

Article

Guideline for advising community enterprise entrepreneurs on entering the digital marketplace

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Abstract: The spread of the coronavirus disease in 2019 (COVID-19) in Thailand has led to a lack of liquidity and income for entrepreneurs, increasing the variety of distribution channels compared to store sales. This will be a solution for businesses struggling and creating value to raise the income levels of community enterprises in Thailand. This was an integrated and participatory action research using qualitative techniques through observation, interviews, recordings, analysis, and interpretation of the operational characteristics of community enterprises from field visits for consultation. This study aimed to examine the problems and obstacles of online selling by community enterprise entrepreneurs and to find guidelines for advising lead entrepreneurs in the Digital Market. These 25 community enterprise entrepreneurs produced community herbal products in Thailand. The research findings were analyzed using grounded theory according to the research objectives. From the research results, it is possible to summarize the problems and obstacles faced by entrepreneurs in selling products online among community enterprise entrepreneurs owing to the lack of knowledgeable administrators and the decline in demand for products affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, barriers to laws, regulations requirements related to cannabis products included legal controls only for cultivation and the production process until the product was sold, and production capacity could not be produced to meet the demand when there was a large volume of orders. Solutions were as follows: increasing skills and knowledge for entrepreneurs, especially in the potential; finding a way to pass on the business to the new generation to continue the business; using strategies to create cooperation with other enterprise networks and government agencies; creating online selling channels through various platforms; increasing funding to develop production processes; and using technology to create competitive advantages and marketing planning and delivery to make online sales an essential channel.

Keywords: community enterprise; digital marketing; herbal products; Thailand

1. Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic since the beginning of 2020 has severely affected small and medium enterprises in all business sectors. Thailand currently has 407,221 SME entrepreneurs (Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, 2022), all of which have been involved from a trim level to the point of liquidation. Businesses with insufficient cash flow and low capital need to leave within the first year of the pandemic because they cannot continue to operate. However, Thailand's economy is driven not only by the industrial sector, but also by economic development at the foundation level, primarily through community enterprises.

Community enterprises are considered essential economic endeavors that strengthen Thailand's economic framework. With their roots in local economies, these businesses are essential to raising the nation's overall level of competitiveness. As such, knowledge-based operations are essential for community enterprises. (Department of Agricultural Extension, 2013). Applying the self-sufficient economic principles of King Rama IX would ensure that businesses, regardless of their scale, can generate enough income for decent living (The Chaipattana Foundation, 2017). It can therefore be said that the revenues of SMEs in Thailand serve as the foundation for the value of businesses. Small- and medium-sized enterprises are responsible for around 70% of value creation in the industrial sector (Thai Association of Small and Medium Entrepreneurs, 2016). Community enterprise entrepreneurs are considered an essential part of raising the income level in the community from the prominence of the local identity and folk wisdom that has been passed down from generation to generation. Herbal remedies from local traditional medicine practitioners are part of the traditional Thai knowledge and are useful in treating a variety of illnesses. However, there is not much preservation of this information, mostly when families do not pass on the knowledge to people outside the family who might be interested. Although agencies from the public and private sectors pay attention to promoting community enterprises in many areas, there are still unclear successes in meeting these goals. This could be due to several reasons, for example:

- 1) The support was only partial, not complete throughout the value chain, making entrepreneurs unable to compete with private businesses with more capital.
- 2) Lacking sustainable or systematic development, resulting in operators lacking continuous development or inadequate allocation of resources.
- 3) Lacking sufficient knowledge and skills of entrepreneurs made entrepreneurs unable to solve problems.

This is particularly challenging because of the need for expertise in business management, both externally and internally, within the enterprise.

The highlights of this research include:

- 1) Participatory action research, in which researchers actively engage with the community in various ways. This involves collaboratively analyzing the causes of problems and assessing the current situation to find ways to increase entrepreneurs' income. The difficulty in conducting this study lies in the fact that each community enterprise faces different problems, based on its unique foundations. It requires adaptation and problem solving tailored to the specific needs of each community. In addition, there is a challenge regarding the time required to observe the results and utilize the obtained data for continuous improvement within the PDCA cycle.
- 2) This research aims to address a group of community enterprises specializing in the production of herbal products, which is currently diminishing in the area and is on the verge of disappearing. This signifies the loss of valuable knowledge in herbal medicine, akin to the distinctive identity of the community, which is at risk of fading.
- 3) This resulted in the development of a critical conceptual framework to create and support sustainable entrepreneurs, as prior research tended to focus on partial or superficial solutions, overlooking the holistic approach to online marketing that led to unsuccessful and unsustainable outcomes in the past.

Four approaches can be taken:

1) Promoting the development of entrepreneurs (upstream), such as training and consulting with entrepreneurs.

2) Promoting development (midstream), such as studying, visiting, and consulting; entering new markets at home and abroad; and creating a brand.

3) Marketing promotion (downstream), such as grouping, networking, and Digital Market entry.

4) Promoting risk management and trade protection, such as registering intellectual property in various forms to prevent infringement (The Office of SMEs Promotion, 2022). Therefore, the guidelines in this study would apply a method to advise entrepreneurs using all four methods from upstream, midstream, and downstream to reduce the risk of IP infringement. The results of this study can be used as a guide for other countries in a context similar to Thailand.

For Thailand, the National Economic and Social Development Plan No. 13 for the period 2023–2027 has already been approved by the Cabinet. The main objectives of the plan are defined in five areas: restructuring production towards an innovation-based economy, developing people in the new world, transitioning to a society of opportunity and equity, shifting production and consumption towards sustainability, and strengthening Thailand's ability to cope with risks and changes from emerging diseases (Thansettakij, 2022).

Therefore, this research was consistent with the plan mentioned above and helped support the main goals consistent with this research, aiming to shift from production to sales by using innovation, human capital development for new skills and knowledge, distribution of income to entrepreneurs who lack opportunities, behavioral improvement of enterprise entrepreneurs to a new model, and finding a guideline to cope with the impact of the recent epidemic on business operations from experience gained during the past COVID-19 epidemic situation.

Objectives:

1) To study problems and obstacles in the online marketing of community enterprise entrepreneurs who produce community herbal products in Thailand.

2) To give advice and guidelines to improve community enterprise entrepreneurs who produce community herbal products to access the Digital Market.

2. Review literature

2.1. Community enterprise concept

A community enterprise is part of SMEs in local operations or a community enterprise with members of the community cooperatively owning and operating. Local knowledge, wisdom, appropriate technology, and creativity are used to add value to raw materials or resources available in communities (Creswell, 1998). The operation of the community enterprise will produce goods or services according to customers' demands and also aims to respond to the community's self-reliance and generate income for the family and the community according to the guidelines of the sufficiency economy. The operation may be in the form of a group of people registered as juristic or non-juristic persons. Community enterprises have 7 components as follows.

1) The community owns the business.

2) Output from community operation.

- 3) There is an innovative community initiative.
- 4) There is a base of local wisdom mixed with universal wisdom.
- 5) There is an integrated operation.
- 6) There is a learning process as the main idea.
- 7) The community enterprise must have self-reliance.

Most community enterprises in Thailand did not aim to make the highest profit, but aimed to reduce expenses and increase income for members and the community to have self-reliance following the sufficiency economy concept. Each community enterprise can be encouraged to bring its unique local products to a broader market through existing technologies and platforms.

The criteria for classifying companies as small enterprises are businesses in the product production sector that employ no more than 50 people or have an annual income of no more than 100 million Baht. In addition, medium enterprises are businesses in the product production sector that employ more than 50–200 people or have an annual income of more than 100–500 million baht (The Office of SMEs Promotion, 2020).

2.2. Herbal community enterprise in Thailand

The use of natural ingredients as drug components to treat diseases is becoming increasingly popular. Owing to their natural origin and tendency toward minimal side effects, Thai herbs are gaining greater attention owing to their potential benefits. However, Thailand's medicinal product management is not well organized, causing problems such as poor quality, shortage of raw materials, and distribution difficulties. Small-to medium-sized enterprises with low competition levels employ a majority of entrepreneurs in this sector. Most are community-based businesses and government promotion is unclear and beset by trade agreements and regulatory barriers.

The government's current focus is on producing herbal medicines for medicinal use and encouraging their incorporation into industrial manufacturing for worldwide distribution (Ministry of Public Health, 2016). The government and corporate sectors are working together to increase the popularity of Thai herbs. Two herbal items Among the top 10 products preferred by foreign tourists, herbal cough syrup (ranked 5th) and herbal toothpaste (ranked 7th), which serve as examples of this effort (MGR online, 2022). To add value to Thai herbs, the intention is to market them as reliable, superior, and standardized products.

This led to the establishment of the framework of the second herbal action plan, including five strategies that aim to interconnect the development of herbs throughout the entire value chain from the source, through the middle, to the end of the herbal industry (MGR online, 2024). This initiative also assists in promoting the image of 'Thai Traditional Medicine' and 'healing concurrently with herbal medicine'.

Strategy 1: Encouraging the growth and processing of herbal raw materials that are of good quality and meet standards. Focusing on bringing technology into upstream processes, the goal is to obtain standard raw materials that meet market needs. Raising the area used to grow herbs to at least 50,000 acres by 2027 is a key success indicator.

Strategy 2: Building the skills of business owners and the herb industry as a whole along the supply chain. The goal is to help small business owners improve their skills and to create a system that supports the herbal industry. A key performance measure is to increase the advanced industrial extraction industry by at least 5% by 2027.

Strategy 3: Encourage the sale of herbal products to make more people aware of their value through food and culture (soft power) and boost trust in Thai herbal products by giving them a sign of quality. One of the key success indicators is to grow the herbal industry along with Thai food and boost the exports of herbal products within the ASEAN by 10% every year.

Strategy 4: Encouraging the right use of herbal goods and focusing on people who already have a positive view of them. The goal is to have a system for registered goods that helps the economy grow and herbal products do well in the market. One of the key performance measures is to register herbal products, the number of which must increase by at least 10% by 2027.

Strategy 5: Making an environmental system that works well and lasts a long time to help Thai herbs grow. The goal was to increase the value of the herbal business through research and new ideas. As a key performance measure, the economic value of herbal products created through research and new ideas should increase by at least 10% by 2027.

2.3. E-commerce acceptance

A major obstacle for SMEs in e-commerce adoption (**Table 1**) is managers' reluctance to accept technological changes (Bennett, 1999; Kalakota and Robinson, 2001). Most businesses consider themselves unwilling to use the internet and engage in online shopping. It only uses ICT for customer contact and reduces the administrative costs of internal processes. In addition, if it is a small community enterprise group, it most often faces the problem of lack of technological knowledge, lack of funding, and lack of legal knowledge related to operations, as well as the lack of integration between networks (Adnan et al., 2022), especially the use of complex e-commerce technologies (Bodorick et al., 2002). Bodorick et al. (2002) state that limited resource availability is a common feature of SMEs that hinders competition in the global e-commerce market. Dongen et al. (2002) commented that the cost of using the Internet for business was low because most countries already have exemplary telecommunication systems and infrastructure. Nolan (2022) explains the advantages and disadvantages for SMEs when entering digital marketing, which entrepreneurs should understand (**Table 2**). Other research indicates that SMEs must devote time and effort to learning and going online, consistently responding to successful customers (Chappell and Feindt, 2000).

The use of external consultants is beneficial to SMEs. Technical experts provide advice to SMEs or obtain help from a social network of business stakeholders. This includes the support of many government agencies trying to guide businesses (Adam and Alarifi, 2021). Regarding the role of business consultants, Mole (2002) argued that SMEs' business consultancy differed from that of other private sector consultants because SMEs would like to expect outside consultants to help businesses develop long-term relationships with customers. This is because most SMEs have a lower

survival rate over extended periods (Simpson and Docherty, 2004). The government has created agencies' support or counseling centers to support SMEs and increase the chances of success for businesses that fail (Razumovskaia et al., 2020). Therefore, the role of government policies that support SMEs to be self-reliant is to persuade and intrinsically motivate entrepreneurs to learn new things to develop their businesses. Therefore, business success should not be expected to come with the help of external consultants (Mason and Brown, 2013).

Most of the suggestions are often based on academic validity to simplify business operations. León-Gómez et al. (2022) critiqued the relevant supporting policies with ICT that entrepreneurship will have limited success because most recommendations do not consider the different characteristics of SMEs. Each country has restrictions on access to essential ICT resources. Entrepreneurs in rural areas have few opportunities to access advice. More importantly, it lacks expert support to advise efficient operations. Sumiyana and Susilo (2021) found that most SMEs with low technical skills seek expert advice on e-commerce. However, currently, very few entrepreneurs receive government support. Thus, there is a lack of personnel with e-commerce knowledge to advise SMEs on. Simpson and Docherty (2004) outline the leading causes and obstacles for SMEs to adopt e-commerce in their business operations, which is still true today, especially in developing countries.

Table 1. The pros and cons for SMEs to the adoption of e-commerce (Simpson and Docherty, 2004).

Driving force in changing entrepreneur behavior	Obstacles in using e-commerce
1) To increase business competition ability.	1) The readiness of entrepreneurs or managers to take responsibility for technological changes.
2) To use a new model in the e-commerce market.	2) Using ICT to reduce costs and improve efficiency than being used in online trading.
3) To access the world market.	3) The older an entrepreneur is, the less likely they are to use e-commerce.
4) Easily invent innovations due to SMEs using a small budget.	4) Difficult integration into existing systems.
5) Quickly change the organization and respond quickly to external pressures.	5) Ignorance and unavailability of technology raise concerns about safety and cost.

Source: E-commerce adoption support and advice for UK SMEs by Simpson and Docherty (2004).

Table 2. The advantages and disadvantages for SMEs to entrance digital marketing (Nolan, 2022).

Advantage	Disadvantage
Lower overhead expenses: Many small e-commerce businesses can be operated by a few founders.	No customer in-store experience: Some consumers still prefer shopping in person to ask questions.
24/7 selling opportunities: E-commerce businesses are open all the time.	Delivery: Some customer want product immediately rather than waiting at home.
Larger customer base: Anyone, who has access to the internet, is customer.	Risk of Technology and security: Customer fear a leak of personal information.
Customer data collection and customer targeting capabilities: Data of customer is a key to track customer buying habits.	Easy price comparison and matching: Some shoppers want to compare product and price in store.
Preferred method of shopping: Customers love to shopping online.	See and touch real produce: Sometime, customer need to see and touch more than picture or clip.

Source: Advantages and Disadvantages of E-Commerce Businesses by Nolan (2022).

The operational plan for herbal products, as detailed in the Cabinet’s second version (2023–2027), highlights the significance of herbal product champions and is organized based on two aspects: potential and demand. A selection of 12 herbs has been identified for focused development, such as black turmeric, galangal, bitter ginger, lotus, turmeric, chilli, white Kwao Krua, bilberry, butterfly pea, red cotton tree, sweetgrass, and crocodile tail. The plan strategically outlines the establishment of Herbal Cities to support herb growth and diverse product offerings, focusing on 14 provinces at the provincial level. Chachoengsao is a key focus area for this study, which aims to enhance the distribution channels of herbal businesses in the region.

2.4. Conceptual framework

This study’s framework consists of three main activities, as shown in the following diagram (Figure 1).

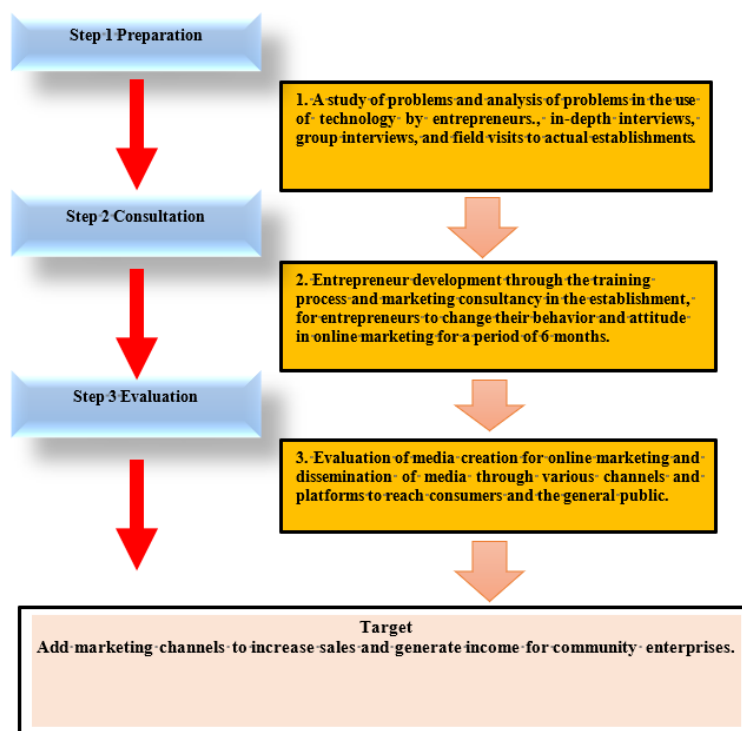


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

3. Research methodology

Participatory action research (PAR) is a qualitative research method that systematically combines research methodology, observation, recording, analysis, and interpretation techniques (Hewitt et al., 2022). Qualitative methods aim to explain and understand rather than predict and control (Streubert and Carpenter, 1995), with the goal of understanding and attempting to solve the problem (Mason, 2006). Participatory qualitative research allows the researcher or counselor to conduct an analysis that may change depending on the actual situation based on the experience and situation at the time (Whyte, 1991). This study obtained more in-depth facts than quantitative research by understanding and interpreting actual phenomena through consultation during the project. This enabled the exchange of information between

researchers (or the advisory group) and the participating entrepreneurs (**Figure 1**). Purposive sampling was used as key informant. Setting the conditions for selection focused on entrepreneurs in the form of community enterprises registered with the Department of Community Enterprise Promotion (2022). The questionnaire was administered in 2022, and the most recent access to the source of the list of registered companies was conducted on March 9, 2022. There were 25 community enterprises located in Chachoengsao Province that emphasized entrepreneurs who produced or processed herbs using local wisdom, and they had to be at least one main product that was suitable for postal delivery. There were 3 main processes as follows:

1) Preparation Process: Selecting entrepreneurs who meet the requirements.

The study team devised a set of criteria, which included the following: obtaining appropriate registration from the Department of Community Enterprise Promotion is an essential requirement for the community enterprise. In addition to offering herbal items for sale, community enterprises should be actively involved in the operations of local businesses. To be successful, community enterprises must be willing to cooperate and work together. Subsequently, the researchers conducted interviews with representative groups of entrepreneurs to learn more about and evaluate the problems associated with the utilization of technology by community enterprise entrepreneurs.

2) Marketing Consulting Process: The goal here is for entrepreneurs to improve their attitudes and behaviors during the six months we visited the area in the actual workplace. The information came from real locations, in-depth interviews with each entrepreneur who participated in the project, and experts who provided helpful advice depending on the type of product and the actual situation of each entrepreneur.

3) Process for Evaluating Online Media Creation and Dissemination to Consumers and the General Public: In this process, we evaluated the methods of model thinking, content thinking, and thinking about how each platform can be presented by each entrepreneur, adding expert perspectives on knowledge sharing to drive entrepreneurs, and creating a good learning environment. When relevant online marketing materials were available, we evaluated the effectiveness of the promotion based on the response and increased sales through online channels, using data before and after each community business participated.

After completing all three phases, the research team interviewed a cohort of 25 entrepreneurs working in the botany field. The collected data were then analyzed using the Atlas.Ti software for qualitative data analysis, according to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) Grounded Theory. The diagram provides a visual representation of the main results of the analysis, which facilitates the understanding and shows the interdependence of the subcomponents within a unified picture. Additionally, a sequential labeling system was introduced for each subcomponent to indicate the frequency with which certain topics were addressed by the respondents. This increases the credibility of the analysis compared to conventional qualitative analysis techniques.

4. Result analysis

Table 3 contains basic information on the 25 entrepreneurs. This shows that the majority were female, and that most community enterprises in this study were small. The main products of these entrepreneurs were herbal medicines, marijuana-based

items, herbal plants, soap, shampoo, and other products made from herbs. The information from the interviews and consultations was analyzed using grounded theory according to the themes and scope of the questions, following the research objectives. The ATLAS.ti program was used to interpret and analyze the data. The interpretation of the visual network is based on the frequency of the numbers and colors of elements. In other words, if the color is green, it indicates low frequency; if the color is orange, it indicates medium frequency; if the color is red, it indicates high frequency. Blue, on the other hand, represents the main focal points or main topics. The overall results of the analysis of the guidelines for advising community enterprises towards the digital market are shown in **Figure 2**.

Table 3. Show descriptive statistics of respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1) Male	10	40
2) Female	15	60
Size of SMEs	-	-
1) 1–10 workers	17	68
2) 11–20 workers	7	28
3. more than 21 workers	1	4
Products	-	-
1) Marijuana Product	8	32
2) Herbal medicine	9	36
3) Herbal plant	7	28
4) Herbal shampoo and soap	6	24
5) Herbal balm	3	12
6) Herbal tea	2	8
7) <i>Mitragyna speciosa</i>	2	8
8) Herbal compress ball	2	8
9) Herbal liqueur	1	4
Growth Rate of Enterprise	-	-
1) 10–20%	13	52
2) More than 20%	8	32
3) Unclear	4	16

84% of community enterprises have more than one product.

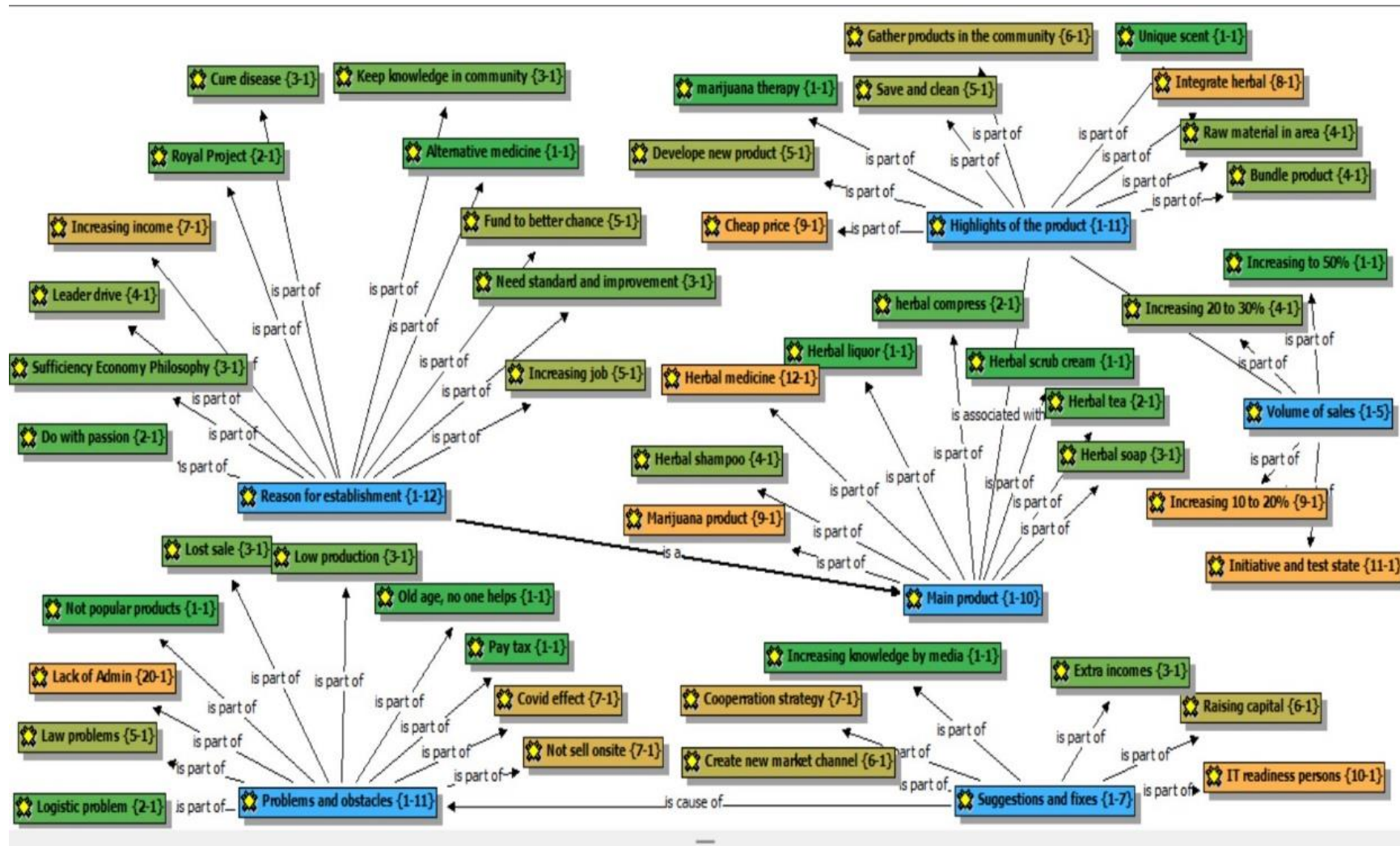


Figure 2. The overall results of the analysis of the guidelines for advising community enterprises towards the Digital Market (from program output).

Ref: The network view from program output.

From an overview of the consultation, it could be divided into 6 main issues as follows:

Issue 1: Duties and Objectives of Enterprises. 11 elements can be described and arranged in order of importance to the least (**Figure 3**), namely:

- An enterprise established to increase income for community members.
- An enterprise established to provide employment opportunities for people in the community.
- An enterprise funded by government agencies to benefit the community.
- An enterprise established by a visionary leader for the community.
- An enterprise established to preserve knowledge within the community.
- An enterprise established to enhance product quality and competitiveness.
- An enterprise established to operate in accordance with the sufficiency economy principles.
- An enterprise established to utilize herbs for disease treatment and prevention.
- An enterprise established by a group with the community's best interests in mind.
- An enterprise established with the support of royal projects.
- An enterprise established to develop guidelines for Thai traditional medicine.

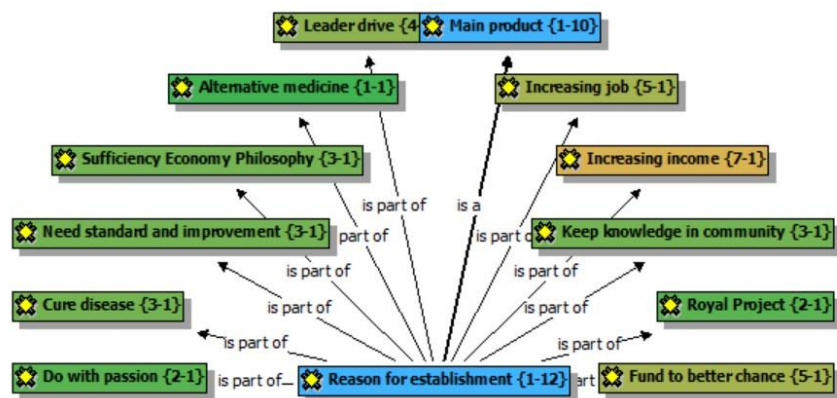


Figure 3. The results of the analysis of the functions and objectives of the enterprise (from program output).

Issue 2: The main product of community enterprise can be presented at eight points, following the most important to the least (**Figure 4**).

- 1) Products belonging to the medicinal herbs group are intended for use in Thai traditional medicine treatments.
- 2) Products containing cannabis as the main medicinal plant ingredient.
- 3) Shampoo-type products with herbal ingredients.
- 4) Soap-type products with herbal ingredients.
- 5) Herbal compress products.
- 6) Herbal tea products.
- 7) Cream and herbal lotion products for skincare.
- 8) Herbal drink products.

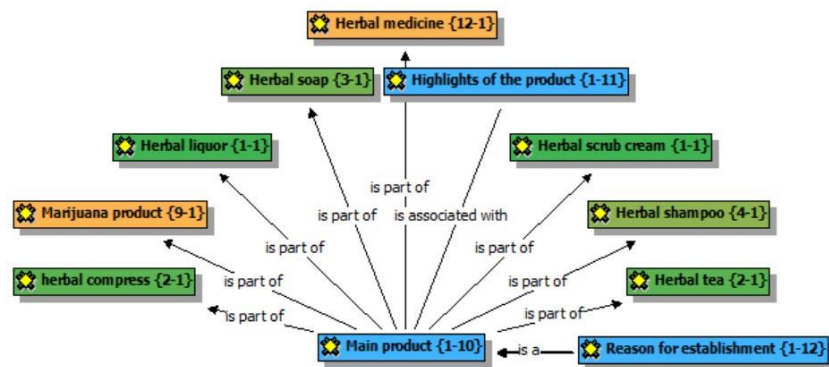


Figure 4. The analysis results of the main community enterprise products (from program output).

Issue 3: Highlights of enterprise products to online selling, could be presented at nine points (**Figure 5**), following the most important to least .

- 1) The product was inexpensive compared to its quality.
- 2) The products were produced from herbal blends according to medical prescriptions.
- 3) There was a diverse group of products within the community.
- 4) There was always the development of new formulas for herbal products.
- 5) Products were standardized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), clean, and safe.
- 6) The product was an herbal product with raw materials that could be obtained locally.
- 7) Products were produced as a bundle set.
- 8) Herbal products contained medicinal cannabis ingredients.
- 9) The product had a unique local herbal scent.

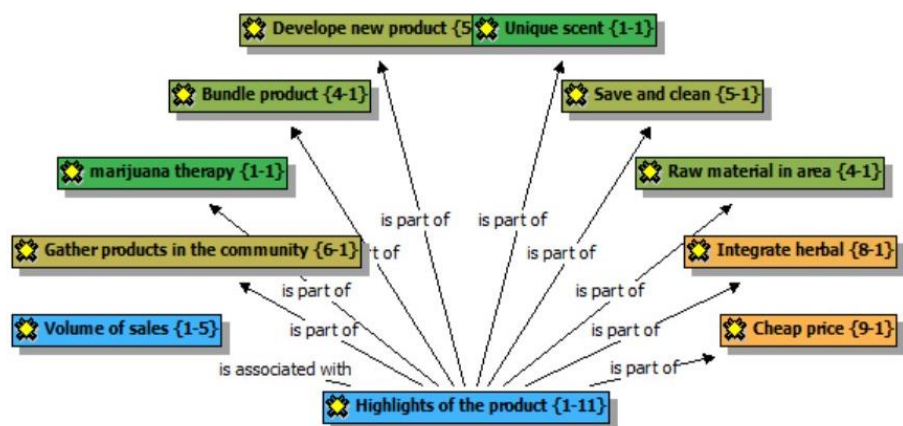


Figure 5. The analysis results of the strength of community enterprise in online selling (from program output).

Issue 4: Problems and obstacles in selling products online, could be presented at 10 points (**Figure 6**), following the most important to the least.

- 1) Issues arising from enterprises lacking administrators responsible for answering questions and updating information.

- 2) The challenge of the COVID-19 epidemic and the inability to sell products in the store.
- 3) The difficulty of not being able to open a shop or set up a sales booth during various festivals.
- 4) Challenges arising from laws, regulations, and government requirements regarding cannabis products, which have specific laws governing planting, production, and distribution.
- 5) The challenge of insufficient production capacity due to the difficulty in sourcing some herbs.
- 6) Issues stemming from declining sales in regular store sales.
- 7) Community enterprises still lacked knowledge of effective logistic management and had to rely on others for product delivery and distribution.
- 8) Most community enterprise entrepreneurs and members were elderly and lacked the workforce of the younger generation to help run the business.
- 9) Some products had not been developed to align with current trends.
- 10) Most community enterprise entrepreneurs did not understand and were concerned about government taxation when selling products online.

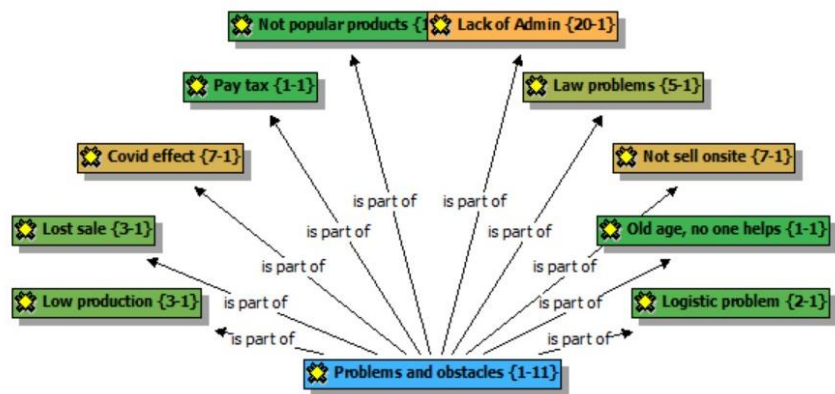


Figure 6. Analysis of problems and obstacles in online selling (from program output).

Issue 5: Proposals and solutions from consultants to online selling, could be presented in 6 points (**Figure 7**) following the most important to least.

- 1) Enhancing skills and knowledge for aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly the younger generation.
- 2) Implementing strategies to foster collaboration with other businesses, establishing network groups, and partnering with government organizations.
- 3) Establishing online sales channels across multiple platforms to cater to diverse customer segments.
- 4) Securing additional capital to enhance production processes and leveraging technology for a competitive edge.
- 5) Utilizing online sales as a means to supplement family income.
- 6) Improving understanding of creating compelling advertising materials and products.

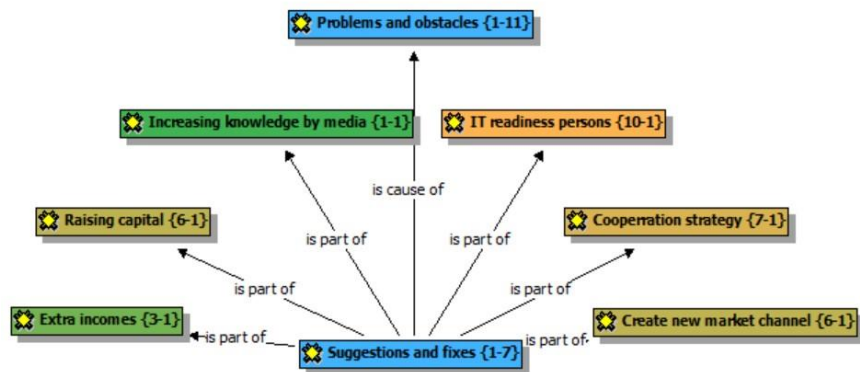


Figure 7. Analysis results of proposals and solutions from consultants to online selling (from program output).

Issue 6: Evaluation of results from online selling, could be presented in two points (**Figure 8**) following the most important to the least.

- 1) The implementation of the online selling system was still in its infancy, so its success was not yet apparent; it would take more time to gain exposure.
- 2) Participating entrepreneurs could increase their income between 10%–50%.

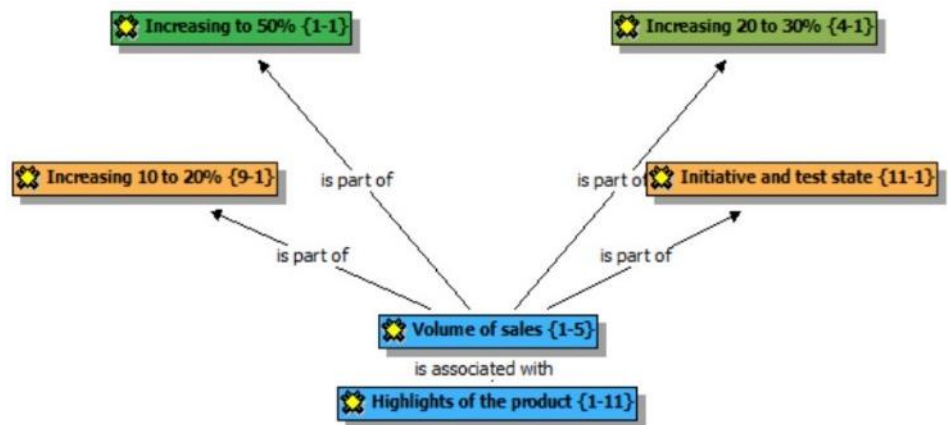


Figure 8. The evaluation analysis results of the online selling.

5. Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on community enterprises, causing members’ incomes, which were initially sufficient to feed their families, to decline, especially as the community’s herbal products used to treat the disease were not as popular as modern treatments (Thailand Development Research Institute, 2021). However, in the early stages of the pandemic, people began to turn their attention to herbs with protective or medicinal properties, consistent with the findings of Verma and Singh (2008). found that people in the Western world have become aware of the effects and side effects of synthetic drugs. As a result, there has been a growing interest in the use of natural products based on medicinal plants. Therefore, medicinal herbs are essential for the development of novel medicines. In addition, the active extracts were standardized based on the bioactive extracts and safety studies were performed. Currently, almost 70% of modern medicine in India is derived from herbs. Therefore,

herbal medicines are indispensable not only in traditional medicine, but also in commercial products.

The online trade of herbs was as modern and popular as any other product, especially in developed countries, because it was safe and had fewer side effects. This is in line with the study by Kamath et al. (2018), who found that in the age of the Internet, the online marketing of herbal community products progressed. In the last decade, there has been considerable evidence of the growth of medicinal herbs in India. In addition to modern medicine, herbal medicines are used by approximately 80% of the world's population. The use of herbal medicines as a medical treatment is currently gaining popularity in the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union, and the market is likely to grow to 3 trillion by 2050 (Nirmal et al., 2013).

From advising joint ventures on how to analyze problems and solve them, to overcoming various obstacles that were unique to each company, knowing techniques for online commerce, scaling up multiple sales platforms, finding strengths, and analyzing weaknesses that differed by product type. It was found that the products of the participating community enterprise groups had many strengths such as

- 1) The price of the product was not high compared to the quality.
- 2) The herbal medicines had quality certification from the government agency.
- 3) The herbal medicines had properties that were consistent with ancient Thai medical texts.

This was consistent with the findings of On-aree et al. (2021) and Chanthep (2003), who found that herbs from Thailand were of high quality and were known worldwide for Thai cuisine. The extension service visited as part of this project can contribute to the income from online sales. Based on marketing and financial analyses, databases of herbal products from the community were used for website development and design, with valuable content knowledge about Thai herbs and quality herbal products. Combining existing content with e-commerce results in entrepreneurs being able to develop online sales more efficiently.

In addition, this marketing and financial analysis also strengthened word-of-mouth, an important marketing technique for community enterprises, which leads to customer satisfaction with products and services. As a result, the customers of the community enterprise returned to purchase or use the service again, and they were also able to spread the word to close people or through social media (Chienwattanasook et al., 2019).

Finally, the consultants also helped entrepreneurs solve the most critical problem, which was the lack of personnel in the enterprises to prepare and maintain the system. In the basics of Thai rural society, the elderly stay at home and do little work, while the younger generation goes to work in affluent cities, resulting in most members of the community herbal enterprises being elderly and lacking IT skills. Therefore, it is challenging to change marketing attitudes and behaviors. In addition, these enterprises lack system administrators to address problems and update their product information. This is in line with Matlay (2004), who found that the digital revolution (DR) that took place in most developed and developing countries may have been difficult because the process of evolution was constantly changing, in practice, it affects the perceptions and views of most people who willingly or unwillingly (Matlay, 2003).

As a result, each enterprise also had a different growth ratio, but most grew around 10–20%, and some grew more than 20%, as shown in **Table 3**. Some were unclear because it took time to market online for a while, and they had to learn more techniques and understand customers more. However, encouraging enterprises to participate in the project to market online increased the opportunity to earn income from the original sales model. This finding is consistent with the study of Shemi and Procter (2018), who verified that the results of online marketing showed the essential attributes of social networking as a necessary tool for e-commerce entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial and creative ability to use Facebook, and email skills to increase sales through niche markets. In addition, the factors that encourage entrepreneurs to engage in activities include trust, commitment, and creativity. This finding is consistent with Mueller (2001), who found that e-commerce adoption had a significantly positive influence on the average sales growth rate of SMEs and that e-commerce adopters had an average sales growth considerably higher than those who did not. Nevertheless, despite having comparatively fewer resources in general, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) benefit from owner control, personal networks, and increased flexibility, particularly in times of financial turmoil. Owing to this rationale, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) possess a competitive edge in terms of adaptability. However, limited resources, specifically human resources, can result in notable drawbacks, including the inability to disseminate expertise and optimal methodologies among small-scale organizations (Grimmer et al., 2018). Social media are frequently regarded as an efficient and economical means of communication. Nevertheless, a few case studies have demonstrated that social media users may generate lower profits for entrepreneurs than those who refrain from using these networks. This may be the result of costs associated with conducting online marketing across multiple platforms. Consequently, the financial investment allocated towards sustaining connections with virtual consumer communities may not yield optimal returns (Domma and Errico, 2023). The research also found that adopting e-commerce had a more positive effect on SMEs' annual sales growth rate when companies adopted a higher level of entrepreneurship, rather than a negative effect.

6. Research suggestion

1) People in social development related to this type of work should create an understanding that enables entrepreneurs to open up new technologies in which technology readiness is a crucial mechanism for success.

2) Entrepreneurs should persuade the new generation to become more involved with community enterprises, create agents for the transition to digital marketing by exchanging knowledge among themselves, and transfer both knowledge in herbal medicines and basic knowledge in the use of technology to achieve the integration of knowledge in online marketing.

3) Entrepreneurs should be grouped for the same products or in the same area to achieve standard potential in online marketing and expand the scope of online data transmission media.

4) Entrepreneurs should closely follow the news of supporting SMEs in various fields of government, especially in the form of funds to develop SMEs, primarily through unconditional grants.

5) Entrepreneurs should sell products online using a variety of platforms, because each group of customers has different convenience and preferences for other media. For instance, Facebook is well suited for a wide range of customers and is widely regarded as the most popular platform, making it an essential platform for every business. Moreover, the official account platform is ideal for businesses seeking to engage in direct communication with customers. In contrast, the TikTok platform caters to Generation Z customers, who enjoy exploring and making purchases through visually appealing and concise advertisements. They should be consistent in online sales because they create awareness and can create increased income, which is less investment, but results in more results.

7. Limitation of study

The herbal products category has a limited number of producers among product entrepreneurs, which hinders the ability to conduct quantitative research effectively because of the small sample size.

Periodically analyzing the results may be required when assessing the impact of online marketing. Systematic evaluations, which encompass non-obtrusive sales and profit growth, as well as comparisons to prior years, are indispensable for confirming the long-term operational capabilities of community service providers. Financial constraints on extended monitoring and assistance are subject to these restrictions.

Chachoengsao Province lacks major organizations at the provincial level to offer support in terms of expertise, financing, and technology, leading to a deficiency in systematic production in the region. Our research has a direct impact on the marketing and sales objectives, which are crucial focal points.

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