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ROLES OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN PRESERVING TRIBAL HANDICRAFTS

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the roles of digital media in reserving tribal handicrafts corresponding to the key government policy in protecting livelihoods, arts, and cultures of tribes in Thailand. The results of the study reveal that in the 21st century, digital media play a suitable role for today's society in communicating with the audience about identities of local handicrafts. The contents are, then, perceived quickly and properly. Modern media can also enrich social values, reach out a more expansive range of the audience, and harmonize the context of Thai society. We often see the tribal handicrafts as a cultural selling point in movies, animations, advertisements, games, and online applications. Involving digital media in storing the way of life as well as recording cultural patterns and stories is beneficial resulting in the intercultural media where the digital age meets unique cultures. The creativity of digital media leads to commercial values known as a creative business to reserve tribal handicrafts in society for good.

Keywords

Roles of Digital Media, Media, Awareness, Identity, Creative Business, Tribal Handicrafts

1. Introduction

Nowadays, digital media plays an important role in communication and production between media and society. Humans in the communication era can take advantage of modern media to raise awareness without borders because current communication is not only convenient but also fast. Information such as emails, news, and data can be shared directly and indirectly (Chayacharoen, 2014).

Digital media plays a role in influencing behaviors, lifestyles, perspectives, thinking processes, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and social values. Digital media on every platform can be used to promote cultural identities in various forms including animations, movies, documentaries, ads, and online games. Motion pictures are considered one of the most important media forms to attract the audience to the message with accessible elements and allow the message to be received efficiently. The audience are able to perceive the content as if they are present in the virtual event such as video advertisements on YouTube, video documentaries on television, animated movies on smartphone applications with the composition of the atmosphere including light, color, sound, surface, and other details of the events (Chayacharoen, 2014).

Digital media can be used to facilitate the livelihood of tribal groups in terms of communication, education, trades, social values, and cultural identities. The concept of creating the network of tribal and urban society involves the use of modern media to introduce the tribal community to the world and open the word to the tribal community to cope with change in society. The trend of digital technology provides the means of improving the livelihood of tribal groups.

The Guideline for the Analysis of this Study Arises from the Questions.

- If there is a relation between “reservation of tribal arts and cultures” and “the use of digital media” To what extent digital media helps to raise awareness of tribal cultures in general?
- If the use of digital media to convey tribal arts and cultures can remind us the importance of reservation in the tribal community.
- If modern media is just a creative business. The case studies in this article include the animation movie “Echo Planet” and the tourism ad “Flora Wonderlust, 2023: Happy Rabbits and the Wonderful Flora Garden”.

2. Roles of Modern Media to Promote Social Values and Tribal Identities

The COVID-19 situation in the world clearly emphasizes the roles of digital media in the modern era because economic, social, cultural, and educational connections are disrupted and affecting people's livelihood. When people are unable to communicate in person, society is on pause. People are not able to connect as easily as usual, so a communication gap occurs between the urban context and the remote areas. Technology, therefore, becomes an important tool to fill the gap. The development of modern and creative media enables information transmission, content sharing, and social networking. Connections at the national, regional, community, and individual level are the results of today's media development. The trend of technological advancement in the modern age helps disseminate information on social media.

The development occurs in diverse platforms by connecting various mechanisms to a consumer's needs. By aiming at responding to a user's behaviors, people's tastes and interests are considered according to psychological principles to develop the suitable digital ecological media to the way of modern life. However, the use of digital media may cause social changes both positively and negatively. The author, then, classifies the roles and duties of modern media into 2 aspects.

First, in terms of enhancing social values based on the results of the case studies, modern media plays a very important role in today's society because of the links to information and knowledge. The influence of the media affects the audience mentally. To reach its goals, the media is used as a tool to create people's values, attitudes, and perceptions in society, so people's expression and interactions are formed according to the media. The behavioral pattern conveyed by modern media gains acceptance and respect from people who are ready to follow the values in terms of objects, thoughts, actions, and decision making. To resolve the social conflicts such as negative attitudes in the urban context toward tribal groups through digital media is to raise awareness of the tribal cultures and identities for people to live in harmony in the Thai social context. Quick and convenient communication through digital media also affects the way of life. The government proposes the policy to advance communication networks in remote areas to promote not only learning through integrated education, but also tribal cultures. Tribal cultures are integrated into digital media as the treasures of human civilization which will probably disappear soon (Wu et al., 2022).



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1-2: *The Su Rui Indians Are Using GPS To Locate the Su Rui Region in The Main Rainforest*

(Source: Nigel Dickinson, 2009)

Another role of social media is storytelling to promote cultural identities and preserve the tribal cultures. In today's society, symbolic storytelling can raise awareness of local identities, arts, and crafts suitably for the audience to understand quickly. The government policy to focus on promoting and preserving tribal cultures in Thailand can be seen from the trend of the economy, trades, and tourism. The strategy is to promote cultural identities in each community such as tribal folk arts as attractions to consumers through creative productions or media. Among the rapid changes in technology, all aspects of lifestyles are impacted. Therefore, it is necessary to use modern technology for creative designs. The media production conveys the stories in relation to the changes, reservation, restoration, integration, and succession of tribal cultures to the target group. In terms of economy, trades, marketing, business, social media, information, and applications on smartphones, government agencies and private sectors often create a social network between the tribal community and the world to raise awareness of the cultural identities through local arts and crafts relevant to the current social context. Integrating tribal cultures into digital communication highlights the meanings, values, and preservation of tribal cultures. Modern media for cultural activities is seen as a driving mechanism for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2012).

The influence of digital media in the Thai social context is based on the saying: “everything is a trade-off.” Since the everyday role of digital media is to influence people’s beliefs and attitudes, the access to modern media can affect people at the emotional level, often leading to resistant behaviors, aggressive language, and violent interactions. On the other hand, the structure of digital media productions supports the traditional context under government control and regulations

resulting in a limited concept and framework. When requiring an approval from the authorities, it means deprivation of freedom of expression on social media, movies, advertisements, animations, and public relation contents. The significant benefit falls on the capitalist and powerful groups. In terms of the rights and liberty, politics, and governance, people must be aware of media literacy to perceive news, information, and entertainment properly.

In this article, the author aims to explore only the advantages of media production to convey the change, reservation, revitalization, integration, and succession of tribal cultures to the target group.

3. Case Studies of Using Animation and Ad in Modern Media to Promote Tribal Handicrafts

Tribal folk arts and crafts are cultural identities and can become attractions in ecotourism, so artistic cultures can be valuable in the economic sector. As a result, in this article, the author aims to examine if the introduction of tribal arts and cultures through the creative media will increase the economic value. By looking at the past decade in South Korea, the economic success can be seen in the growth of "cultural products", especially in the entertainment industry, including movies, music, clothes, everyday life stories, and local food. Through Korean movies, Korean food becomes more familiar among Thai people. Nowadays, Korean cultural trends have transformed the country's economy and society in a leap as seen on the creative media presenting its "cultural values" in the international context (Ruedeenyomwut, 2021). With the introduction of Korean cultures in the world, people's thoughts and behaviors are greatly influenced. The term "soft power" (Nye, 2004) has emerged to explain how cultural trends work in the modern society corresponding to the Thai government policies in protecting and promoting the way of life of tribal groups. For promoting the community's potential according to the way of life and needs, there are three main principles and guidelines.

- To protect cultural rights.
- To promote the potential of ethnic groups.
- Creating equality on cultural diversity.

The phenomenon of "Cultural Media" can be applied to promote tribal identities through folk arts and crafts. Thailand has driven the policy to support "Soft Power" and Thailand's creative business to be known at the global level.

Folk arts and crafts reflect the way of life and cultures of tribal groups in a beautiful, valuable, and memorable way as a body of knowledge and local wisdom passed from the ancestors to following generations. Digital media transforms local cultures by introducing the content and viewpoints of the past through tribal folk arts. The essence of the content raises awareness and provides understanding to promote reservation. Whether it will work or not might have to be researched and analyzed further. The author focuses on the animated film "Echo Planet" and the tourism ad for "Flora Wonderlust 2023: Rabbits and the Miracle Flora Garden" as case studies.

The author would like to refer to the production of the animated film "Echo Planet" by Kantana Animation Studio in 2012 since the author is one of the creators. The personal experience in the development of the overall animation arts started from gathering the information from the Kayan, known as Longneck Karen, who migrated from the war to Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand. Longneck Karen is a familiar term referring to this ethnic group in Thailand because women in this group have a popular culture to wear brass rings around their necks. The more rings, the more belief and wealth. This way of life is inherited from ancient beliefs. Some believe that the neck rings will bring safety in life and even create beauty.

For the characteristics of Longneck Karen, this ethnic group lives in a bamboo house with partitions and a floor made from wood such as teak and other kinds of hardwood found in the area. The teak floor must be polished with beeswax and rubbed with coconut husks. There will be a patio or balcony in every house for activities in the household such as weaving and relaxing. The roof is made of banana leaves, which is easy to find around the community. Either 1 or 2 layers of tight banana leaves are sewn together. If there are two layers, they usually use neatly stitching techniques to arrange those leaves properly as the roof.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Figure 3: *The Karen Girls Are Dressed in Traditional Costumes to Fight Heat Wave Demons in The Teak Forest. The Surroundings, Nature, And Abundance of Forests Are Presented in The Scene.*

Figure 4: *The Western Child Uses GPS To Navigate Through the Forest and Gets Lost into The Karen Community. The Environment and The Karen Way of Life Are Presented in the Scene.*
(Source: Sanook, 2012)

There is an insertion of cultural identities, community beliefs, and the way of life of the tribal group in the animated film inspired by the relationship between humans and the environment according to the principles of anthropology. A variety of details such as anatomical structures, appearances, skin colors, ethnicity, races, ancestors, social behaviors, rituals, use of language, symbols, utensils, and household objects for the production of Echo Planet (Echo Planet) have been clarified and classified. In the scene of the movie, there is a combination of the local nature with the tribe. Some details are deducted, but they are not related to art terms in the traditional way. The interpretation of the intimate connection between the simple lifestyle of Longneck Karen and folk Thais. The scenes are developed in a different way to be connected according to the guidelines of the

story. The cultural identity in folk arts and handicrafts of the tribe are used as attractions to raise awareness in a more applicable way for modern society such as unique color schemes. The scenes are more graphic with simple, clear shapes. It can be said that the cultural identities of the tribe have been transformed through digital media to be introduced to society in general. The author aims to grow the values of cultural identities through the folk arts and handicrafts of the tribe. The process of producing this creative media focuses on the way of life in the tribal group.

Another case study was from a tourism ad of “Flora Wonderlust 2023: Happy Rabbits and the Wonderful Flora Garden on 3-5 February, 2023 ”. The audience were introduced to the winter beauty in the flower garden at Nong Buak Hard Public Park, Chiang Mai Province. The nostalgic theme involved important moments of going out, and people in the area were friendly and lively attracting tourists to the location. In the past three years, the COVID-19 crisis across the world with social distancing measures affected everyday communication and life. Many direct and immediate impacts happened to the tourism industry throughout the world including Thailand where many places rank the most popular tourist destinations. Because the situation was resolved, going out and sharing space with others gradually became normal again. However, work and lifestyles have changed since the COVID-19 situation. Many countries revitalize their economy with tourism as seen on the ad of “Flora Wonderlust 2023: Happy Rabbits and the Wonder Flora Garden”. This commercial film depicts lifestyles, perspectives, and social contexts in Thailand. Due to the COVID-19 situation, not only the tourism industry but also people’s lifestyles like greeting styles were dramatically changed. Many countries around the world changed shaking hands and hugging to other forms of greeting. Going out for fun activities was limited. The limited interaction with each other during the COVID-19 situation caused people to communicate less in person. When going to work or running errands, people keep distancing from one another. Today’s ads, then, focus on connecting people together after a long period of being apart. Most people long for usual quality time with family, community, and society. Another part of the ad is to present the cultural identity of Chiang Mai including beliefs, way of life, traditions, and rituals. The performers in traditional tribal costumes were paying homage to sacred objects at Doi Suthep Temple and Wat Phra Singh Woramahaviharn. The starting scene was around the city through the famous landmark of Chiang Mai called “Tha Phae Wall” next to Khlong Mae Kha, Chiang Mai City Municipality and arrived at Nong Buak Hard Public Park where many tourists come to experience the lively atmosphere filled with beautiful flowers blooming in the cold wind at the Miracle Garden Fair, Heaven of Chiang Mai. All the entrepreneurs try to solve problems

with new approaches including online public relations and online business communication to create cultural identities as products and services. Digital media plays a role in raising awareness and influencing the target groups. The positive image of communities for economic purposes helps raise the cultural values in the creative business.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

Figure 5-6-7-8: *Tourism Ads of Flora Wonderlust, 2023 With the Theme “Wonderful Flora Garden, Heaven of Chiang Mai”. The Performers Were Wearing Unique Clothing Representing Arts and Craftsmanship of The Northern Tribes and Walking in The Wonderful Flora Garden Consistent with The Theme “Heaven of Chiang Mai” With the Background of Thai Architectures, Churches, Buildings, Houses, Nature in Chiang Mai.*

(Source: Chiang Mai City Municipality, 2023)

Cultural identities and ways of life of some ethnic groups have changed due to many external socioeconomic factors. This rapid change is probably the result of the government development plan. Many issues are caused by the lack of community capacity to adapt or deal with the digital social context in time. When the social context is different, perspectives and attitudes of the new generation change. The tribal children have changed in terms of attitudes, beliefs, and needs. The demand of more materialistic needs obstructs cultural interactions and community refinement. Therefore, it is necessary to study all aspects of social sciences, geography, and anthropology to

examine the issues of tribal groups in Thailand to reduce the gap among generations and create opportunities for sustainable development in the community.

Tribal identities also face globalization with the development of technology. The internet becomes more accessible, inexpensive, and part of everyday life. The modern generation has access to the broad information in the worldview. The young generation is more interested in their own needs. They have a strong sense of individuality which is very common in “digital society”. The modern generation has less expression of traditional cultures. As a result, local wisdom is at risk of becoming extinct. The values and meanings of tribal identities in the context of today's Thai society depend on which part of the community or society we are defined to. There are many ways of understanding who we are, where we come from, and where our roots are. Interestingly, the inherited roots can identify not only diversity but also identities by recognizing the differences from other groups. The unique symbols can indicate that people are in the same group through beliefs, types of folk instruments, knowledge of cultivation, clothing weaving techniques, writing languages, dialects, recipes, medicines, etc.

The production from digital media such as movies, ads, documentaries, and animations are considered the historical records of the tribes. The cultural identities of the tribes are documented to see an individual's thorough development. The development of the thinking process has changed according to the natural environment and society. The language development can be seen in art and handicraft creations. The development of lifestyles can lead to the formation of the modern identity of the group. The current prosperity is all inherited from ancient cultures and beliefs and becomes the cultural identity of the tribes in different regions.

At present, the integration of technology knowledge as a tool to record and store the way of life and cultural stories in the form of digital media such as teaching materials, infographics, and games was beneficial. Therefore, establishing the database is a process of integrating knowledge from various sources such as individuals, community, and society. The database is related to the design of digital media productions. Using technology as a tool to create modern learning media promotes awareness of the audience through learning activities. Knowledge and experience from the previous generation can be passed on to the following generations. Each person has his or her way of sending messages, receiving messages, and interpreting the information for their own interests. Some people may argue that the older generation has no knowledge in modern media and knowledge of modern media prevents people from interacting with contemporary cultures.

In terms of historical perspectives, a tribal cultural identity can be lost because the local wisdom is perceived as less important by people in the community. The risk will lessen if we collect cultural evidence including the way of life and wisdom of the tribe as a record of knowledge. These valuable cultural heritages, especially local wisdom should be inherited and passed down to the next generation to create pride of hometown at the psychological level with the belief that the bond to ancestors has been going on for a long time.



Figure 9



Figure 10

Figure 9-10: *Artistic Hmong Hill Tribe Fabrics with Embroidery and Candle Writing Patterns of Hmong Lai Tribe from International Center for the Promotion of Arts and handicrafts (Public Organization, 2020) & (Thailand & Organization, 2020)*

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of digital media in terms of value creation due to demonstrated through changes in technology. Modern media is not only creating quick efficient communication, but also personally and externally changing lifestyles, values, attitudes, and beliefs. In the midst of rapid changes in the era where technology plays a role and interferes with life in every sector, it is necessary to use modern technology for creation and production of digital media. Information must be integrated to help make decisions or raise awareness of various issues in society. The role and importance in promoting the reservation of tribal handicrafts through digital media should be

publicized and passed down for the next generations. Mechanisms to drive the creative media include production business.

In addition, if modern media can be developed through advanced knowledge of technology such as the internet, communication will be more efficient. Modern media has become a facilitator with a key role in the creation of conceptualized networks and understanding of how to look at the world around us. Modern media also integrates historical stories and cultures directly to raise awareness of local arts and cultures. The tribal society is widely modern now with many changes due to technology. Both images and animations with audio and texts are read, watched, and accessed. Digital media productions or modern media can create a network and channel for knowledge sharing and values of tribal handicrafts.

This article reflects two roles of digital media. First, modern communication has improved life quality and reservation of tribal arts through cultural records. From the first case study, digital media in terms of information sharing is the result of technological advancement. The modern influence comes into the community causing changes in the cultures and behaviors. The young generation accepts changes and focuses on modernity regardless of cultural roots and traditional practices. The means of communication to create awareness among tribal children is to allow them to realize how to accept and carry on the way of life properly in the tribal community. Second, the role of visual presentation can include symbolic stories to raise awareness of local arts and handicrafts as cultural identities. The audience can understand quickly and the content can be conveyed more suitable for today's society. In the end, it may be necessary to study further on the relation between promoting the preservation of tribal arts and cultures and the use of digital media to examine whether the tribal groups can be reminded of cultural reservation through modern media or modern media is just another creative business.

It is clear that there is a connection between digital media and preservation of traditional Indian arts and cultural heritages. The potential of virtual new media (Kolay, 2016) was discussed concerning its suitability to present traditional arts in various forms. The visual language of traditional arts can be conveyed clearly in the new media (Alnaghaimshi & Pearson, 2021). The social media of tribes play multiple roles simultaneously, including taking care of one another to build tribal unity in the face of urbanization and the era of globalization. It is critical to understand the influence of tribes on individuals and social trends in order to create mutual understanding and lead to the right direction in the future.

In addition, in the past few years, there has been a growing interest among cultural tourism researchers as seen in their application of social media to cultural recognition and community identities. Social media and cultural tourism (Neville, 2014) create not only unique experiences but also influence travel decisions. Besides, social media (Lexhagen et al., 2013) can lead to travel decisions and event participation. Since the 2006 food heritage event in China (Zheng, 2023), China's raw material and commodity system for the Intangible Culture Heritage (ICH) at the national, provincial, and district administrations has been founded. During the food heritage registration, many questions concerning the protection of intangible cultural heritage and the commercial dissemination of cultural practices were brought up on social media platforms in China. The researchers also found the attempt to promote and commercialize ICH practices including cultural heritage and local food traditions on social media platforms, especially TikTok. In Zhanjiang, Guangdong Province, China, the hashtag campaign on social media facilitated ICH protection and even accelerated trade. These case studies offer the local stakeholder's insights and concepts related to food traditions and their responses to digital trading events.

4.1. Limitations

This study presented the animation movies and public relations works consistent with the objectives of the research to be analyzed for understanding, essences of ideas, and new perspectives. The result of this research may not be applicable to all indigenous groups on their preservation of cultures and traditions due to unique environmental factors such as lifestyles, relationship among generations, and impacts of long cultural beliefs on individuals and community contexts. Another issue of random sampling resulted in restricted responses to questions. As a result, the researcher focused only on the roles of digital media in preserving tribal handicrafts.

4.2. Suggestion

The roles of today's digital media include creating social trends and reserving cultural identities with mechanisms of creative business. The key digital media often creates a social impact or phenomenon. "Cultural Media" can become the database to store historical evidence and records of each era to benefit directly and indirectly everyone for their research and learning. The historical knowledge is not only conserved in the sustainable manner but also used for future development.

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