

## **Thailand's Brand: Brand Communication for Creating Image of the Country and Thai Products or Services**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to study exporters' perspectives of Thailand's brand communication from 2011 – 2013 and its factors, which are brand identity, brand image and, integrated communication. The study also aims to examine the relationship between these factors, and to demonstrate whether these three factors can be positively linked to Thailand's brand communication. Brand personality (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness) was applied as a corporate image concept to explore Thailand's brand in terms of brand image, which is communicated via various attributes and personality traits.

This survey research is a cross-sectional study of two sample groups of 525 Thai exporters who are members of the 'Thailand's Brand' scheme, and 525 non-members. A total of 1,050 subjects were selected from the 2012-2013 Thai Exporter List, using the stratified random sampling techniques. The surveys were conducted by mail, e-mail and, telephone. The instrument validity and reliability was assessed using the Item Objective Congruence Index: IOC and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient.

The findings revealed that there are significant and positive relationships between identity, image, and, integrated communication in Thai goods branding. The second order of factor analysis using LISREL revealed that Thailand's brand communication model fitted well with the empirical data. The model's first order factor analysis displayed the relationship between factors of Thailand's brand identity, image and integrated communication, and observed variables. That is, Thailand's brand identity factors had 15 indicators, Thailand's brand image factors were comprised of 12 indicators, and integrated communication had 16 indicators.

**Keywords:** Thailand's brand, Country Brand, Branding, Brand Communication

## Significance of the problem

The Ministry of Commerce, via the Department of Export Promotion, is aware of the importance of competition trends in international commerce in the globalized era. Because of this, it has designed a brand, known as 'Thailand's Brand' displaying unique characteristics to attract international consumers, boosting their confidence in Thai products:



**Figure 1** Logo of Thailand's Brand (Source: The Department of Export Promotion, The Ministry of Commerce (2013))

This branding concept, which includes brand communication, is not applied just to goods and services, but also to organizations and institutions. The aim of the branding strategy is to promote and improve Thailand's image as an effective producer and exporter of a wide range of quality goods and services, creating a positive impact on consumers and leading to competitive advantage due to economic sustainability. To some extent, this strategy has been successful in creating interest among those in the export business, to the point where almost a thousand businesses have adopted the 'Thailand's Brand' logo alongside their own brand name. This has led to the sense, among consumers and importers, that Thai products are of a global standing.

In any case, Thai goods and services require continuous linking with the 'Thailand's Brand' initiative in order to build their image and that of Thailand itself. In other words, the scheme helps promote both the country image and the product image simultaneously. Furthermore, if the initiative is a success, Thailand's brand can become a citizen brand, serving to reassure consumers and buyers that Thai products are of good quality and are carefully made according to international standards. In addition, Thailand's brand can be elevated to a country brand, reflecting the nation's image, or an umbrella brand signifying global acceptance of Thai goods and services. Apart from helping to raise export value, branding on this scale can boost Thailand's standing in the world, and facilitate future marketing of new products and services joining the 'Thailand's Brand' scheme.

This research aims to study exporters' perspectives of Thailand's brand communication from 2011 – 2013 and its factors, which are brand identity, brand image and integrated communication. The study also aims to examine the relationship between these factors, the

results of which may be used in determining suitable future approaches to Thailand's brand communication. Lastly, it intends to prove, using empirical data, whether these three factors are positively connected to, and have an impact on, Thailand's brand communication. These findings will increase the body of knowledge in the field of brand communication.

#### Concepts of Thailand's branding and country branding

Country branding can be explained from the general recognition of a country by international or foreign stakeholders (Fan, 2010:97-103). In addition, country branding is the establishment of a national brand as a visual symbol, slogan or anything else that can be perceived directly. The brand can be communicated pictorially, verbally or via other means. Furthermore, a country brand is tantamount to an umbrella brand, an ingredient brand or a co-brand that stimulates particular economic sectors in that country (Dinnie, 2007:185). A more complex implication that country branding has is on country image, reputation and, positioning (Gilmore, 2002:281-293; Teslik, 2007 cited in Moiescu, 2009:247-256). Therefore, country branding is similar to corporate or organizational branding in that it uses similar branding methods to build a desirable image and establishes the country's brand status in relation to other countries (its competitors). Some experts (Anholt, 2007:1-2; Lee, 2009 cited in Moiescu, 2009: 247-256) not only regard country branding as having a role in building an image and establishing status, but also consider it as creating and preserving a country's competitive potential. This is done by taking into account particular economic sectors in which a country possesses a competitive advantage.

The latest method of country branding is to create the impression of greater sophistication and complexity. Country branding is seen as the creation and improvement of a country's 'soft power' (Fan, 2008:147-158), or 'country identity' (Dinnie, 2007:45). Despite the latter sounding easy to accomplish, in reality it is the most complex factor to be incorporated into country branding strategies, entwined as it is with culture, language, people, history, system of government, food, mode of dress, and celebrities.

In synthesizing the various forms of country branding techniques, several significant differences can be spotted. For example, some methods relate to 'shaping a new country identity' (Olins, 1999), others relate to 'improving a country's competitive potential' (Anholt, 2007: 1-2; Lee, 2009 cited in Moiescu, 2009:250) or to 'the embrace of political, cultural, business, and sporting activities' (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001), while others still are concerned with 'supporting national economic and political interests at home and on the world stage' (Szondi, 2007:8-20) or even to 'changing, developing or improving national image' (Fan, 2008:147-158).

Many studies have found that consumer choices to buy a particular product, or visit a particular place, depend on their perception of the country's image, in the same way that

investors base their investment decisions on a country's image, among other factors under consideration. It is this aspect, known as country-of-origin effect, that is an important reason behind country branding (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004).

Apart from this factor, a strong country brand serves as a defense against competition from other countries, and the subsequent country image can help generate wealth without that country being required to produce the goods itself. Often, all that is needed is a label saying that it is a product of that particular country. Quantitative value estimation of country brands shows that 'country name' influences consumers' decisions in what type of product to buy, or can persuade them to pay a higher price. Researchers have found that the USA is the most valuable brand, followed by Germany, Japan, Switzerland, Italy, and South Korea (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004).

Apart from tourism, products are another way to build a country brand. The aim is to create an umbrella brand for the country, comprehensively communicating all national products and services to the world. Some companies from a particular country support their products by making use of the country of origin as an asset. Some examples of this are Swiss watches, Scotch whisky, Colombian coffee, and Russian vodka. These examples show that various companies use country names to promote their own products and the country's reputation as an asset for export (Kotler & Gertner, 2002:249-261).

In summary, country branding is a complex and multidimensional construct. Several critics accept that country branding is about the essence of a nation, but, on the other hand, country branding is a matter for debate among scholars and professionals, with all parties considering the multiple effects that country branding has on their own nation. These effects cannot be ignored.

A challenge in country branding is communication to create image, or to reach a diverse global audience. Country image is complex in nature and hard for diverse targets in a market to have similar perceived image. Country branding in theory means communicating to varied stakeholders in a consistent way. If a country wants to change its image, it must first change its behavior and publicize this change to the world. When true change has occurred, country image may not automatically change. Furthermore, in practice, it may be difficult for the industrial sector to develop a country's core substance for communication to overseas target stakeholders. Country branding, therefore, needs a conceptual framework, specific measurement, and a detailed action plan. For example, a country may like to brand itself as a final goal of tourism and work towards being an export hub and center of culture.

Thailand's brand is not for specific brands of goods and services, but rather a creation of an image for all goods and services originating from Thailand, which is inextricably linked to building a country image. 'Thailand's Brand' is therefore an umbrella brand for all Thai goods and

services, helping to create an impression among international communities that 'Thailand has diversity and refinement'.

Thailand's status as a producer of goods and services makes it comparable to a corporation. The researcher, therefore, uses the concept of corporate branding to study 'Thailand's Brand'.

#### Concept of Thailand's branding vis-à-vis corporate branding

Van Riel (2001, cited in Einwiller & Will, 2002:101) narrowed down the definition of corporate branding as 'a process of systematic planning and operations to create and sustain corporate reputation, via the use of holistic relating factors that send a message to corporate / organizational brand stakeholders'. Einwiller and Will (2002:101) later clarified this definition due to the confusion between 'image' and 'reputation'. They defined organizational branding as "a process of systematic planning and operations to create and sustain a good image, resulting in a good corporate reputation (for the organization as a whole) by conveying various messages to stakeholders through manipulated behavior, communication and logo building".

Creating an organizational or corporate brand means building awareness among target stakeholders. This results from the construction of an identity and image via a process of integrated communication, including effective, unified, and extensive corporate communication activities.

#### Concept of corporate identity

Corporate identity is the starting point for building a corporate brand. It is widely accepted that in various situations, corporate communication based on identity eventually generates corporate image. For this reason, before creating an image, a company must first clearly decide on its identity. Markwick and Fill (1997:397) argue that corporate identity is the way a company presents itself to target stakeholders, by clearly distinguishing itself from other organizations. Van Riel (1995) defines corporate identity as an organization's expression of itself through factors used in conveying the desired message about itself. This is manifested in organizational behavior, communication, and corporate logos. Meanwhile, Gray and Balmer (1998:695) contend that corporate identity portrays the reality and uniqueness of the organization. In general, identity is related to image and reputation, both inside and outside the organization, generated by means of planned organizational communication. In other words, creation of a corporate identity depends on corporate communication, or the process by which target stakeholders are made aware of corporate identity, image, and reputation that have been formed (Balmer & Gray, 2000:256).

Van Riel and Balmer (1997:340) stress that corporate identity is connected to name, logo, corporate characteristics and appearance to others, and those simultaneously communicate the desired meaning. Corporate identity may be interpreted differently by various target groups; therefore, the organization must find ways to ensure consistency of communicated corporate identity.

Corporate identity can convey to the world the company's desired message. With corporate behavior, communication and logos as indicators, corporate identity becomes clearer to target stakeholders if graphics are used to design a logo that is linked to a company's sense of self and core values.

Logos are what allow companies to visibly express their unique format and style. Van Riel (1995) asserts that logos have the power to attract public interest towards a company, and corporate communication via logos determines visual, spoken, and textual news, and information that the company wishes to publicize to promote corporate identity (Brirkigt & Stadler, 1986, cited in Korver & van Ruler, 2003:198-200).

As discussed at the start, building a corporate identity is the same as raising target stakeholder awareness of a company's core identity value, which summarizes the brand concept that distinguishes the organization from others. In any case, such a synopsis may cause ambiguity, so, to reflect corporate sense of self, it is necessary to add meaning to the brand via an extended identity, such as brand personality and unique attributes (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000:45).

Hence, the elements of corporate identity studied in this research would be the brand identity design such as logo, slogan, as well as colors.

### Concept of corporate image

Bernstein (1984) emphasizes that image is not something perceived as such by a company, but is instead based on feelings and beliefs towards the company among its target stakeholders in light of their experience. Image, therefore, can vary in the eyes of different people. Martineau (1960) believes that corporate image is the collective result of viewpoints of the company held by target stakeholders. Gray (1986) attempts to explain corporate image as akin to small mosaics of collected perspectives in the minds of target stakeholders, both inside and outside the organization. Kennedy (1977:120-164) argues that corporate image is built on external target stakeholders' impression of their interactive experiences with the company. Image consistency is the key to success, generated solely via adequate organizational communication. Whatever the case, image management should begin with corporate personality (Abratt, 1989:63-76) in order for stakeholders to consider and develop corporate image continuously. This is done by integrating marketing communication with interactive corporate

communication between the company and its target stakeholders, interpersonal communication within the target stakeholder groups, and other forms of communication (Cornelissen, 2000:119-125).

As previously mentioned, corporate image is a combined result of awareness, interpretation, and subsequent acceptance, linked to several dimensions of the corporate brand, which exists in the heart and mind of each target stakeholder. Additionally, stakeholders can make three-dimensional links to corporate image as suggested by Keller (2003:544-551). Target stakeholders can decide (1) the connection between image and strength of brand association, (2) the favorability of brand association, and ( 3 ) uniqueness of brand association. Keller's explanation can be adopted as a significant approach in evaluating corporate image.

Maintaining a positive corporate image is an essential goal for all organizations. If a company is perceived positively, stakeholders are likely to initiate positive experiences when dealing with the company. On the opposite side of the spectrum, argues Hobbs (1987), stakeholders can reject a company's corporate products and services, which can be compounded by further negative feelings towards the company. For businesses to build and maintain a positive image, Goldberg (1998:8-12) has found two factors: social awareness and business competency.

#### Image and personality

As previously mentioned, corporate branding depends on the construction of a corporate image. One of the most important things to consider in building and maintaining the most appropriate image for a company is to understand what image best fits that particular company and how to boost that image (Westberg, 1994:12). Standards set to measure company size, or even reputation, cannot be used as criteria to determine the best image of the company. However, these standards can be applied to evaluate corporate image further down the line, after the corporate image action plan has been in operation for some time.

All in all, corporate image is based largely on target stakeholders, who assign corporate characteristics and attributes as important criteria in forming their perception of a company. These qualities tend to be personally defined and are prone to subjective interpretation. Research has found that corporate image is affected by personal factors (personality, knowledge and beliefs) and organizational factors (communication, displayed behavior and product quality). These two sets of factors combine to form meaningful impressions in the minds of target stakeholders (Kennedy, 1977:120-164; Dowling, 1986:109-115).

In sum, the relationship between the company and its target stakeholders is irrefutable . Corporate image must therefore fit with corporate characteristics deemed important by target stakeholders to distinguish one company from another. However, the standards to measure

reputation, modernity, leadership or superior management system in relation to corporate size, are not yet fully formed.

The suggestion to apply personality traits to determine brand image of house or generic brands came about (Singh, 1988). This is due to the fact that people tend to use their knowledge and familiarity to evaluate their surroundings, product brands, and companies. Use of personality traits is therefore an appropriate starting point for defining corporate image, and two principles are in effect. Firstly, a company is likened to a social entity which, as a human being, displays clear behaviors (Hastorf, Schneider & Polefka, 1970). Secondly, researchers tend to apply personality traits to understand social dynamics within human groups. That is, research on leadership qualities has supported the notion that personality traits can be used to indicate corporate image (Bernard, 1926, cited in Westberg, 1994:13).

Brand personality is an important part of corporate image and can measure awareness of a company among target stakeholders, who formulate connections with imagery and words essential to the brand's sense of self. By promoting brand image and identity, brand personality is therefore a major factor in integrated communication strategy in building a strong corporate brand (Temporal & Lee, 2001:27-28).

Brand personality can be explained using related human characteristics (Aaker, 2014:141). These characteristics or personality traits can be divided into five categories, known as "The Big Five": (1) sincerity, (2) excitement, (3) competence, (4) sophistication, and (5) ruggedness.

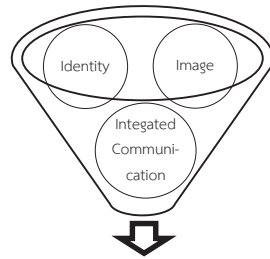
This research study, as a result, will apply the aforesaid corporate image concept to explore Thailand's brand in terms of brand image, which is communicated via various attributes and personality traits.

#### Concepts relating to integrated corporate communication

Integrated marketing communication signifies the overall marketing planning and promotion, as well as the combination of various communication factors, not just promotion of goods and services, but all marketing activities communicated to target consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 1996:481). In general, consumers' perceived impression towards a company or brand is generated by the information they receive through advertising, product price, direct sales, distribution, sales promotions and outlets in which a particular product is sold. In the case of non-profit organizations, integrated marketing communication incorporates several facets such as communication of the name, logo, activities, and corporate communication of organizational members.



In this research, the integrated corporate communications are elements of integrated communication through media and activities as well as contextual integrated communication (Figure 2).



Thailand's Brand Communication  
Source: Created by the author

**Figure 2** Conceptual framework of the research

## Research Questions

This research has been conducted in accordance with the following research questions:

1. What are exporters' perspectives of Thailand's brand communication from 2011 to 2013?
2. What are the significant factors of Thailand's brand communication from 2011 to 2013, focusing specifically on brand identity, brand image and integrated communication?
3. What is the relationship between the aforesaid factors underlying Thailand's brand communication?

## Research methodology

This survey research is a cross-sectional study of 2 sample groups, in which one group consists of 525 Thai exporters who are members of the 'Thailand's Brand' scheme, and another group of 525 Thai exporters who are non-members. The sampling technique used in this study is the stratified random sampling, in which two strata were identified – members and non-member groups of the 'Thailand's Brand' scheme. The 525 subjects in the sample were selected for each group from the 2012 – 2013 Thai Exporter List, totaling 1,050 subjects.

The instrument validity and reliability was assessed using the Item Objective Congruence Index or IOC (only items with a value greater than .50 were selected), and

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (each section of the questionnaire had an Alpha coefficient greater than .70).

Subsequently, mail, e-mail and, telephone surveys were conducted with the selected sample groups in 2011-2012.

## Results

The data were analyzed using a statistical package and produced the following results:

### Relationship between identity, image and integrated communication in Thai goods branding

The relationships between identity, image and, integrated communication of Thailand's brand, along with their dimensions, were all tested. It was found that each pair of factors had a positive correlation with a .01 statistical significance.

The analysis of the relationship between various dimensions of each factor, and between the factors as a whole, revealed the following: Logo and slogan-defined identity (ID1) had the strongest correlation with general identity (.930), followed by color usage-defined identity 1 (ID2) (.765), and color usage-defined identity 2 (ID3) (.743).

Personality image (IM2) had a stronger correlation with general image (IM) than with attribute image (IM1), or .928 and .840 respectively.

Integrated communication through media and activities (IC1) was more strongly correlated with general integrated communication (IC) than with contextual integrated communication (IC2), or .962 and .560 respectively.

Furthermore, in terms of the strength of the relationship between the 3 factors as a whole, it was found that overall identity (ID) and overall image (IM) had the strongest correlation (.439), followed by overall image (IM) and overall integrated communication (IC) (.378), while overall identity (ID) and overall integrated communication (IC) had a correlation of .214. Figure 3 shows these results in detail:

	D	D1	D2	D3	M	M1	M2	C	C1	C2
D	1									
D1	.930**	1								
D2	.765**	.517**	1							
D3	.743**	.574**	.519**	1						
M	.439**	.403**	.268**	.451**	1					
M1	.466**	.436**	.266**	.485**	.840**	1				
M2	.341**	.308**	.221**	.345**	.928**	.577**	1			
C	.214**	.181**	.152**	.234**	.378**	.319**	.350**	1		
C1	.195**	.167**	.144**	.201**	.323**	.254**	.312**	.962**	1	
C2	.153**	.126**	.093**	.204**	.338**	.341**	.274**	.560**	.314**	1

\*\*Sig < .01

**Figure 3** Correlations between identity, image and integrated communication of Thailand's brand

(Key: ID=Overall identity: ID1=Logo and slogan-defined identity, ID2=Color usage-defined identity 1, ID3=Color usage-defined identity 2; IM=Overall image: IM1=Attribute image, IM2=Personality image: IC=Overall integrated communication: IC1=Integrated communication through media and activities, IC2=Contextual integrated communication)

#### Model fit of Thailand's brand communication model

In testing the model fit of Thailand's brand communication, based on empirical data, the statistical analysis of all 43 variables produced a range of means from 2.58 to 4.39 and standard deviations ranging from 0.614 to 1.039.

The analysis of the 43 variables using Pearson's  $r$  revealed 691 positive and significant pairings, out of a total of 903 pairings, with significant values of .05 or .01, and coefficients of .025 to .770.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was applied to test the hypothesis of whether or not the correlation matrix was an identity matrix (value = 20380.00,  $df$  = 903 and  $sig$  = 0.00), signifying that the correlation matrix of studied variables differed significantly from an identity matrix, which has a value of .01. This also corresponds with the results of the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO), which produced a value of .861, close to 1. The results show sufficient correlations among the variables to be used in factor analysis. This is important because factor analysis requires correlated variables (see Figure 4).

The model fit to measure Thailand's brand communication, based on theory and interviews with data providers, was tested against information from data providers and empirical data gathered from Thai exporters' opinions. The second order of factor analysis using the Linear Structure Relationship Model, or LISREL, revealed that Thailand's brand communication model fitted well with the empirical data. The chi-square value was 472.35 ( $df$  = 424,  $sig$  = 0.052), exceeding the .05 minimum significance value, and therefore validating the hypothesis that the theoretical model fits with empirical data. The value according to the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was 0.98, while that on the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) was 0.95, close to 1.00 (the required value is over 0.9). Furthermore, the Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (RMR) was 0.03 and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.01, close to 0.00 (the required value is less than 0.05). This means that the theory- and interview-based Thailand's brand communication model fitted with the empirical data generated from Thai exporters' opinions. In terms of the factor loading of the model variables, all variables had a statistical significance of .05 ( $sig$  < .05) and, most had a significance of .01 ( $sig$  < .01).

The model's first order factor analysis displayed the relationship between factors of Thailand's brand identity, image and integrated communication, and observed variables. The factor loading of all variables was statistically significant ( $sig$  < .05), with most variables having a significance of .01 ( $sig$  < .01). This means that all 43 observed variables are major indicators of Thailand's brand identity (ID), Thailand's brand image (IM), and integrated communication (IC). These variables have a standard factor loading (Beta) between 0.07 and 0.67, the highest loaded and most important indicators being 'identity of the upward pointing red and navy blue triangles' (d11) and 'integrated communication through television' (c04). The lowest weighted indicators were the image that 'Thai goods and services reflect up-to-date people' (m08) and the image that 'Thai goods and services reflect kind people' (m12).

Thailand's brand identity factors had 15 indicators, all of which had a significance of .01, except for the identity of 'the white background' (d14), which had a significance of .05. The factor loadings ranged from -0.08 to 0.67, while the highest factor loading was for the identity of the 'red

and navy blue upward pointing triangles' (d11), with a value of 0.67 and 44.89% of variance explained by brand identity factors. The indicator with the lowest factor loading was the identity of the 'white background' (d14), with a value of -0.08 and 0.64% of variance explained by brand identity factors.

Thailand's brand image factors were comprised of 12 indicators. The results showed that each indicator had a significance of .01, except the image that 'Thai goods and services reflect up-to-date people' (m08) and that 'Thai goods and services reflect kind people' (m12). Both these indicators had a significance of .05. The indicators ranged in factor loading from 0.07 to 0.67, the highest being for the image that 'Thai goods and services are reliable' (m04), at 0.67, with 44.89% of variance explained by Thailand's brand image factors. The lowest factor loading was for the image that 'Thai goods and services reflect kind people' (m12), with a value of 0.07 and 0.49% of variance explained by brand image factors.

\*Sig. < .05, \*\*Sig. < .01

**Figure 4** Mean, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients in the Confirmatory Second-order Analysis of Thailand's Brand Communication Model

Factors in integrated communication had 16 indicators, all of which were statistically significant (.01), with factor loadings ranging from 0.15 to 0.66. The indicator with the highest factor loading was integrated communication through television (c04), with a value of 0.66 and 43.56% of variance explained by the integrated communication factors. The lowest factor loading was for integrated communication targeting domestic consumers (c15), with a value of 0.15 and 2.25% of variance explained by the integrated communication factors.

The second order factor analysis of the model displayed the relationship between factors in Thailand's brand communication, incorporating Thailand's brand identity, Thailand's brand image, and integrated communication (the first order factors). All three factors had a loading with a significance of .01, while the standard factor loading ranged from 0.40 to 1.00. This means that these three factors are statistically significant indicators of Thailand's brand communication. The highest loaded indicator in Thailand's brand communication was Thailand's brand image, followed by Thailand's brand identity and integrated communication. Each factor had a covariance with Thailand's brand communication, at 100%, 62.41% and 16% respectively (see Figures 5 and 6).

Variable	Factor loading			t	R <sup>2</sup>	Factor score coefficient
	B	Beta	SE			
First order factor analysis						
<u>Thailand's brand identity</u>						
d01	1.00	0.47	<-->	<-->	0.22	0.04
d02	0.89	0.42	0.09	9.46**	0.18	0.05
d03	0.90	0.45	0.08	11.72**	0.20	0.00
d04	1.20	0.52	0.10	12.28**	0.27	0.02
d05	1.27	0.59	0.10	12.70**	0.35	0.05
d06	1.14	0.55	0.09	12.39**	0.30	0.02
d07	1.02	0.53	0.09	11.65**	0.28	0.04
d08	1.10	0.52	0.10	10.62**	0.27	-0.02
d09	1.18	0.61	0.10	11.47**	0.38	0.01
d10	1.20	0.61	0.11	11.40**	0.37	0.00
d11	1.35	0.67	0.12	11.31**	0.44	0.19
d12	1.43	0.66	0.12	11.92**	0.44	0.06
d13	1.18	0.59	0.10	11.52**	0.35	0.05
d14	-0.18	-0.08	0.07	-2.39*	0.01	-0.01
d15	-0.27	-0.14	0.07	-4.07**	0.02	-0.03
<u>Thailand's brand image</u>						
m01	1.00	0.62	<-->	<-->	0.38	0.12
m02	0.86	0.53	0.05	15.71**	0.28	-0.03
m03	1.08	0.63	0.06	17.20**	0.40	0.05
m04	1.19	0.67	0.07	17.67**	0.45	0.11
m05	0.89	0.52	0.07	13.02**	0.27	0.07
m06	0.28	0.19	0.05	5.70**	0.04	0.01

Variable	Factor loading			t	R <sup>2</sup>	Factor score coefficient
	B	Beta	SE			
m07	0.20	0.14	0.05	4.17**	0.02	0.00
m08	0.11	0.07	0.05	2.19*	0.01	-0.02
m09	0.27	0.16	0.06	4.50**	0.03	0.05
m10	0.34	0.18	0.07	4.85**	0.03	0.02
m11	0.33	0.17	0.07	4.53**	0.03	-0.01
m12	0.13	0.07	0.06	2.07*	0.00	-0.01
<u>Integrated communication</u>						
c01	1.00	0.50	<-->	<-->	0.25	0.12
c02	1.36	0.58	0.16	8.69**	0.33	0.01
c03	1.44	0.62	0.15	9.33**	0.39	0.08
c04	1.62	0.66	0.17	9.68**	0.44	0.09
c05	1.49	0.65	0.16	9.54**	0.42	0.07
c06	1.36	0.54	0.15	8.94**	0.30	0.01
c07	1.25	0.50	0.14	8.61**	0.25	-0.02
c08	1.45	0.47	0.18	7.87**	0.22	0.05
c09	1.30	0.48	0.14	9.52**	0.23	0.07
c10	1.03	0.36	0.12	8.24**	0.13	0.01
c11	0.46	0.18	0.09	4.96**	0.03	-0.01
c12	0.68	0.33	0.07	9.16**	0.11	0.02
c13	0.68	0.30	0.09	7.26**	0.09	0.01
c14	0.55	0.26	0.09	6.47**	0.07	0.04
c15	0.27	0.15	0.07	3.98**	0.02	-0.03
c16	0.69	0.33	0.09	7.75**	0.11	0.04
Second order factor analysis						
<u>Thailand's brand communication</u>						
Variable	Factor loading			t	R <sup>2</sup>	Factor score coefficient
	B	Beta	SE			
ID	1.00	0.79	<-->	<-->	0.62	-
IM	1.40	1.00	0.19	7.33**	1.00	-
IC	0.36	0.40	0.07	4.86**	0.16	-
Chi-Square = 472.35, df = 424, sig = 0.052						
GFI = 0.98, AGRI = 0.95, RMR= 0.03, RMSEA = 0.01						
* sig < .05 and **sig < .01						

<--> SE and t values are not listed due to being constrained parameters

**Figure 5** Results of second order confirmatory factor analysis of Thailand's brand communication model

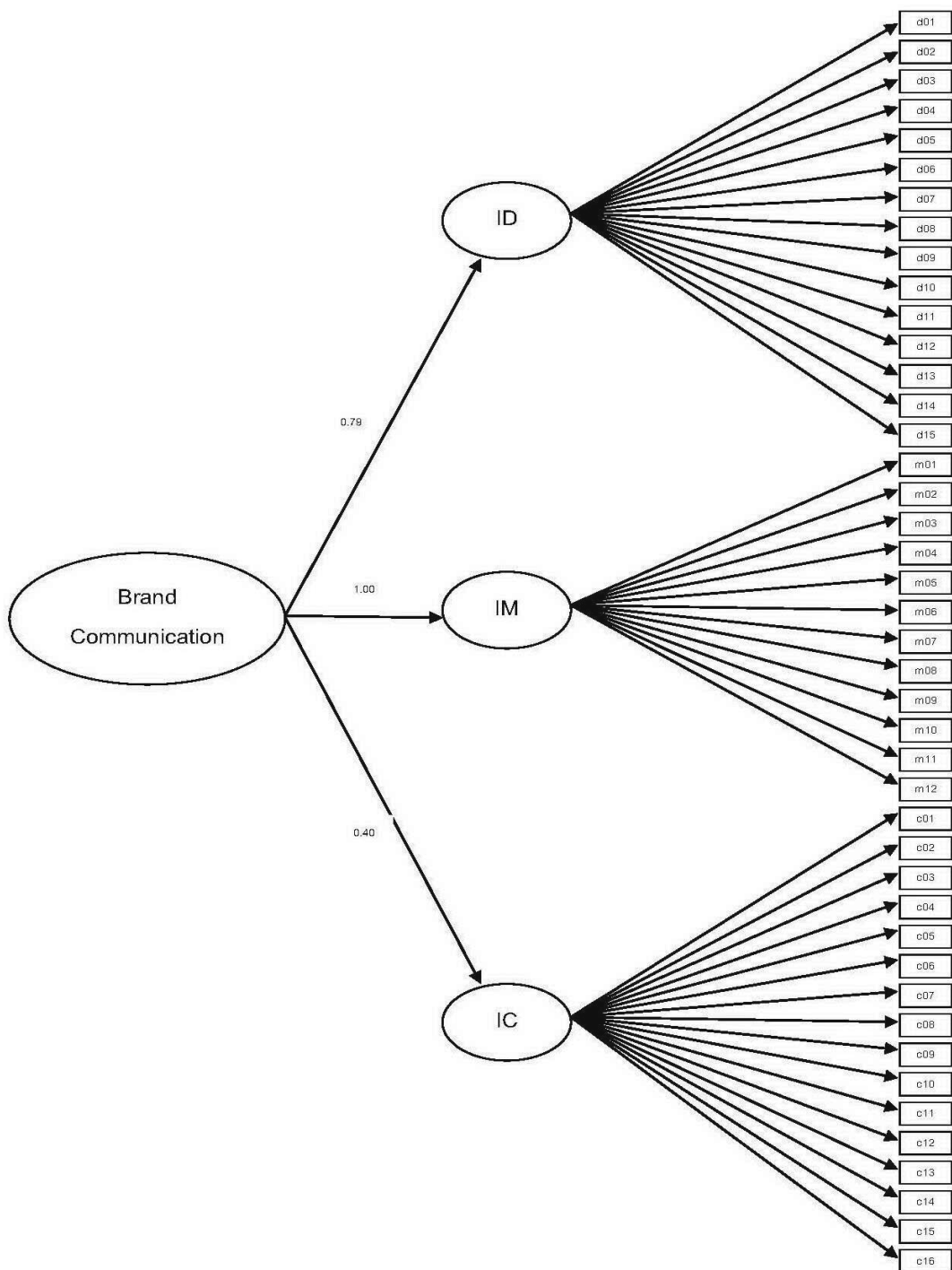
(Key 1: ID=Overall identity: d01=Identity of the oval shape, d02=Identity of the upward pointing triangles, d03=Identity of the word 'THAILAND', d04=Identity of the format of the word 'THAILAND', d05=Identity of 'the size of the word THAILAND compared to other factors', d06=Identity of the slogan 'Diversity and Refinement', d07=Identity of the format of the slogan 'Diversity and Refinement', d08=Identity of the size of 'Diversity and Refinement' compared to other factors, d09=Identity of the pale yellow background, d10=Identity of the red and navy blue rings, d11= Identity of the red and navy blue coloring of the upward pointing triangles, d12=Identity of the black coloring of the word 'THAILAND', d13= Identity of the



navy blue lettering of 'Diversity and Refinement', d14=Identity of the white background, d15=Identity of the gold coloring of the logo

Key 2: IM=Overall image: m01=Image of 'the diversity of Thai goods and services', m02= Image of the 'refinement of Thai goods and services', m03= Image of 'quality Thai goods and services', m04= Image that 'Thai goods and services are reliable', m05= Image that 'Thai goods and services are of premium quality', m06=Image that 'Thai goods and services reflect maturity and experience', m07= Image that 'Thai goods and services reflect contemporary people', m08= Image that 'Thai goods and services reflect up-to-date people', m09=Image that 'Thai goods and services can be compared to lively and active people', m10= Image that 'Thai goods and services reflect loyal people', m11= Image that 'Thai goods and services reflect charming people', m12= Image that 'Thai goods and services reflect kind people'

Key 3: IC= Overall integrated communication: c01= Integrated communication through 'the internet', c02= Integrated communication through 'newspapers', c03= Integrated communication through 'magazines', c04= Integrated communication through 'television', c05= Integrated communication through 'radio', c06= Integrated communication through 'airport luggage cart advertising', c07= Integrated communication through 'airport advertising hoardings', c08= Integrated communication through 'open-air advertising', c09= Integrated communication through 'commemorative products', c10= Integrated communication through 'goods displays', c11= Integrated communication through 'point of sale advertising', c12= Integrated communication through 'brand ambassadors', c13= Integrated communication through 'communication with Thai exporters', c14= Integrated communication through 'communication with overseas importers', c15= Integrated communication through 'communication with domestic consumers', c16= Integrated communication through 'communication with overseas consumers')



**Figure 6** Thailand's Brand Communication Analysis Model

## Discussion

From the research findings, the researchers can discuss the following main findings:

### Thailand's brand communication factors

The study reveals the relationship between Thailand's brand communication and the factors of Thailand's brand identity, image, and integrated communication. The first order factor analysis tested the relationship between these factors of Thailand's brand communication and 43 variables indicative of the importance of identity, image and integrated communication of the Thailand's brand. The aforementioned three factors were found to be significant indicators of Thailand's brand communication according to the second order of factor analysis. Both sets of results support Van Riel's (2001) (cited in Einwiller & Will, 2002:101) argument that identity, image, and integrated communication affect branding. This research study can therefore discuss factors of Thailand's brand communication in terms of identity, image, and integrated communication.

#### 1. Construction of Thailand's brand identity

As stated by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), building brand identity should comprise two factors: core identity and extended identity. The results of this study show that Thailand's brand identity can as well be divided into two groups of indicators as follows:

1.1 Core identity, or the distinctive indicators that can reflect the main identity of Thailand's brand logo. The logo indicators, ranked in order of importance, are: (1) the upward pointing triangle in red and navy blue (the colors of the Thai flag), with (2) the word "THAILAND" in black on (3) a mild yellow background framed by (4) red and navy blue rings.

1.2 Extended identity, or indicators of secondary distinction to the main indicators that can be used to bolster and clarify the core identity. In order of importance, these indicators are (1) the size of the word 'THAILAND' compared to other factors, (2) the navy blue color in (3) the slogan "Diversity and Refinement", (4) the placement of the slogan 'Diversity and Refinement', (5) the placement of the word 'THAILAND', the format of the word 'THAILAND', and (6) the size of the slogan 'Diversity and Refinement'.

#### 2. Building Thailand's brand image

As is known, image is a combined result of several viewpoints collected in the minds of target stakeholders (Martineau, 1960; Kennedy, 1977; Gray, 1986). This research shows that image indicators can be classified into two groups:

2.1 The most important groups of indicators of Thailand's brand image are "the brand for Thai goods and services that indicate (1) reliability (Kapaeng, 2005), (2) quality, and (3) diversity.

2.2 The second most important group of indicators is "the brand for Thai goods and services which possess (1) sophistication and refinement (Kapaeng, 2005), and (2) premium standard-quality.

These two groups of indicators play an important part in Thailand's brand image strategy, which reflects the brand business competency (Goldberg, 1998) and, through perception or interpretation, can lead to the acceptance of the Thailand's brand in an appropriate way. In addition, there is great opportunity to build strength, favorability and uniqueness of brand association (Keller, 2003).

Furthermore, the building of Thailand's brand image must include the status of Thailand as a country, which, apart from reflecting diversity, refinement and quality suitable for export, must bear in mind the variety of quality goods and services that convey the beauty and goodness of the Thai culture and way of living as passed down through generations. Having Thailand's brand as a country brand inevitably links the image of Thai goods with that of the country (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004; Sun & Paswan, 2011: 143-157). As well as building the aforementioned image, Thailand's branding can be an umbrella brand (Dinnie, 2007) for other goods and services produced in or offered by Thailand, allowing them to share the particular Thailand's brand image. One day Thailand will be able to declare that 'jasmine rice' is a brand that implies that the product is grown exclusively in Thailand, while the same type of rice grown elsewhere may have to be termed differently (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

The role of Thailand's brand as an umbrella brand could be considered from two angles. If a particular brand has already been strongly established and communicated, additional adoption of the Thailand's brand will help build a good image. Alternatively, new product brands adopting Thailand's brand, in addition to their own, will boost consumer confidence in the products or help improve the product brand image.

### 2.3 Relationship between brand image and personality

This study, however, did not uncover empirical evidence strong enough to confirm that building a Thailand's brand personality is essential for Thailand's brand communication. The significantly low mean value of image-personality importance reflects that brand personality is not perceived as a highly influential factor in branding.

Singh (1988) suggests that personality traits should be applied in building a brand image, since a brand is a social entity and can display behaviors just like human beings (Hastorf, Schneider & Polefka, 1970). The studies of Bernard's (1926, cited in Westberg, 1994:13), Temporal and Lee's (2001), and Aaker's (2014) have reinforced this argument.

### 3. Integrated Communication

Thailand's brand communication relies on integrated communication in the media and through activities, as well as the context in relation to target stakeholders. There must also be the opportunity for entrepreneurs to participate in integrated communication planning (Kotler & Armstrong, 1996).

The major communication channels are the use of mainstream mass media such as radio, television, and publications, in that order. The secondary channels are newspapers, advertising on airport luggage carts, and online media, respectively. These findings correspond with studies by Thaicharoen (2000) and Sayapan (2002). Use of mainstream media helps spread the brand message to a wider audience, while use of the internet can reach a greater diversity of people. This group of people may include target stakeholders, which cover, in order of importance, Thai exporters, overseas consumers, overseas importers, and domestic consumers. The marketing media used to reach overseas target stakeholders correspond with those reported by Suwannachod (2000).

In addition, as also found by Suwannachod (2000), Thai goods exhibitions are held, while either Thais or foreigners possessing an image of or having a clear connection with Thailand, can serve as brand ambassadors. Such activities help to sustainably disseminate the main image concept of diversity and refinement of Thai goods.

#### Thailand's brand communication strategy

This research concludes that Thailand's brand communication rests on the importance of various factors of Thailand's branding. The study has found that strategic planning of Thailand's brand must place premium significance on image factors of the brand, followed by factors of identity and integrated communication.

### **Recommendations**

#### Recommendations regarding Thailand's brand communication

The Department of Export Promotion of the Ministry of Commerce should change its Thailand's branding strategy, since the brand is now over ten years old. Priority should be given to integrated communication to build an image of Thai goods and services that is 'reliable, of export quality, diverse, refined, and of premium quality'. These positive qualities should be conveyed through the personality of an up-to-date and loyal people, founded on their Thainess.

Furthermore, the organization(s) responsible should suggest that Thailand's brand identity has the following features: (1) the upward pointing triangles colored in red and navy blue (the colors of the national flag), and (2) the word 'THAILAND' in black on (3) a pale yellow background, framed by (4) rings of red and navy blue. Extended identity features to be considered are (1) the size of the word 'THAILAND' in relation to other factors, (2) the navy blue color of (3) the slogan 'Diversity and Refinement', (4) the placement of the 'Diversity and Refinement' slogan, (5) the placement of the word 'THAILAND', and finally (6) the size of the 'Diversity and Refinement' slogan.

Meanwhile, in terms of integrated communication, use of mainstream mass media such as radio, television and magazines must be considered, with newspapers, airport luggage cart advertising, airport advertising hoardings and, internet media as supporting media. Thai goods exhibitions and selection of Thais or foreigners with a Thai image or a clear connection to Thailand, to be brand ambassadors, will assist in better spreading the main image concept of diversity and refinement of Thai goods.

However, as Thailand's brand is a branding communication strategy confined only to its products and services, it could work better if using this particular strategy to strengthen the country brand for Thailand. When successful, this country brand could boost brand strength in terms of awareness, trustworthiness, and loyalty, or even up to engagement towards 'Thainess' (distinctive cultural values of Thais) as a whole in the global level amidst unstable economics and intensified competitive situations.

#### Suggestions for further research

The following research could be carried out:

1. An investigation of opinions of overseas and domestic consumers, and overseas importers, drawing comparisons with those of Thai exporters. This would increase the body of knowledge concerning Thailand's brand communication.
2. Future research could collect data from target stakeholders via focus group interviews to ensure greater depth of information.
3. A comparative study of Thailand's brand communication with brand communication in other countries, comparing their strengths and weaknesses, should be encouraged. The results can be applied to improve Thailand's branding in the future.
4. A study of policy and planning in Thai export promotion should also be conducted. Such policy should also be connected to Thailand's brand communication and country branding in the area of exported goods or services and other areas such as tourism and investment.

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