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# PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN COMMUNITY PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT BY THE BATIK FABRIC BAGS AT BANWA HOUSEWIVES GROUP, YALA, THAILAND

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## Abstract

This research examined participatory communication in community product development by the Banwa Housewives Group. The objective was to develop the design of Batik fabric bags through participatory communication. The research employs a qualitative approach. The participants were ten members of the Banwa Housewives Group through a purposive sampling method. The research tools included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Data were analyzed descriptively, focusing on the studied themes. The findings, based on the research objective, revealed that the Banwa Housewives Group engages in participatory communication in community product development. This includes co-thinking/co-planning, co-policy formulation, co-implementation, co-allocation and sharing of benefits, and co-monitoring and evaluation to improve the design of Batik fabric bags. However, the group cannot effectively use online communication. It is recommended that relevant agencies support and promote the group's ability to use technology to expand communication channels. Establishing networks could also help the group exchange information and ideas, fostering creativity. In addition, the group should incorporate local identity into their products to attract customers and find ways to ensure customer acceptance of product quality.

**Keywords:** Batik Fabric Bags, Participatory Communication, Banwa Housewives Group

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## Introduction

The 13<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027) focuses on harnessing existing potential and readiness to strengthen the nation. This involves preparing people, society, and the economic system to respond effectively to change's impacts. The plan emphasizes the importance of developing Thailand's economy and society efficiently, ensuring equitable access to resources and the benefits of economic and social development. It aims to create economic opportunities through knowledge, creativity, technology, and innovation, grounded in environmentally friendly production and consumption practices. This includes developing community products in alignment with the National Economic and Social Development Plan. Additionally, the plan promotes applying the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy across all sectors to help Thai people sustain their livelihoods even during economic crises. It encourages people to live moderately, with reasonableness and strong internal resilience, adopting a lifestyle of self-sufficiency.

Developing community products is a crucial process that reflects local identity through compelling stories that align with the community's context and culture. These products, rooted in local wisdom or creatively enhanced to meet consumer and tourist interests, do more than just fill shelves—they provide a learning experience. Tourists engage in shared learning about the value, origin, and production processes, gaining valuable experiences. Strengthening the community involves fostering the mindset, consciousness, and awareness of community leaders and members in thinking, decision-making, and preparing to change behaviors, self-management, and problem-solving. This is achieved through active participation in various community activities, leading to continuous learning and further community initiatives. According to Phetiomthong et al. (2021), a key element in developing community products to generate income is brainstorming, field surveys, and engaging with local knowledge holders, resource owners, and entrepreneurs. This approach helps understand and foster community participation. The participatory process involves the community and villagers learning, studying, and analyzing product information. The analyzed data is then used to select what best represents or embodies the community more clearly.

Currently, products from local communities are gaining popularity and becoming more diverse. New entrepreneurs are emerging continuously, and established businesses must adapt to keep up with the times to create distinction and strengthen their operations. Jaiseutong (2020) discusses meeting the needs of community product entrepreneurs and promoting sustainable business growth. This requires development in five areas: 1) enterprise networks, 2) management, 3) marketing, 4) production, and 5) government support. Yala Province, located in Thailand's southern border region near Malaysia and Indonesia, is known for its cultural and product diversity, reflecting a multicultural society. People coexist harmoniously by supporting and respecting each other's rights, allowing for peaceful cohabitation despite social and cultural differences. The government prioritizes the development of these border provinces to support and promote communities in creating new income sources and employment opportunities. This effort is accompanied by expanding trade opportunities and improving community income and well-being. Moreover, the focus is on driving innovation in production within the service and agricultural sectors, elevating income levels for sustainable development in alignment with the national strategy of enhancing competitiveness. Srichan & Kosolkittiamporn (2023) highlight development goals that aim to enhance potential based on three concepts: 1) building on the past by integrating economic roots, identity, culture, traditions, and diverse natural resources with technology and innovation; 2) adjusting the present by developing national infrastructure to support future industries and services; and 3) creating new value by enhancing entrepreneurs' capabilities and developing the new generation to adapt business models for the digital market.

Batik fabric, also known as Pateh, refers to a type of cloth created by using wax to resist dye on certain areas, then coloring the desired parts through painting, dyeing, or shading. The intricate patterns and vibrant colors of batik fabric reflect the rich culture and local wisdom of Southern Thailand. The complex and detailed designs, often featuring multiple patterns on a single piece of fabric, make batik fabric stand out. Modern applications include using Pateh fabric to craft various products such as bags, clothing, scarves, and more, which has increased its value and made it more desirable. Oranom (2024) notes that the Banwa Housewives Group in Muang District, Yala Province, received support from Yala Rajabhat University to enhance their knowledge and skills in producing batik fabric products. This initiative creates opportunities for alternative livelihoods, increases household income, and reduces expenses. It also promotes the use of free time for productive activities, fostering unity and self-reliance within the community, in line with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. By using batik fabric as the primary material for products like fabric bags, hats, keychains, and masks, the group has successfully modernized the designs for daily use. This production not only adds value to the products and boosts local income but also plays a vital role in preserving culture and traditions for future generations, ensuring that the beauty of batik fabric remains a community heritage. Currently, the production of bags made from batik fabric faces several challenges, both external and internal. External factors include the appreciation of the Thai baht, the depreciation of the Malaysian ringgit, competition from neighboring countries, and price suppression by buyers. Internally, rising production costs, inconsistent quality standards, design plagiarism among producers, and poor management systems have forced some entrepreneurs to close their businesses and others to cut wages to reduce production costs. The competition to undercut prices among local producers, driven by a lack of unity, has allowed middlemen to negotiate significantly lower prices for batik products. This has resulted in reduced income for producers, with some selling at prices that do not cover production costs, leading to further wage cuts for workers, who are already struggling, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely impacted entrepreneurs. Despite these challenges, the quality of life in communities that have developed supplementary income through tourism has improved. The creative development of community-based tourism, rooted in the cultural identity of local products like embroidered Saew fabric, has increased the number of tourists and revenue, leading to better living conditions. This has inspired community members to enhance tourism management, as they can generate income during both the tourist season and the off-season. Additionally, the ability to sell products online has fostered sustainable livelihoods, strengthened group cohesion, expanded sales channels, and enhanced the community's environment and reputation. To achieve sustainable creative community-based tourism aligned with cultural identity, collaboration, clear role distribution, systematic work, and well-defined strategies and practices are essential. Training community members, establishing communication channels like Line groups for easy knowledge exchange with experts and researchers, and engaging in participatory communication are vital. Such efforts help foster learning, creativity, and mutual understanding between community groups and consumers. Given these issues, the research team recognizes the need to assist, guide, and enhance the capabilities of local entrepreneurs, particularly in participatory communication and marketing support. Building a strong, united group of entrepreneurs is crucial for reducing price competition and empowering the community to negotiate better with middlemen. Emphasizing the uniqueness and aesthetic appeal of batik products can create differentiation and interest in these community-made bags, incorporating local identity into the products. The benefits of this research include its immediate applicability to meet the needs of entrepreneurs, providing a foundation for further practical applications, and positively influencing the overall research development process. The dissemination of knowledge regarding the production process and product development using batik fabric is a public benefit that increases the value of both the

fabric and the community. Beyond adding value to products, this initiative aims to standardize community products, gain tourist recognition, and promote the use and support of local goods. This approach helps preserve local wisdom, generates income, alleviates poverty, and fosters sustainable grassroots development.

## Literature Review

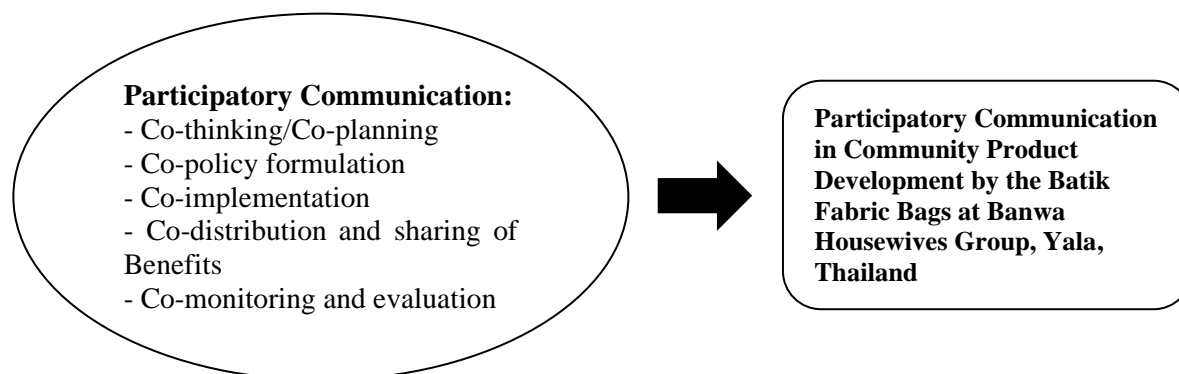
### The Evolution of Batik Fabric in the Three Southern Border Provinces

Batik fabric in the southern region of Thailand is produced in Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat. The batik has been influenced by Malaysia and Indonesia (Anderson, 2023). The patterns of batik fabric include geometric designs, motifs adapted from nature or various parts of plants, Thai patterns, and animal imagery. The choice of batik design varies based on individual preferences and is influenced by personal dressing habits, as well as the occasion, place, and activity. This has led to batik designers creating modern patterns according to user needs. Additionally, batik patterns are arranged to create designs for men's shirts, women's garments, and other products according to the wearer's preferences (Bamrunpanit et al., 2022).

### Participatory Communication

Community participation refers to the involvement of the community in communicating and carrying out activities through media. This includes collective thinking, acting, and voluntary participation in decision-making, cooperation, opinion exchange, and benefit-sharing. Community participation in the development of community groups involves collectively thinking and deciding on the direction of community life development, with shared benefits. This also includes monitoring and evaluating the implementation of policies, plans, or activities to achieve objectives. Community participation must be present from the beginning to the end of the project (Jianchatchawanwong et al., 2024).

### Research Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1** Research Conceptual Framework

## Research Methodology

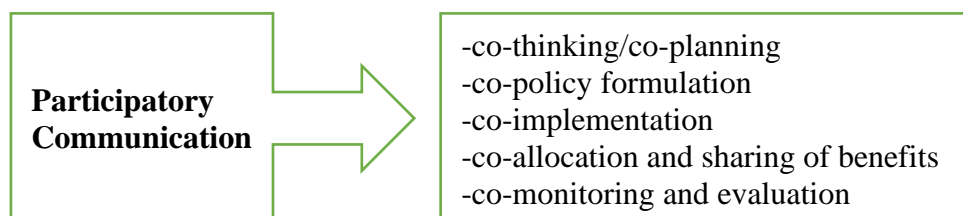
This research is a qualitative approach and employs participatory communication concepts and marketing mix factors as its research framework. The research area was Muang, Yala, Thailand. The sample group consists of 10 Banwa housewives, selected through the purposive sampling method. The research tools used include in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and in-depth interview forms before applying. The researcher conducted preliminary checks on the quality of the instruments by evaluating the alignment of questions with the characteristics of the variables being measured as defined. Quality was further assessed by consulting with experts and obtaining feedback on questions related to the development of batik fabric bag designs through participatory communication with the Banwa housewives group covering aspects such as 1) co-thinking and co-planning, 2) co-policy formulation, 3) co-implementation, 4) co-distribution and sharing of benefits, and 5) co-

monitoring and evaluation. Data was collected personally by the researcher. For qualitative data analysis, document research was employed to analyze, synthesize, and narratively describe the issues under study. Data verification in this study used triangulation, including data triangulation (checking data consistency from different sources such as primary informants and stakeholders) and methodological triangulation (using observations alongside interviews and content analysis, and consulting relevant documents) to ensure the accuracy and clarity of the data. Additionally, member checking was used to confirm data by returning the analyzed data to informants for validation before concluding.

## Research Findings

### Development of Batik Fabric Bag Designs through Participatory Communication with the Banwa Housewives Group

The Banwa housewives group emphasizes participation in co-thinking/co-planning, co-policy formulation, co-implementation, co-allocation and sharing of benefits, and co-monitoring and evaluation, as follows.



**Figure 2** Participatory Communication

“...Whenever we work, each member sits together to discuss how to attract more customers to buy from us. Sometimes we think about participating in exhibitions to boost sales or introducing new designs to appeal to the younger generation...”

(S. Kaje, personal communication, October 20, 2023)

“...Our group divides the work equally. If some housewives cannot take on a job due to urgency, it is given to someone else who can handle it. We discuss this beforehand so that if someone cannot take on a task or faces any issues, we find someone to replace them. We agree on this in advance...”

(N. Malee, personal communication, October 20, 2023)

“...When the province notifies us about an event, we divide the duties based on who is available on which day to help out. For events like the city pillar shrine festival, we distribute workdays to sell our products...”

(H. Khawi, personal communication, October 20, 2023)

“...Our group is clear about sharing benefits. We are transparent and adhere to our faith. Everyone works honestly, and there have never been any financial issues...”

(Sateepa Ase, personal communication, October 20, 2023)

“...Regarding the outcomes and problem-solving related to community activities, there have never been major issues. Usually, the problem is low sales due to the poor economy. Sometimes we have to accept this because people are not buying non-essential items...”

(A. Dolaokauder, personal communication, October 20, 2023)

In summary, the participatory communication within the Banwa Housewives group employs various communication methods, emphasizing exchange and participation, and utilizes two-way communication focusing on mutual assistance and maintaining benefits.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This research found that participatory communication significantly contributes to community product development, specifically in the creation of batik fabric bags by the Banwa Housewives group. The group prioritizes participatory communication in all stages: co-thinking and co-planning, co-policy formulation, co-activity organization, co-benefit sharing, and co-monitoring and evaluation. Each stage involves both sending and receiving messages among group members, with content developed through a collaborative policy setting. Communication channels used include general public relations with support from government agencies for marketing. The communication model and approach in this new paradigm for developing the Banwa housewives group employ two-way communication, including focus group discussions and meetings, rather than online communication for information exchange. This is consistent with the findings of Wiriyawit (2021), which indicated that participatory communication is crucial for effective work, involving community participation at every stage, including planning, activity execution, and evaluation. Pumpruek (2021) stated that various communication strategies, beyond creating a sense of ownership, serve to benefit the community and guide the creation of projects and activities to aid the community, supported by related networks to ensure sustainable communication. Angkura et al. (2019) noted that community wisdom communication processes use both horizontal and vertical methods, formal and informal communication, with participatory communication used at every step: co-thinking, co-policy formulation, co-implementation, co-benefit allocation, and co-monitoring and evaluation. Systematically continuing and passing on local wisdom creates experiences for both community members and tourists, fostering concrete learning and pride in contributing to the preservation of community wisdom. Yala has been promoting and developing more community enterprises and housewives' groups, focusing on grassroots economic development and enhancing community members' capabilities for sustainability. However, some community enterprises and housewives' groups struggle to continue operations due to various issues such as lack of working capital, management skills, market organization, information, and technology use. Increasing networks can help housewives' groups exchange information and foster creativity. Additionally, housewives' groups should explore local identity to create products that attract customer interest and find ways to ensure customer acceptance of product quality.

## Recommendations

- 1) The development of batik fabric bag designs should include ongoing studies of changing consumer behavior to accurately understand consumer needs and guide further development.
- 2) It should promote a variety of batik bag designs and develop new styles to accommodate changing consumer behaviors and ease of use, including leveraging local identity as a selling point for products.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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