three core elements: (1) Product – the tangible offering, (2) Value – functional and emotional benefits, and (3) Association – the meaning and relationship established with consumers (Kleechaya, 2021). Kongarchaphat, B. (2019) adds that strong Thai and local brands rely on three attributes:

1. Identity – distinctiveness and recognizability linked to place or culture;
2. Local Wisdom – accumulated traditional knowledge and skills;
3. Creativity – innovation that enhances product value and modern relevance.

These attributes are central to building brand equity and market competitiveness for community products such as Pla Meng.

Review of Related Studies

Previous research reinforces the significance of local history, communication patterns, and cultural identity in developing effective community brand communication. Suwantip et al. (2021), Chamnian (2020), and Buadis & Phimphro (2021) highlight the importance of integrating local knowledge and marketing communication tools to strengthen community product branding.

Studies on communication development, including Phuangok & Panleow (2024) and Chaisuwan (2015), further indicate that brand communication strategies must be grounded in an analysis of cultural capital and community potential, supported by an appropriate marketing communication framework.

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Research on cultural identity communication such as Roemsri (2023) on Sakon Nakhon indigo-dyed fabrics and Chamnian et al. (2023) on traditional fish-trap making, demonstrates that identity is dynamic, selectively constructed, and requires collaboration between communities and government agencies for effective representation.

Community branding studies, including Thongyaem & Leevisitpattana (2020) and Sinruangwilai & Rattanatai, (2021), conclude that analyzing community identity to inform brand content is essential for building consumer engagement and brand recognition, especially in digital markets. International studies by Pofuss, J. (2020) and Oscar & Tanuwijaya (2021) corroborate that brand communication significantly enhances product competitiveness for small producers and agricultural sectors.

Conceptual Framework

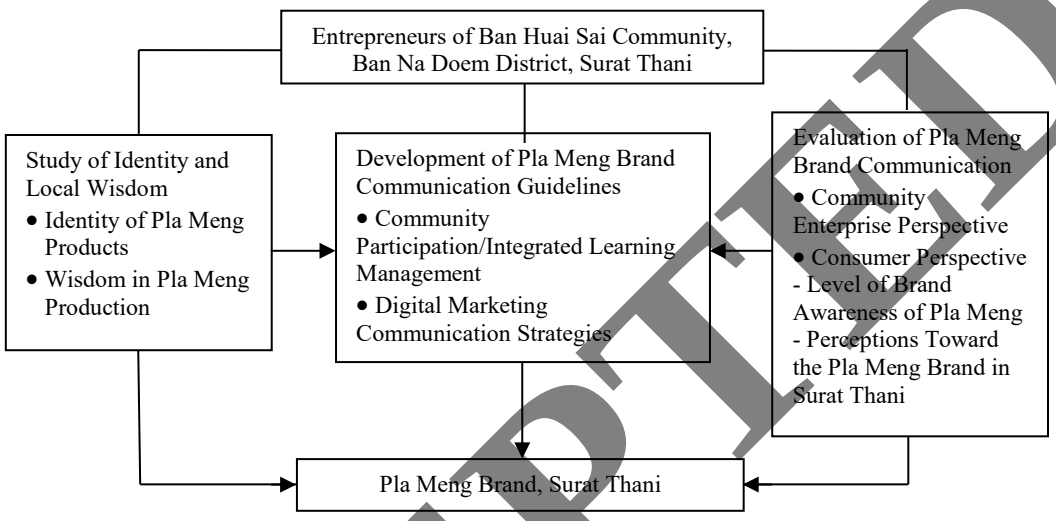

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design. For the qualitative research, the researcher conducted documentary analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with 12 key informants, who were Pla Meng farmers. In addition, non-participant observation was conducted during the brand communication practice sessions, along with an analysis of the media formats and content produced to communicate the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani. The research was integrated with the Southern Cultural Communication course, allowing 30 students to participate in brand communication practice in collaboration with Pla Meng farmers. Furthermore, 3 marketing communication experts were invited to critique and provide recommendations for improving the project. The study also included in-depth interviews with 12 Pla Meng product producers to gather further insights. For the quantitative research, data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 400 consumers, including residents of Surat Thani and tourists visiting the province. The data were analyzed using the following statistical methods: frequency and percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Hypothesis testing through t-test (comparing mean differences between two groups), F-test using one-way ANOVA to analyze variance. In cases where significant differences were found at a 0.05 level of statistical significance, Scheffé's method was applied for pairwise comparison. Additionally, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine correlations.

Results

1. Local Identity of Pla Meng in Surat Thani

The study on the local identity of Pla Meng in Surat Thani reveals that products processed and distributed by the Pla Meng Large-Scale Community Enterprise in Sub Thawee Subdistrict, Ban Na Doem District, include fresh Pla Meng, smoked grilled Pla Meng, semi-instant Pla Meng salad, semi-instant Pla Meng tom klong (spicy fish soup), and Pla Meng chili paste.

The prices vary according to the level of processing and distribution channels: Fresh Pla Meng: 400 - 600 THB per kilogram. Semi-instant Pla Meng salad and Pla Meng tom klong: 159 THB per box. Smoked grilled Pla Meng: 250 THB per box or 2,400 - 3,500 THB per kilogram and Pla Meng chili paste: 69 THB per jar.

Pla Meng products are available through various channels such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and online platforms. These include the Huai Sai Community Enterprise Facebook page, SRU Shop (at Suratthani Rajabhat University and on Shopee), 7-Eleven, and Tops Supermarket in Central Department Stores. Marketing promotions such asdiscounts, promo codes, and free shipping were used to attract customers. Most Pla Meng consumers are restaurants, eateries, and hotels in Surat Thani and nearby areas. The distinguishing feature of Pla Meng is its status as a freshwater fish unique to Surat Thani, characterized by its firm texture, low fat content, and a production process rooted in local wisdom.

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The Pla Meng farming group began by breeding natural fish species, mimicking their natural habitat. They also received fish breeds from the Freshwater Fisheries Research and Development Center of Surat Thani. This success led to the formation of the Huai Sai Learning Center, spearheaded by Mr. Kittisak Nakkun. This structured community enterprise, known as the Huai Sai Model, serves as a sufficiency economy learning center with comprehensive agricultural operations.

2. Communication Guideline for the Pla Meng Brand in Surat Thani

The development of communication guidelines involved hands-on workshops analyzing media formats and content for the Pla Meng brand. Marketing communication experts were invited to provide critiques and recommendations. The study, integrated with the Local Cultural Communication course in the Communication Arts program at Suratthani Rajabhat University, identified five key areas: Pla Meng farming process, smoked grilled Pla Meng production, processing and packaging, culinary innovations using Pla Meng and distribution to the market. Students collaborated with community enterprise members to produce visual content, primarily using platforms like Facebook and TikTok. Marketing communication experts reviewed the output and provided recommendations for developing the Pla Meng brand communication guideline across four key dimensions: the development of the sender, the development of message content, the development of communication channels, and the development of the receiver engagement.

In addition, the outcomes from the Pla Meng brand communication practice and the critique and recommendations provided by marketing communication experts led to the development of a conceptual framework for designing a workshop curriculum on the use of digital media to enhance brand communication skills, as detailed below.

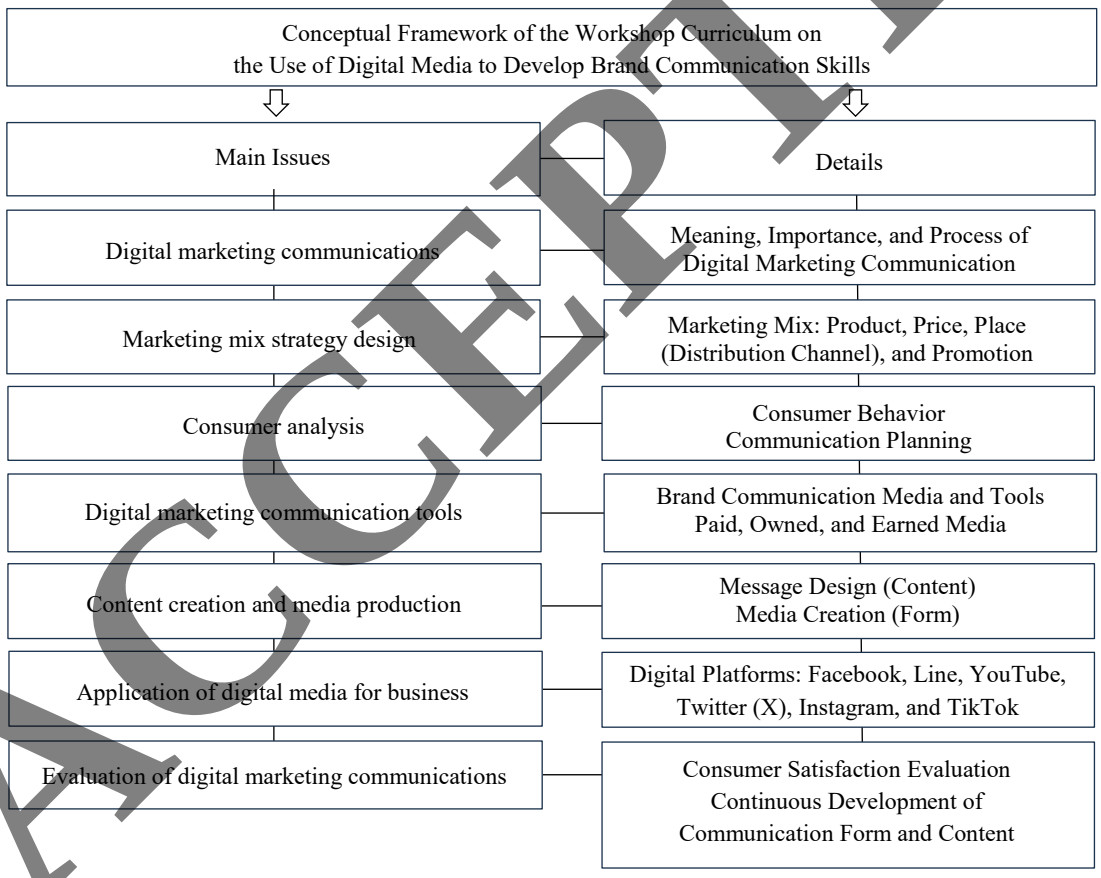

Figure 2 Conceptual Framework of the Workshop Curriculum on the Use of Digital Media to Develop Brand Communication Skills

3. Evaluation of Pla Meng Brand Communication

3.1 Community Enterprise Perspective

The evaluation of brand communication among members of the Pla Meng Large-Scale Community Enterprise Group, located in Sub Tai Subdistrict, Ban Na Doem District, Surat Thani, revealed that the group currently uses social media channels, particularly Facebook, under the names "Huai Sai Community Enterprise Pla Meng Surat Thani", "Pla Meng", and "Phuyaitho Nakul", to raise consumer awareness about Pla Meng products from Surat Thani. The community enterprise group expressed the view that mass media should serve as the primary channel for

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communicating the Pla Meng brand, as it can reach a large target audience and is considered credible. Meanwhile, social media should be used as a secondary channel, given its growing popularity in the modern communication landscape. The group also suggested that the content presented in the media should provide information about Pla Meng as a geographical indication (GI) of Surat Thani, including local wisdom in fish farming, production processes, and product transformation. Such content would help target audiences to recognize, understand, and make purchase decisions regarding Pla Meng products. It was further recommended that brand communication be conducted through popular media platforms used by the general public today, such as Facebook and TikTok.

3.2 Consumer Perspective

The researcher conducted a study to evaluate the communication of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani, with the data analysis divided into 6 sections as follows:

1. Analysis of respondents' personal factors: The majority of respondents were female and between 36 and 45 years of age. Most had an education level below a bachelor's degree and were self-employed or engaged in trade/business. Their average monthly income ranged from 25,001 to 35,000 baht, and most respondents were residents of Surat Thani Province.

2. Analysis of brand awareness of Pla Meng, through digital marketing communication: Overall, the level of brand awareness through digital marketing communication was low. When considering each type of media, the awareness level was moderate for Facebook (1 medium); low for YouTube and TikTok (2 media); and very low for Line, Twitter (X), and Instagram (3 media), respectively.

3. Analysis of the level of brand awareness of Pla Meng: The overall and specific aspects of brand awareness were found to be at the lowest level. The areas with the lowest awareness included: Knowledge of Pla Meng; Recognition of Pla Meng products as a provincial signature product; Perception of Pla Meng products as high-quality products; and Awareness of the benefits and value of Pla Meng products, respectively.

4. Analysis of opinions toward the Pla Meng brand: The overall and specific aspects of opinions toward the Pla Meng brand were also at the lowest level. The least favorable opinions were: Choosing to consume Pla Meng products when visiting Surat Thani; Desiring to purchase community products, particularly Pla Meng products in Surat Thani; Repurchasing Pla Meng products in the future; and Recommending Pla Meng products to friends, family members, or others, respectively.

5. Comparative analysis of brand awareness through digital marketing communication by personal factors: Overall, there were statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level in brand awareness through digital marketing communication according to age, education, occupation, income, and place of residence, as shown in Table 1-6.

Table 1 Respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing, by gender

Digital Marketing Communication	Gender		t	Sig	Interpret
	Male	Female			
1. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Facebook.	3.26 (Moderate)	3.36 (Moderate)	-1.16	0.24	Not Significantly different
2. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Line.	1.21 (Very low)	1.16 (Very low)	1.27	0.20	Not Significantly different
3. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through YouTube.	2.43 (Low)	2.41 (Low)	0.18	0.85	Not Significantly different
4. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Twitter (X).	1.13 (Very low)	1.14 (Very low)	-0.25	0.79	Not Significantly different
5. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Instagram.	1.06 (Very low)	1.07 (Very low)	-0.54	0.58	Not Significantly different
6. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through TikTok.	2.17 (Low)	2.25 (Low)	-0.95	0.34	Not Significantly different

As shown in Table 1, the comparison of respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing communication, by gender, indicated that there were no significant differences between female and male respondents in awareness across each type of digital media.

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Table 2 Respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing, by age

Digital Marketing Communication	Age					F	Sig	Interpret
	Under 25 years	25 – 35 years	36 – 45 years	46 – 55 years	56 years And above			
1. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Facebook.	3.45 (High)	3.52 (High)	3.43 (High)	3.39 (Moderate)	2.65 (Moderate)	13.21*	0.00	Significantly different
2. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Line.	1.13 (Very low)	1.24 (Very low)	1.21 (Very low)	1.19 (Very low)	1.11 (Very low)	1.56	0.18	Not Significantly different
3. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through YouTube.	2.67 (Moderate)	2.70 (Moderate)	2.66 (Moderate)	2.31 (Low)	1.52 (Very low)	40.33*	0.00	Significantly different
4. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Twitter (X).	1.25 (Very low)	1.38 (Very low)	1.04 (Very low)	1.03 (Very low)	1.02 (Very low)	20.97*	0.00	Significantly different
5. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Instagram.	1.03 (Very low)	1.20 (Very low)	1.03 (Very low)	1.03 (Very low)	1.03 (Very low)	8.86*	0.00	Significantly different
6. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through TikTok.	2.62 (Moderate)	2.56 (Low)	2.66 (Moderate)	1.81 (Low)	1.05 (Very low)	143.44*	0.00	Significantly different
Total average								

* Sig. < 0.05

As shown in Table 2, the comparison of respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing communication, by age, revealed that awareness via Facebook, YouTube, Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok differed significantly at the 0.05 level. In contrast, awareness through Line did not show a significant difference.

Table 3 Respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing, by education

Digital Marketing Communication	Educational Level			F	Sig	Interpret
	Below Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Above Bachelor's degree			
1. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Facebook.	3.15 (Moderate)	3.48 (High)	3.34 (Moderate)	6.69*	0.001	Significantly different
2. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Line.	1.16 (Very low)	1.20 (Very low)	1.24 (Very low)	0.83	0.43	Not Significantly different
3. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through YouTube.	2.16 (Low)	2.64 (Moderate)	2.69 (Moderate)	21.97*	0.00	Significantly different
4. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Twitter (X).	1.11 (Very low)	1.18 (Very low)	1.07 (Very low)	2.86	0.05	Not Significantly different
5. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Instagram.	1.03 (Very low)	1.09 (Very low)	1.10 (Very low)	2.96	0.05	Not Significantly different
6. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through TikTok.	1.79 (Very low)	2.56 (Low)	2.76 (Moderate)	70.75*	0.00	Significantly different

* Sig. < 0.05

As shown in Table 3, the comparison of respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing communication, by educational level, revealed that awareness via Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok differed significantly at the 0.05 level. In contrast, awareness through Line, Twitter (X), and Instagram did not differ significantly.

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Table 4 Respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing, by occupation

Digital Marketing Communication	Occupation						F	Sig	Interpret
	Own business	Company employee	Government officer	Student	Farmer	Housewife			
1. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Facebook.	3.41 (High)	3.46 (High)	3.48 (High)	3.46 (High)	3.02 (Moderate)	2.86 (Moderate)	5.06*	0.00	Significantly different
2. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Line.	1.13 (Very low)	1.16 (Very low)	1.34 (Very low)	1.17 (Very low)	1.17 (Very low)	1.00 (Very low)	3.06*	0.01	Significantly different
3. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through YouTube.	2.29 (Low)	2.73 (Low)	2.77 (Moderate)	2.65 (Moderate)	2.02 (Low)	1.71 (Very low)	18.01*	0.00	Significantly different
4. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Twitter (X).	1.11 (Very low)	1.13 (Very low)	1.26 (Very low)	1.30 (Very low)	1.02 (Very low)	1.07 (Very low)	7.08*	0.00	Significantly different
5. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Instagram.	1.11 (Very low)	1.09 (Very low)	1.06 (Very low)	1.02 (Very low)	1.04 (Very low)	1.00 (Very low)	1.64	0.14	Not Significantly different
6. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through TikTok.	2.36 (Low)	2.68 (Moderate)	2.68 (Moderate)	2.59 (Low)	1.43 (Very low)	1.00 (Very low)	90.38*	0.00	Significantly different

* Sig. < 0.05

As shown in Table 4, the comparison of respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing communication, by occupation, revealed that awareness via Facebook, Line, YouTube, Twitter (X), and TikTok differed significantly at the 0.05 level. In contrast, awareness through Instagram did not differ significantly.

Table 5 Respondents' Awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing, by income

Digital Marketing Communication	Income					F	Sig	Interpret
	Less than 15,000 baht	15,001-25,000 baht	25,001-35,000 baht	More than 35,001 baht	No income			
1. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Facebook.	3.10 (Moderate)	3.42 (High)	3.41 (High)	3.40 (High)	2.86 (Moderate)	3.61*	0.00	Significantly different
2. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Line.	1.15 (Very low)	1.17 (Very low)	1.20 (Very low)	1.47 (Very low)	1.00 (Very low)	3.18*	0.01	Significantly different
3. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through YouTube.	2.18 (Low)	2.42 (Low)	2.61 (Moderate)	2.53 (Low)	1.71 (Very low)	8.58*	0.00	Significantly different
4. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Twitter (X).	1.15 (Very low)	1.12 (Very low)	1.16 (Very low)	1.07 (Very low)	1.07 (Very low)	0.55	0.69	Not Significantly different
5. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Instagram.	1.03 (Very low)	1.04 (Very low)	1.11 (Very low)	1.00 (Very low)	1.00 (Very low)	2.78*	0.02	Significantly different
6. Awareness of Pla Meng brand	1.99 (Low)	1.99 (Low)	2.54 (Low)	2.80 (Moderate)	1.00 (Very low)	27.93*	0.00	Significantly different

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through TikTok.					

* Sig. < 0.05

As shown in Table 5, the comparison of respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing communication, by income level, revealed that awareness via Facebook, Line, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok differed significantly at the 0.05 level. In contrast, awareness through Twitter (X). did not differ significantly.

Table 6 Respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing, by place of residence

Digital Marketing Communication	Place of residence		t	Sig	Interpret
	Local resident of Surat Thani	Visitor/Tourist			
1. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Facebook.	3.26 (Moderate)	3.40 (Moderate)	-1.67	0.09	Not Significantly different
2. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Line.	1.16 (Very low)	1.21 (Very low)	-1.30	0.19	Not Significantly different
3. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through YouTube.	2.27 (Low)	2.63 (Moderate)	-4.77*	0.00	Significantly different
4. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Twitter (X).	1.23 (Very low)	1.01 (Very low)	7.93*	0.00	Significantly different
5. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through Instagram.	1.08 (Very low)	1.04 (Very low)	1.43	0.15	Not Significantly different
6. Awareness of Pla Meng brand through TikTok.	2.10 (Low)	2.38 (Low)	-3.59*	0.00	Significantly different

* Sig. < 0.05

As shown in Table 6, the comparison of respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing communication, by residence, revealed that awareness via YouTube, Twitter (X), and TikTok differed significantly at the 0.05 level between residents of Surat Thani and visitors to the province. In contrast, awareness through other types of media did not differ significantly.

6. Analysis of the relationship between brand awareness and opinions toward the Pla Meng brand, Surat Thani: The study found a high positive correlation between brand awareness and opinions toward the Pla Meng brand, which was statistically significant at the 0.01 level, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Analysis of the relationship between awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani and opinions toward the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani among respondents

Variable	Opinions toward the Pla Meng brand, Surat Thani		
	r	Sig.	Level of correlation
Awareness of Pla Meng brand, Surat Thani	0.60**	0.00	High correlation

** Sig. < 0.01

As shown in Table 7, the analysis of the relationship between respondents' awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani and their opinions toward the brand revealed a high positive correlation, which was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Discussion

Based on the research on the branding communication of Pla Meng in Surat Thani, the results can be discussed as follows:

1. Local Identity of Pla Meng in Surat Thani

The local identity of Pla Meng in Surat Thani lies in its uniqueness as a freshwater fish native to the province. Pla Meng is characterized by firm, fibrous flesh with low fat content and a non-mushy texture. Its production and processing follow traditional local wisdom. The distinct identity of Pla Meng is evident through its unique attributes, its long cultivation period, and meticulous smoking process. This aligns with the concept of identity, which emphasizes differentiation and uniqueness (Plienrung, 2021). The establishment of Pla Meng's local identity also reflects its brand persona and highlights its distinctiveness, particularly through its registration as the 6th Geographical Indication (GI) product of Surat Thani.

2. Branding Communication Guidelines for Pla Meng in Surat Thani

The branding communication guidelines for Pla Meng in Surat Thani can be categorized into five key content areas: the fish farming process, the smoked fish preparation process, the production and product processing, the culinary creativity with Pla Meng, and the market distribution process. These are communicated through social media, which serves various marketing objectives. Chaisuwan (2015) noted that social media can raise awareness, stimulate demand, promote trials, facilitate purchases, and build brand loyalty by enabling consumer interaction. Through engaging content

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design, social media fosters user experiences that encourage participation, leading to word-of-mouth and viral marketing, effectively integrating paid, earned, and owned media.

3. Evaluation of Pla Meng Branding Communication in Surat Thani

The Pla Meng brand communication by the Pla Meng Large-Scale Community Enterprise in Sub Thawi Subdistrict, Ban Na Doem District, Surat Thani, emphasizes traditional mass media as the primary channel due to its wide reach and credibility. Social media platforms like Facebook serve as secondary channels, given their current popularity. The digital marketing communication via Facebook is moderately effective, while platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Line, Twitter (X), and Instagram are less impactful. Triphobsakul (2022) suggested that businesses should use Facebook Fan Pages for branding as they are specifically designed for business purposes, providing a strong online presence.

Consumer awareness of the Pla Meng brand includes recognition of Pla Meng as a renowned product of Surat Thani, its quality, and its benefits. However, this awareness remains low, resulting in minimal influence on consumer decisions, such as purchasing Pla Meng products when visiting Surat Thani, repurchasing, and recommending the product to others. There is a need to enhance communication strategies through well-planned message designs aligned with the brand's communication goals to effectively guide consumer perceptions (Kleechaya, 2021).

The comparative analysis of the awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani through digital marketing communication among respondents classified by personal factors revealed that, overall, demographic factors such as age, education, occupation, income, and place of residence significantly influenced respondents' brand awareness at the 0.05 statistical level. This finding indicates that demographic characteristics have an impact on media exposure patterns and levels of brand awareness in digital media. This result is consistent with the concept proposed by Kotler and Keller, K.L. (2016, as cited in Janprapad et al. 2023), which states that personal characteristics influencing consumer decision-making include age and stage in the life cycle, occupation and economic situation, personality and self-concept, lifestyle patterns, and values. These factors directly affect consumer behavior and serve as criteria for market segmentation, as consumers in different groups exhibit varying levels of awareness and interest in media content.

The analysis of the relationship between the awareness of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani and respondents' opinions toward the brand revealed a highly positive correlation at the 0.01 significance level. This finding indicates that as consumers' awareness of the brand increases, they tend to develop more positive attitudes and opinions toward it. This result aligns with the concept proposed by Aaker (2008, as cited in Ratcharoen, 2019), who stated that the ability to build brand awareness enhances the likelihood of brand selection and competitive advantage. When consumers recognize a brand clearly and perceive it as credible, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes and favorable behaviors toward that brand, leading to increased likelihood of purchase or recommendation.

The findings highlight the identity, local wisdom, and creativity in the branding communication of Pla Meng in Surat Thani. This aligns with the essential components of quality Thai and local products (Kongarchaphat, 2019), positioning Pla Meng to gain broader recognition and competitive market advantages. This development can enhance local entrepreneurs' capabilities by leveraging regional resources.

From the study of the local identity of Pla Meng in Surat Thani Province, which aimed to create understanding and awareness of the body of knowledge related to Pla Meng, the findings led to the development of communication strategies for the Pla Meng brand. The study analyzed the forms and content of media produced to communicate the Pla Meng brand through the perspectives of Pla Meng product producers and consumers, as well as incorporating recommendations from marketing communication experts and an evaluation of the current brand communication of Pla Meng in Surat Thani Province. As a result, the researcher proposed a brand communication model for Pla Meng, Surat Thani Province, based on the principles of communication, as presented below.

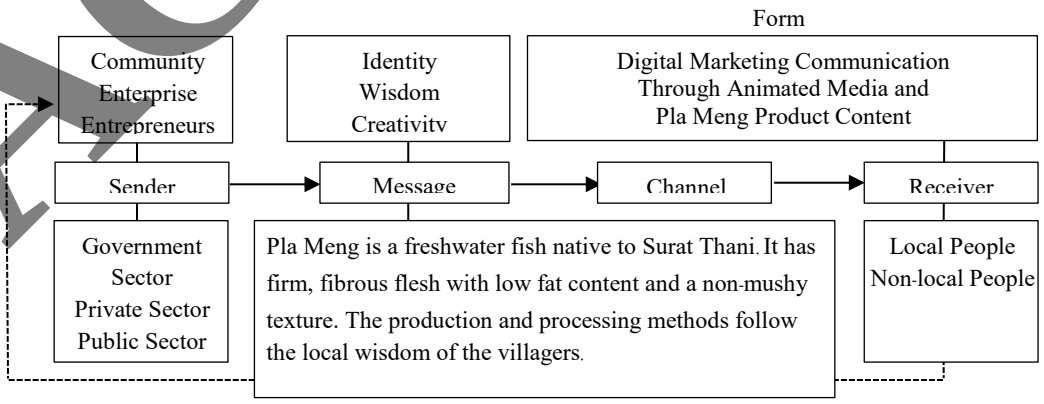

Figure 3 Communication model for the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani

Based on the above model, it is evident that the researcher has presented a communication model for the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani using the S-M-C-R communication components: Sender (S), Message (M), Channel

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(C), and Receiver (R). In other words, the Pla Meng brand communication plan should involve various senders, including community enterprises, public sector entities, private sector representatives, and the general public. The communicated message should consist of information about the Pla Meng brand, emphasizing its identity, local wisdom, and creativity. The content might highlight that Pla Meng is a freshwater fish unique to Surat Thani and known for its firm, fibrous texture, low fat content, and non-mushy quality, with production and processing rooted in local wisdom. The communication channels should utilize digital marketing, leveraging visual media and content related to Pla Meng products, targeting both local and external audiences. This approach aims to creatively and effectively promote the Pla Meng brand, ensuring its relevance in the rapidly evolving digital and technological landscape.

Conclusion and Implications

1. Policy Contribution

The findings of this study provide valuable insights for local government agencies, provincial administrative organizations, and community development offices in formulating strategic communication policies that promote Pla Meng as a distinctive geographical indication (GI) product of Surat Thani Province. Policymakers can use these results to design integrated communication frameworks and public relations campaigns that strengthen local identity, enhance product recognition, and promote sustainable community-based enterprises. Furthermore, the results can guide the allocation of budget and support programs to build digital marketing capacity among local entrepreneurs and community enterprises.

2. Managerial Contribution

From a managerial perspective, this research offers practical guidance for community enterprise leaders, marketing managers, and brand developers in enhancing brand communication strategies for Pla Meng. The findings highlight the importance of multichannel communication, particularly the use of mass media as the primary channel for credibility and social media as a secondary channel for reach and engagement. Managers can apply these insights to develop more targeted content strategies, improve consumer awareness and perception, and foster brand loyalty. Additionally, the integration of local cultural identity into marketing communication can serve as a key differentiator that supports long-term competitiveness.

3. Academic Contribution

Academically, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in branding communication, community-based marketing, and digital marketing communication within a local cultural context. It demonstrates the effectiveness of a mixed-methods research design in analyzing both perceptual and behavioral aspects of brand awareness within a specific local product ecosystem. The study also provides a model for integrating research with community-based learning, linking academic research with practical training in local brand communication. Future academic work may build upon these findings to explore digital branding strategies for regional products, community empowerment through communication, and sustainable cultural entrepreneurship.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for Applying the Research Findings

The communication of the Pla Meng brand in Surat Thani Province, as identified in this study, represents a key component of the overall brand communication process. The findings can serve as a guideline for building brand awareness of Pla Meng, Surat Thani Province, and can be applied to the creation and communication of the brand to enhance recognition and engagement among target audiences.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could focus on the development of marketing capabilities and brand-building processes for Pla Meng products. Such research would contribute to making the Pla Meng brand communication more effective and would serve as a foundation for ensuring the sustainability and long-term success of community enterprises and local entrepreneurs.

Author Contributions

Thatsanawadi Kaeosanit – [Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing]

ORCID iD

Thatsanawadi Kaeosanit – [0009-0008-2751-6898]

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript

Declaration of the use of Generative AI or AI-assisted tools

The author declare that no AI or AI-assisted tools were used during the preparation of this manuscript.

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Author
Kaeosanit

Email
thatsanawadi.kae@sru.ac.th

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