

Community Empowerment in the Digital Era : Developing Social Media Campaigns for OTOP Branding

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ABSTRACT

Community empowerment through localized economic development is vital for sustainable growth, particularly in rural areas. This study focuses on developing and implementing social media campaigns to enhance the branding of One Tambon One Product (OTOP) in Bang Prong, Samut Prakan, Thailand. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combined community engagement, audience analysis, strategic campaign design, and comprehensive evaluation. The campaign leveraged storytelling, influencer partnerships, interactive content, and educational outreach to increase product visibility and consumer engagement. Results showed a substantial increase in social media reach, positive shifts in brand perception, and enhanced entrepreneurial confidence among community members. The campaign also fostered stronger social cohesion and promoted sustainable production practices. This study contributes to the understanding of digital marketing's role in community-based economic initiatives and offers a replicable model for empowering grassroots enterprises in the digital era. The findings underscore the importance of integrating digital tools with traditional practices to drive inclusive and sustainable local development.

Keywords: Community Empowerment, Digital Marketing, Local Economic Development, One Tambon One Product (OTOP), Social Media Campaign.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, community empowerment has become a pivotal strategy for fostering sustainable development and improving livelihoods at the grassroots level. Particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, empowering local communities to take ownership of their economic and social growth is essential for addressing persistent challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and cultural erosion. The advent of the digital era has introduced new opportunities for community empowerment by providing innovative tools and platforms that facilitate communication, marketing, and knowledge sharing. Among these, social media is a powerful medium capable of amplifying local voices, enhancing visibility, and creating networks that transcend geographical boundaries (Sensang et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2024). Thus the integration of digital technologies into community development initiatives holds significant promise in driving inclusive economic growth and social cohesion.

Thailand's One Tambon One Product (OTOP) initiative exemplifies a successful community-based development program that leverages local culture, resources, and skills to generate economic benefits and preserve cultural heritage. Since its inception in 2001, the OTOP has empowered thousands of sub-districts (tambons) across Thailand to identify unique products, ranging from handicrafts to local foods, and develop them into marketable goods. This initiative has not only improved income levels and entrepreneurial skills among community members but also fostered pride in local identity and traditions (Pholhirul et al., 2023; Potjanajaruwit, 2021). Moreover, OTOP has evolved by incorporating modern marketing techniques and collaborations with academic institutions to enhance product quality and market reach, including in international markets (Grodgangunt et al., 2022; Panyoyai et al., 2024). Despite these advancements, challenges remain in effectively branding and promoting OTOP products in increasingly competitive and digitally driven markets.

The core challenge lies in bridging the gap between traditional community enterprises and a dynamic digital marketing environment. Although OTOP products are rich in cultural significance and local uniqueness, their visibility and appeal to broader audiences often remain limited. Conventional marketing approaches have proven insufficient to reach younger, digitally savvy consumers who increasingly rely on social media platforms for information and purchasing decisions (Barreto & Ramalho, 2019; Omeish et al., 2024). Consequently, there is a growing need to develop integrated social media campaigns that not only highlight the distinctiveness of OTOP products but also engage consumers interactively and emotionally. Such campaigns can foster a stronger brand identity, increase consumer loyalty, and expand market access for community producers.

Previous studies have explored various digital marketing strategies that enhance brand awareness and consumer engagement, emphasizing the importance of audience segmentation, storytelling, influencer collaborations, and interactive content (Chikweche et al., 2024; Sevin & White, 2011). However, research specifically focusing on the application of these strategies within community-based initiatives such as OTOP remains limited. Furthermore, the incorporation of educational components that inform consumers about the cultural and environmental benefits of local products has been identified as a critical factor in building a sustainable brand value

(Pholpirul et al., 2023). This gap highlights the need for empirical investigations into how tailored social media campaigns can effectively empower communities by boosting the visibility and competitiveness of their products.

This study addresses this gap by focusing on the Bang Prong community in Samut Prakan, Thailand, aiming to develop and implement social media campaigns that enhance the branding of OTOP products. This study seeks to understand the digital behaviors and preferences of the target audience, craft compelling content that resonates with both local and broader markets, and leverage influencer partnerships and interactive engagement to maximize outreach. In doing so, this study contributes to the broader discourse on community empowerment in the digital era, demonstrating how digital tools can be harnessed to support sustainable local economic development. The findings are expected to provide practical insights and a replicable model for similar community-based initiatives seeking to thrive in an increasingly digitalized marketplace.

METHOD

This study develops and evaluates social media campaigns aimed at enhancing the branding of the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) in the community of Bang Prong, Samut Prakan, Thailand. The methodology was structured into several phases including community engagement and data collection, audience analysis, campaign design, implementation, and evaluation. Each phase was designed to ensure that the campaign was contextually relevant, culturally sensitive, and strategically effective for leveraging digital platforms for community empowerment.

The initial phase involved extensive community engagement to understand the local context, product characteristics, and stakeholders perspectives. Participatory workshops and focus group discussions were conducted with OTOP producers, local leaders, and community members to gather qualitative insights into the unique attributes of Bang Prong's OTOP products, existing marketing practices, and challenges faced in product promotion. This engagement facilitated a collaborative environment in which community voices shaped the campaign's objectives and contents. The qualitative data collected were analyzed thematically to identify key themes related to product identity, community values, and digital communication preferences, aligned with previous findings on community participation in development initiatives (Pholpirul et al., 2023; Sensang et al., 2023).

Concurrently, interviews were administered to a broader sample of potential local and external consumers to profile the target audience's demographics, social media usage patterns, content preferences, and purchasing behaviors. The survey instrument was developed based on established frameworks for digital marketing research (Barreto & Ramalho, 2019; Omeish et al., 2024) and included questions on platform usage frequency, engagement motivations, and attitudes toward local products. Audiences were segmented into different groups for targeted messaging strategies.

The campaign design phase synthesizes insights from both qualitative and quantitative data to develop a comprehensive social media branding strategy. Key elements included crafting compelling storytelling narratives that highlighted the cultural heritage and production processes of OTOP products, integrating high-quality

visual content such as photos and videos, and selecting appropriate social media platforms based on audience preferences. Furthermore, the strategy incorporates collaboration with local and regional influencers whose values and audience align with the OTOP's mission, following best practices in influencer marketing to enhance credibility and reach (Jain et al., 2024). Interactive components such as user-generated content contests and live streaming sessions were also embedded to foster community engagement and two-way communication.

The implementation phase involved deploying the campaign across the selected social media platforms over a three-month period. Content calendars were developed to ensure consistent and timely posting with periodic adjustments based on real-time feedback and engagement metrics. Collaboration with influencers was coordinated to coincide with key campaign milestones and community events to maximize visibility and impact. The campaign also included educational segments to inform audiences about the environmental sustainability and socio economic benefits of supporting OTOP products, addressing the knowledge gap identified in prior studies (Pholpirul et al., 2023).

A mixed-methods evaluation framework was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign. Quantitative metrics such as reach, engagement rate, follower growth, and conversion rates were monitored using social media analytics tools. These metrics provide objective measures of the campaign's performance in raising awareness and stimulating consumer interest. Additionally, post-campaign surveys and in-depth interviews with community members and consumers were conducted to assess the perceived changes in brand perception, community empowerment, and economic outcomes. The qualitative evaluation focused on understanding the campaign's impact on community cohesion, entrepreneurial confidence, and the sustainability of marketing practices, drawing on the theoretical perspectives of community development and digital empowerment (Grodgangunt et al., 2022; Panyoyai et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews and focus group discussions with several potential consumers have revealed diverse social media usage patterns and preferences. The majority of the target audience actively used Facebook and Instagram, while emerging platforms such as TikTok were popular among younger demographics (aged 18–30). Cluster analysis identified three primary audience segments: traditional consumers valuing cultural authenticity, environmentally conscious buyers interested in sustainable products, and digitally engaged millennials seeking unique and trending local goods. This segmentation informed the tailored messaging and content strategies employed in the campaign, ensuring the relevance and resonance of each group.



Figure 1. Focus Group Discussions

The results of the focus group discussion highlighted the community's strong attachment to traditional craftsmanship and the local stories behind OTOP products. These insights shaped the storytelling narratives that formed the core of campaign content. Visual materials, including high-resolution photographs and short videos documenting the production process and community life, were produced in collaboration with local artisans. This participatory content creation not only ensured authenticity but also empowered community members by directly involving them in the campaign.



Figure 2. Documenting the production process

The campaign was conducted by uploading promotional content for OTOP products published on Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok. The campaign was expected to achieve a high cumulative user reach, with engagement rates exceeding the industry benchmarks for community-based initiatives. Collaborations with influencers contributed significantly to this reach, with several local influencers generating

aggregated impressions and driving follower growth on the OTOP's official social media pages.

Interactive elements such as user-generated content contests and livestreaming sessions foster active audience participation. The #BangProngOTOP hashtag campaign attracted numerous user posts, showcasing personal stories and product usage, which further amplified the organic reach and community involvement. Live sessions featuring product demonstrations and Q&A sessions with artisans attract viewers, increasing transparency and trust.



Figure 3. Live sessions featuring product demonstrations

Post-campaign, there was a significant increase in brand perception, increased awareness of Bang Prong's OTOP products, and greater appreciation of the cultural and environmental values embedded in the products. Consumers indicated a higher likelihood of purchasing OTOP products following the campaign, reflecting a positive shift in their attitudes and intent.

Interviews with community members revealed enhanced entrepreneurial confidence and motivation to sustain and innovate product offerings. Several producers reported increased orders and inquiries, attributing this growth to the campaign's heightened visibility. The collaborative nature of the campaign strengthened the social networks within the community, fostering a shared sense of pride and collective responsibility for product quality and promotion.

The campaign's educational components successfully raised awareness of sustainable production practices among both producers and consumers. Community members expressed a deeper understanding of environmental considerations, leading to voluntary adoption of eco-friendly methods in product development. The participatory approach also contributes to capacity building, with local stakeholders gaining skills in digital content creation, social media management, and customer engagement.

The implementation of the social media campaign for the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) initiative in Bang Prong, Samut Prakan, demonstrates the effectiveness of an integrated digital strategy for enhancing community empowerment and product branding. A strategically designed and community-centered social media campaign can significantly enhance the branding and marketability of OTOP products. The campaign not only increased product visibility and consumer

engagement but also empowered the Bang Prong community by fostering entrepreneurship, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting sustainable practices. Digital tools complement traditional community development initiatives, paving the way for scalable and replicable models of community empowerment in the digital era.

This study underscores the transformative potential of integrating social media campaigns into community-based economic development initiatives such as Thailand's One Tambon One Product (OTOP) program. The successful implementation of a tailored digital branding strategy in Bang Prong, Samut Prakan, reveals critical insights into how digital tools can enhance local product visibility, consumer engagement, and ultimately, community empowerment.

One of the key contributions of this study is its demonstration of the importance of audience segmentation in designing effective social media campaigns. By identifying distinct consumer groups, traditionalists, environmentally conscious buyers, and digitally engaged millennials, the campaign delivered targeted messaging that resonated with diverse preferences and values. This approach aligns with existing literature emphasizing the need for personalized communication to maximize engagement in digital marketing (Barreto & Ramalho, 2019; Omeish et al., 2024). Segmentation also facilitated the selection of appropriate social media platforms, ensuring that content reached users where they were most active, which is consistent with the best practices noted in prior studies.

Participatory development of content has emerged as a vital factor in fostering authenticity and community ownership. Engaging local artisans and community members in storytelling and visual content creation not only enriches the campaign's narrative depth but also empowers the community by valuing their knowledge and cultural heritage. This participatory approach echoes the findings of Pholpirul et al. (2023) and Sensang et al. (2023), who highlighted community involvement as essential for sustainable development initiatives. Furthermore, the co-creation process contributed to capacity building, equipping community members with digital skills that extended beyond the campaign's immediate scope, thereby supporting long-term empowerment.

The role of influencer collaborations in amplifying campaign reach and credibility is another noteworthy outcome. Influencers acted as bridges between the community and broader audiences, lending authenticity and trustworthiness to OTOP brands. This finding corroborates the growing body of research on influencer marketing's effectiveness in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in niche and community-based markets (Jain et al., 2024; Omeish et al., 2024). However, this study also highlights the need for careful alignment between influencer values and community identity to maintain brand integrity.

Interactive campaign elements, including user-generated content and live streaming, play a crucial role in transforming passive viewers into active participants. This two-way engagement fosters a sense of community and belonging among consumers, which is critical for building brand loyalty and advocacy (Chikweche et al., 2024). The success of these interactive strategies supports the notion that digital campaigns should move beyond mere promotions to facilitate meaningful exchanges that strengthen social ties and community cohesion.

The campaign's educational components addressing sustainability and cultural preservation further reinforced the broader socioeconomic goals of OTOP. By informing consumers about the environmental and cultural significance of products, the campaign helped cultivate informed consumption patterns that aligned with global sustainable development trends (Nildam et al., 2024; Pholpirul et al., 2023). This integrative approach enhances the value proposition of OTOP products and positions them competitively in markets increasingly driven by ethical consumerism.

Although the campaign yielded positive outcomes, several challenges and limitations warrant consideration. The digital divide remains a barrier for some community members, particularly older adults and those with limited Internet access, potentially restricting their full participation in digital initiatives. Addressing this gap requires complementary offline strategies and ongoing digital literacy training. Additionally, the sustainability of social media campaigns depends on continuous content creation and engagement, which may strain community resources without the sustained support of external partners or government agencies.

This study affirms that social media campaigns, when thoughtfully designed and community centered, can significantly enhance the impact of grassroots economic initiatives such as OTOP. By combining audience insight, participatory content creation, influencer collaboration, interactive engagement, and educational outreach, such campaigns can boost product branding and foster broader community empowerment and sustainable development. These findings contribute valuable knowledge to the fields of community development, digital marketing, and social entrepreneurship by offering a replicable model for similar initiatives seeking to harness the digital era for inclusive growth.

Future research should explore long-term impacts and scalability across diverse cultural and economic contexts to further refine digital empowerment strategies for community-based enterprises. Future research should also extend this study through longitudinal analyses to examine the long-term sustainability of social media campaigns in maintaining visibility and sales as well as through cross-cultural and geographical comparisons to assess replicability across diverse contexts. Further exploration of advanced digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence for content personalization, Augmented Reality for interactive shopping experiences, and integrated e-commerce platforms could provide new avenues for OTOP branding. In addition, future studies should measure broader social and economic impacts, including income growth, employment generation, and cultural preservation, while addressing the digital literacy gaps within communities. Finally, investigating multi-stakeholder collaborations involving universities, governments, the private sectors, and influencers is essential to establish sustainable ecosystems for community-based branding in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that strategically designed social media campaigns can significantly enhance the branding and market reach of One Tambon One Product (OTOP) initiatives, thereby fostering community empowerment in the digital era. The integrated approach—combining audience segmentation, participatory content

creation, influencer collaboration, interactive engagement, and educational outreach—proved effective in increasing product visibility, consumer engagement, and entrepreneurial confidence within the Bang Prong community. The campaign not only strengthened local social networks and cultural pride but also promoted sustainable production practices aligned with global environmental goals. These findings highlight the critical role of digital tools in complementing traditional community development efforts and suggest that such approaches can be scaled and adapted to grassroots initiatives worldwide. Continued support and capacity building are essential to sustain these gains and address the challenges related to digital access and resource constraints.

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Ethical Compliance

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee of Universitas Komputer Indonesia and complied with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Data Access Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study, including pre-and post-test results, observational records, and participant feedback, are not publicly available because of privacy and confidentiality considerations involving humans. The datasets are available from the corresponding author upon request. Access to data will be granted for academic purposes only and in accordance with ethical approval and institutional guidelines.

Conflict of Interest declaration

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. The research was conducted independently and the results were not influenced by any personal or financial relationships that could be construed as potential.

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