



## Product Development and Marketing Strategies for Community Products in the Lower Northeast Area, Thailand

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**Abstract**— This paper aims to study new product development and marketing strategies in the context of community products in the lower northeast area, Thailand. Surin province has been chosen as the area of study since this province is well known as a beautiful location for traveling purposes and a great place for souvenir shopping. It has earned a reputation for its fine silk and notable silver beads & ornaments. Both qualitative and quantitative researches are used for this study. The study starts with compiling qualitative data from various sources and then operationalizes quantitative findings via a questionnaire survey. The qualitative endeavors include in-depth interviewing, focus group discussion, and brain storming. Informants of qualitative research included consumers, experienced distributors, the members of an enterprise's target community, designers, expertise practitioners, and government officers. The quantitative research involves a field survey, using the questionnaire as a data collecting tool. Field survey samples consisted of 100 consumers who live in Surin province and are experienced in purchasing or using the same kind of community products as under the study. The data obtained from the survey were analyzed by fundamental descriptive statistical methods. The findings show that several outputs are obtained from the process of new product development, including product idea generation, product idea screening, product concept development, product concept testing, and marketing strategy development. It was also found that the respondents agree with the new product concept. They might buy the product if it is in accordance with the stated concept. Marketing strategy should fit the target customers' demand and reach them efficiently and economically.

**Keywords**— Community, marketing strategy, northeast Thailand, product development.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

To be able to survive sustainably and grow in the current competitive market, businesses have to understand the market, especially regarding demand and supply. Businesses must not only be able to produce their products, but also apply marketing strategies in order to achieve acceptance from their target consumers. Additionally, they must develop new products to satisfy their target consumers' changing needs and wants.

Although plenty of marketing research has been conducted to understand and find out about the ultimate outcomes of consumers' choices, studies of marketing strategy and product development deserve more attention.

Although community products in Thailand have historically generated a lot of income for communities and the local people, the businesses surrounding these products still have weaknesses. Most importantly, many businesses lack a plan for marketing direction, resulting in the community products failing to sustain themselves on the market [1]. The most vital problem lies in some non-standardized products and imitated and/or copied products. For example, packaging does not meet the

standard, nor is it adequately outstanding to attract customers' attention [2].

Process-based conceptualizing of product development brings about problems and failure. Hence, the conceptualizing of a product should be developed to emphasize marketing. Such conceptualization begins by looking at market demand and proceeds by producing a product to respond to the demand - a more sure way towards success [3]. A product that meets the market needs and is accepted in the target market must be a quality product [4]. A business organization, therefore, needs to regularly develop new products and follow values that respond to customers' demand, which will result in the business's flexibility towards the market's competitive reaction to its products.

The objective of this paper is to present this new product development and marketing strategy in the context of a community product in Thailand. This study was conducted with an attempt to analyze the opinions of key informants on the development and marketing strategy of a selected product. The study also surveys the satisfaction and opinions of customers towards the targeted product in order to understand their demand and develop the new product concepts accordingly. The findings are presented and discussed. Conclusions were then drawn to prepare for further study in the next steps of new product development and to clarify business implication.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To clarify the role of marketing strategy and new product development, this section scrutinizes and discusses

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relevant literature and existing bodies of knowledge. Collectively, this knowledge reflects the importance of the topic of study and elaborates on conceptualization and taxonomy, of each relevant concept.

### **2.1 New Product Development**

The consulting firm Booz, Allen & Hamilton has identified six categories of new products in terms of their newness to the company and the marketplace [5].

1) New-to-the-world products: Products new to the company and the market;

2) New product lines: New products that allow a company to enter an established market for the first time (the product is new to the company, not to the market);

3) Additions to existing product lines: New products that supplement a company's established product lines;

4) Improvements and revisions of existing products: New products that provide improved performance or greater perceived value and replace existing products (improvements in features and benefits of a product);

5) Repositioning: Existing products that are targeted to new markets or market segments (to be called a new product there must be some changes in the existing product to suit the new segments targeted);

6) Cost reductions: New products that provide similar performance at lower cost to the company.

This research study focuses on category 4, improvements and revision of existing products.

Kotler says only 10% of all new products are truly innovative and new to the world. New product development in various categories mentioned above is very important for any organization because existing products are vulnerable to changing consumer needs and tastes, new technologies, shortened product life cycles, and increased domestic and foreign competition. Organizations have to be on the lookout for new products [6].

Eight stages are involved in new product development process. [6].

- 1) Idea generation
- 2) Idea screening
- 3) Concept development and testing
- 4) Marketing strategy development
- 5) Business analysis
- 6) Product development
- 7) Market testing
- 8) Commercialization

This research was conducted by following the new product development process from steps 1 to 4 only.

### **2.2 Marketing Strategy**

The primary focus of marketing is to effectively allocate and coordinate marketing resources and activities to accomplish the firm's objectives within a specific product market. Therefore, the critical issue concerning the scope of a marketing strategy is specifying the target market(s) for a particular product or product line. Next,

firms seek a well-integrated program of marketing tailored to the needs and wants of potential customers in that target market. [7].

Many researchers emphasize the success of introducing new products to the market as they believe this is the way to maintain customer loyalty and to restore product life cycles [8, 9, 10,11].

The importance of focusing on market acceptance was highlighted and it was pointed out that customers are the best product designers, as they can define and solve the problems that develop with their products [8]. Therefore, obtaining local business representatives' and customers' opinions towards the local products is invaluable insight for marketing strategy and product development.

### **2.3 Context Discussion**

The 2001 government policy of One Tambon One Product (OTOP, which is a concept of one product per town, or subdistrict) encouraged cooperation within the community by persuading community members to form into small entrepreneurs to produce OTOP. The Government approach to rural development and attaining self-reliance is based on teaching communities how to successfully develop and market their unique and distinctive products. The OTOP project was undertaken to assist rural villages in promoting tourism and advancing national brands. It emphasised the global market for locally produced products [12].

In the period of more than 10 years since 2001, regional products have generated income for local communities. However, regional producers still have weaknesses in production and marketing as they lack a marketing plan, resulting in local products that are not able to sustain in the current competitive market, much less enjoy long-term growth and profitability into the future. The concept of process-based conceptualization has resulted in significant problems and failures when competing in the current market. Hence, the conceptual process should be altered to emphasize marketing. This process begins by examining the market demand and producing a product to respond to the demand, which is a better way for a business to succeed. A product that meets market needs and is accepted in the target market must be a quality product. Local producers, therefore, need to understand the current market, regularly develop new products, and follow values in line with customers' demands. This will result in competitiveness and the business's flexibility towards the market's competitive reaction to its products.

Surin Province is one of the prominent regional provinces in Thailand, located in the lower Northeastern area. It is famous for many of list OTOP products; for example, fine silk, clothing articles, utensils, decorating items, art and handicraft, silver beads and ornaments, and hand-made souvenirs. Some community products have little by little entered both domestic and foreign markets, for example, woven cloth and cloth products, such as scarves and clothes; wickerwork items from natural fibers; earthenware; imitated flowers; woodenware; sandalwood products; and products from mulberry paper.

In an effort to enhance quality, the OTOP products have been judged on basis of quality, given grades from

A to D by a committee selected for this purpose [13]. Grade A products are the highest quality and considered competitive enough for export. Grade B products have strong potential, should be competitive domestically, and can be developed to international standards. Grade C products should be studied further. Finally, Grade D products generally have very low potential for development [14]. Part of the grade is dependent on the condition that all laws and copyrights are respected in the making of the goods and that the goods are not made of entirely imported materials. Once that is determined, the product is judged by the amount of local materials and knowledge that goes into its production, the quality and development of the product, and any potential effects on the environment. Marketing factors are also considered: the distribution channels available, sales trend comparisons, the sustainability of the market, logistical challenges, and the product design [14]. Most local products produced in Surin Province continue to be graded with D, C or B. Very few products are such high quality that they are accepted as grade A products.

In order to increase marketing opportunity, it is vital to study marketing strategy and product development of community products. This will create potential for community products to compete on regional, national, and international markets in the future.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Both qualitative and quantitative researches are used for this study. The research starts by compiling qualitative data from various sources and activities, then operationalizes the qualitative findings quantitatively via a questionnaire survey.

The qualitative endeavors included focus group discussion, in-depth interviewing, and brainstorming.

Focus group discussion was primarily conducted with members of the target community enterprise for an analysis of marketing problems and selection of a suitable product.

Baan Taen Thai Silk Industrial Group which is located at Baan Taen Sub-district, Sikhoraphum District, Surin Province was selected as the target community enterprise for this study. Silk products were selected by the members of the target community enterprise as the suitable products to be used in the process of new product development study. The main products of the target community enterprise are made from fine silk, including clothes, women's hand bags and shoulder bags, wallets, glasses and tissue boxes, and silk ornaments. The decided upon product, specifically, was women's shoulder bags. The main problems of the selected product included its lack of development or design of new products; lack of product variety, brand names, or other details; and product advertising.

The in-depth interview was used for exploring the satisfaction and opinions towards the selected product and desired products. Informants were: 1) consumers who had experience in buying the selected product either from the target community enterprise or from other producers, and 2) distributors who had been selling the community product in the study area.

Brainstorming was conducted with designers, academics in the field of marketing, expertise practitioners, experienced distributors, together with government officers in charge of promotional activities of the community products. Brainstorming was utilized to gain ideas and to conceptualize new products. It was followed with screening and evaluating the new product concepts.

The quantitative research involved a field survey using a questionnaire to collect data, fulfilling the steps of product concept testing and developing marketing strategies for the selected and tested product. Field survey samples consisted of 100 consumers who live in Surin Province and have had experience in purchasing or using the same kind of community product as the one selected under this study. The data obtained from the survey is analyzed by fundamental descriptive statistical methods.

### **4. FINDINGS**

#### ***4.1 Customers' attitudes and satisfaction towards selected products***

It was found from the in-depth interviews with consumers and distributors that they did not like the out-of-date and unattractive products with no standard form. The main weaknesses of the selected product were said to be mildew, easy distortion, out-of-date and unluxurious patterns and forms, unattractive colors and styles, and lack of partition inside. Satisfactory traits included various size options, the availability of suitable styles for teenagers, and its local identity. Suggestions for product improvement were modernizing patterns and forms to suit teenagers and young working women; designing more models; making the product more attractive, luxurious and unique; and adding inside partitions.

#### ***4.2 New product ideas to meet demands***

The consumers' and distributors' satisfaction and opinions about the selected product were applied in assigning characteristics and major trait formation, including three customer-related "product ideas." The three ideas include:

- 1) Luxury-look, working women's handbags or shoulder bags;
- 2) Decorative silk cloths for house and living room decoration;
- 3) Decorative frame of silk cloths with provincial symbol designs on the silk, along with a story or legend.

#### ***4.3 Evaluation and screening of new product ideas***

In order to select and obtain the best product idea, the Product-Idea Rating Device, which was modified from Kotler's and Keller's, was used as a tool for product selection, as shown in Table 1[15].

The screening of the brainstormed, new product ideas was carried out by 8 specialists in different fields who considered various factors that make a product successful. The weight of each factor was stipulated, including product characteristics, identity, and

demonstration of local wisdom, target market, size of market that would enable commercial selling, competitive situation, and relation with the group's production resources.

TABLE 1 Product idea rating scale

Order	Factors making a product successful	Score weight (a)	Scores of suitable idea (b)										Product score (a)*(b)
			.1	.2	.3	.4	.5	.6	.7	.8	.9	1.0	
1	Identity of outstanding trait	.30											
2	Product design in line with target customers' demand	.20											
3	Fineness of workmanship	.10											
4	Characterization of local wisdom	.10											
5	Containing patterns that reflect local identity	.10											
6	Related to the group's production resources	.05											
7	Size of markets for commercial production	.10											
8	Competitive situation in terms of price	.05											
Total score													

Meaning of rating scales:

0.10 – 0.30 means the product is not suitable to enter the market.

0.31 – 0.60 means the product is moderately suitable to enter the market.

0.61 – 1.00 means the product is good and suitable to enter the market.

Each idea was scored according to the rating scale, and the idea with the highest total score was selected. Therefore, the first idea was selected due to its highest score. The results of each product idea evaluation are shown in Tables 2,3, and 4.

TABLE 2 The results of the first product idea screening: a luxury-look, working women's handbags or shoulder bags

No	Factor	Scores from individual screener (one by one)										Product Score
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
1	Identity of outstanding trait	0.170	0.160	0.115	0.109	0.150	0.110	0.105	0.110			
2	Product design in line with target customers' demand	0.010	0.025	0.025	0.020	0.040	0.019	0.023	0.030			
3	Fineness of workmanship	0.215	0.200	0.029	0.015	0.200	0.015	0.023	0.018			
4	Characterization of local wisdom	0.016	0.020	0.012	0.012	0.110	0.190	0.190	0.100			
5	Containing patterns that reflect local identity	0.015	0.015	0.130	0.113	0.100	0.150	0.190	0.150			6.017
6	Related to the group's production resources	0.019	0.015	0.016	0.017	0.128	0.150	0.180	0.150			
7	Size of markets for commercial production	0.109	0.029	0.025	0.026	0.170	0.160	0.320	0.160			
8	Competitive situation in terms of price	0.090	0.050	0.018	0.026	0.190	0.180	0.160	0.180			
Total score		1.191	0.898	0.644	0.338	1.088	0.370	0.974	0.514			
Average agreement score from all screeners					0.752							

TABLE 3 The results of the second product idea screening: decorative silk cloths for house and living room decoration

No	Factor	Scores from individual screener (one by one)										Product Score
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
1	Identity of outstanding trait	0.028	0.110	0.150	0.109	0.140	0.029	0.190	0.116			
2	Product design in line with target customers' demand	0.028	0.030	0.050	0.020	0.060	0.120	0.160	0.025			
3	Fineness of workmanship	0.026	0.018	0.150	0.020	0.015	0.120	0.130	0.120			
4	Characterization of local wisdom	0.180	0.100	0.119	0.023	0.010	0.030	0.010	0.010			
5	Containing patterns that reflect local identity	0.028	0.029	0.026	0.024	0.023	0.030	0.028	0.025			5.162
6	Related to the group's production resources	0.018	0.015	0.015	0.017	0.023	0.015	0.015	0.120			
7	Size of markets for commercial production	0.023	0.016	0.016	0.160	0.170	0.160	0.160	0.160			
8	Competitive situation in terms of price	0.160	0.180	0.180	0.160	0.180	0.180	0.180	0.180			
Total score		0.491	0.498	0.706	0.533	0.621	0.684	0.873	0.756			
Average agreement score from all screeners					0.645							

TABLE 4 The results of the third product idea screening: the decorative frame of silk cloths with provincial symbol designs on the silk cloth and the story of legend

No	Factor	Scores from individual screener (one by one)										Product Score
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
1	Identity of outstanding trait	0.110	0.115	0.118	0.119	0.230	0.290	0.280	0.230			
2	Product design in line with target customers' demand	0.023	0.030	0.050	0.020	0.060	0.025	0.019	0.025			
3	Fineness of workmanship	0.021	0.018	0.015	0.020	0.015	0.026	0.015	0.150			
4	Characterization of local wisdom	0.180	0.100	0.018	0.023	0.010	0.030	0.010	0.010			
5	Containing patterns that reflect local identity	0.028	0.150	0.115	0.110	0.010	0.030	0.015	0.150			5.232
6	Related to the group's production resources	0.028	0.119	0.015	0.017	0.023	0.015	0.015	0.190			
7	Size of markets for commercial production	0.023	0.016	0.016	0.160	0.170	0.160	0.160	0.160			
8	Competitive situation in terms of price	0.160	0.180	0.018	0.016	0.018	0.180	0.180	0.180			
Total score		0.573	0.728	0.365	0.485	0.536	0.756	0.694	1.095			
Average agreement score from all screeners					0.654							

#### 4.4 Product concepts development

With the best product idea selected, it was developed as follows:

*The bag will be formed as a stylish, modern, and luxurious handbag of a large size for working women. Special, local materials, such as leather and metals, will be used in order to add value to the product, as well as increase the price. The women's bag should have rigid, chic, and unique patterns and forms. Target customers are teenagers and working women aged 15-35 years who like new, attractive, and luxurious products of various kinds, with different and outstanding traits.*

The new product concept was transformed into three styles of product image which are Large Luggage, Multi-Purpose Luggage, and Fashion Handbag and then underwent product concept testing by asking target customers' about their opinions and intentions to buy the product if it were sold on the market.

Marketing strategies were also collected. The tools used were a questionnaire and face-to-face interviewing. The field-surveyed population included consumers who used to buy or use the local products of the same type as those produced by the target community enterprise.

#### 4.5 Product Concept Testing

From the results of product concept testing, it was found that the respondents agreed with the new product concept. They might buy the product if were in accordance with the stated concept. The most suitable product concept was a Fashion Handbag that retained the former identity and emphasized utility and uniqueness, designed with more separate partitions inside for holding more items. If this were sold on the market, there would be a chance the respondents would buy it. The results of product concept testing shown as in Tabel 5.

**Table 5** Numbers and percentages of people answering the questionnaire who classified the style as conforming to the product concept

Style	Number of people	Percentage
<b>Style 1</b> Large Luggage Target: Working people and adults Materials: Made of silk, leather handle, zip, magnet buttons, and leather strip Featured: It can pack things for a one week break, added value of leather. It uses similar colors in cutting patterns.	18	18.00
<b>Style 2</b> Multi-Purpose Luggage Target: Working people and adults Materials: Made of silk, canvas handle, and magnet buttons Featured: It uses similar colors in cutting patterns. It is used for keeping documents, a notebook, and other such items.	27	27.00
<b>Style 3</b> Fashion Handbag Target: Working people and adults Materials: Made of silk, canvas handle, and zip or magnet buttons Featured: A removable shoulder-strap. It uses similar colors in cutting patterns. Zipper pocket is added for small articles.	55	55.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The reasons of respondents for choosing each style are as follows:

*Reasons for choosing style number 1 were:* the luggage is large, so it can contain a lot of items and can be used anytime. The product is suitable for the consumers. The design, colors, and shape of the product is beautiful and long-lasting.

*Reasons for choosing style number 2 were:* the product is compact and has beautiful color, which is suitable for the consumers. The style of the product is luxurious and can be used for multi-purposes, such as keeping documents.

*Reasons for choosing style number 3 were:* the design is beautiful and the colors can be used for many occasions. The design of a modern variety, it is different, compact, and it also conserves local wisdom.

#### 4.6 Marketing Strategy Development

Most respondents agreed with the marketing strategies proposed for silk, ladies' handbags. They mentioned that the product should have a variety of styles and a variety in sizes. They also agreed that the product should be designed to maintain the original characteristics. They suggested that the products should be designed by focusing on function, modernity, and uniqueness and constantly updated with a new, modern style. Appropriate packaging for each product was also expressed as essential.

Most of participants suggested that the price of the large luggage should be around 1,500-2,500 Baht. According to some respondents, the multi-purpose luggage and the fashion handbag should be set around 1,000-1,500 Baht.

In terms of product distribution, most of respondents believed that it should be fulfilled in different ways, especially through distributing at souvenir stores and convenient stores. The most suitable and convenient place for product distribution would be the OTOP center.

The most respondents expressed that there should be advertisements or public relations to present the silk handbag product to potential customers. The product information should be presented at an exhibition or trade fair.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded from the results of field survey research as following:

1) According to the personal information of the respondents who answered the questionnaire, 100% of the respondents were female, 67% of them married. The highest education level was an undergraduate degree (35% of participants); major occupations included those in the government sector (25%), and the majority income was 5,000-10,000 Baht per month (37%). The average age of the participants was 30-35 years old (35%); 52% were working, living, and studying in the urban area of Surin.

2) Buying Behaviors and the Use of Silk Products from the Past Year, 100% of the respondents used to buy local products (OTOP) and 99% knew of the silk products. The amount of respondents who had bought and used silk products was 92%, and 34% had bought a silk purse before. The most widely expressed problem respondents found in using silk bags was discoloration.

3) The analysis of respondents' opinions about the product concept of silk ladies' hand bags of Baan Taen Thai Silk Industrial Group revealed that 53% of participants know of Baan Taen Thai Silk Industrial Group's silk, ladies' hand bags. 4.35% agreed with the group's new product concept of silk ladies' hand bags. A mixture of local materials are used and the product has a modern form, especially focusing on unique characteristics of modern, working women who enjoy working.

4) Market strategy should include alternative designs, models, and sizes, with an emphasis on usage, modernity, uniqueness, and beauty. Fashioned silk bags



should be from 1,000 –1,500 baht. They should be sold at souvenir shops, modern bag shops, special product shops (as fashion items), and small shops in department stores. Marketing communication should be continuous through a selection of appropriate tools. Access to the target consumers should be emphasized. Advertisements, so that more people know about silk bags, can be done through the Internet, in addition to exhibition, fair, and demonstration events. Entrepreneurs should acquire Internet skills and access to an online society, which will assist communication to reach the target customers quickly and economically. It also creates potential for conducting further study on customers' demands.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are drawn from this research study as follows:

1) The first step in developing product ideas, which is the analysis of problems with a selection of products, should be carried out cautiously in order to minimize mistakes. All relevant people should be involved, especially customer groups, middleman groups, and enuser groups. As a result, a good product idea can be created, which answers all groups' concerns.

2) The main factor that urges customers to buy products is that the product is new and unique, with attractive colors and designs. The unique selling proposition, including difference, identity, multiplicity, and usefulness for different occasions, should then be used to attract more customers.

3) Some customers complain about problems from using products. Entrepreneurs should regularly inspect the characteristics and uses of their products to be able to solve problems in time. Tags should be provided to show details for correct consumption or use. In the case of specific characteristics that require special care and maintenance, augmented products should be offered. For example, quality guarantee may be offered or a problematic product can be returned. This will build confidence among customers.

4) Product standardization and quality are other marketing strategies which would impress the customers and encourage them to come back again.

5) There should be a variety of distribution methods to suit consumer differences in demography and behavior.

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