

The Development of Community Enterprise Entrepreneurs in the Crop Production Sector for Entry into e-Commerce

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Abstract: - The spread of 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 that are struggling. The objectives of this research are to provide training and guidance to community enterprise groups, build a platform and collect product data from community enterprises in the research area, i.e. community enterprises in Chachoengsao Province. This research is participatory action-based with a group of entrepreneurs and 25 groups of community enterprises with three main processes: first, selection and training on e-commerce, second, development of electronic databases and marketing consultation to collect data from the website and consult experts. Finally, advertising and publicity in the online media to make consumers and the general public aware of the project in order to increase the sales and revenues of the community enterprise entrepreneurs. The results of the study indicate political and practical recommendations. To begin with, the government should provide financial support such as low-interest funds or loans as well as have clear, concrete, and continuity policies to support and promote community enterprises. In addition, community enterprises should raise awareness about the importance of real participation, manage big data, and form online trading will facilitate which can ensure sustainability.

Key-Words: -Community enterprises, entrepreneurs, e-commerce, plant production, COVID-19

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1 Introduction

As the pandemic situation of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is severe and spread widely, all countries worldwide are aware of the dangers to the lives of their people. Therefore, various measures have been formulated to control this pandemic such as shutting down the country, refraining from travel, reducing congestion in various areas even the workplace, etc. These measures cause a severe impact on the business sector and entrepreneurs who do not prepare for the adaptation. In Thailand, the epidemic started in early 2020. This epidemic has spread across the country. The number of infected people continued to increase during the first half of

the year. On February 29, 2020, the Ministry of Public Health declared COVID-19 a dangerous communicable disease under the Communicable Disease Act B.E. 2558. The National Emergency Decree was declared in use by the Thai government, [1], resulting in immediate disruption in the business sector, severely affecting the country's economy. Many businesses had to halt their own business. The entrepreneurs, whether large, medium, and small, lack income and suffered insufficient liquidity, [2].

Thailand Development Research Institute has reported the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. It was found that businesses with high exposure to risks included hotels, restaurants, airlines, real estate, automotive,

steel, oil, and related industries. These businesses are quite severely affected by the epidemic situation of COVID-19 including the impact of various lockdown measures, [3]. In addition, in some cases, there is a risk of a business closure. The trading of goods was very difficult. A lot of people were laid off and unable to find work. The general population is unable to engage in an occupation or earn normal income resulting in a lack of income for their livelihood, [4].

Regarding the impact of this epidemic, even developed countries are struggling to cope with such a situation. For a developing country like Thailand, although there is a satisfactory level of solving public health problems, the economic problems affected by the epidemic seem to have a truly widespread impact on the people. The Thai economy is mainly concentrated in large cities with a great overlap with distant areas. There is a much inferior availability of public utilities and economic infrastructure. Thus, research and innovation for spatial development to reduce disgrace and help solve the country's crisis is considered important during the COVID-19 epidemic situation. Due to the rapid development of marketing technology, small entrepreneurs such as enterprises in remote communities lack competitiveness, [5].

The development of such group of entrepreneurs is considered very necessary to raise the level of community products as well as develop marketing channels, [6]. The ultimate goal is to create a structure of income distribution directly to producer farmers. In the past, the government tried to accelerate the policy by using the economic recovery plan to focus on helping community enterprises in terms of raw material quality and processing problems, problems of product residues, and community products in the area. This includes the problem of drainage and export of goods in the area to restore and generate income as well as developing local entrepreneurs to learn more about trade innovations in the form of online platforms or e-commerce. This research aims to train and advise community enterprises related to crop production of 25 community enterprises about components, steps, and various online trading techniques for developing product publicity of community enterprises. The platform can be created to gather product information from 25 community enterprises related to plant production in order to be able to bring product information into the online trading system.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Community Enterprise

Among the community enterprises in Thailand, most entrepreneurs use the principle of thinking by themselves, making their own decisions, doing their own work, and managing on their own. The government agencies are only coordinators to give support, promote potential, give advice as well as provide education and training to the community, [7]. For the initial implementation, each community must determine their own direction by determining the plans, projects, forms of business or industry to be operated, and method of action, [8]. Accordingly, a community enterprise plan can help promote and support community learning, which can lead to the community being able to know its capabilities and related situations around the world. The community will learn from the information until creating a view of what the direction of the community is, and what businesses or industries should be. The plans or projects are required to guide the direction that the community expects. Community enterprises must have 7 important characteristics; 1) Owned and operated by the community, 2) The output comes from the community process, 3) Creative initiatives are community innovations, 4) Local wisdom bases mixed with universal wisdom, 5) Integrated operations that link various activities to form a system, 6) To have a learning process as the core, and 7) To have family self-reliance and target communities, [9]. In addition, principles for applying social innovation to business development consisting of (1) focus on finding social innovations to use in business operations that meet social satisfaction and generate economic benefits, (2) characteristics of social innovations, (3) types of products or the outcomes of social innovation; (4) the effectiveness of social innovation; and (5) the final products of social innovation, [10]. The aim of using social innovation is to build or enhance the capacities and relationships within society from a systematic perspective in order to meet future needs.

Therefore, each community enterprise that is currently operating will be able to bring products that are uniquely locally expanding to wider markets by leveraging existing technologies and platforms, [11].

2.2 Concept of 5Ds of Digital

The 5Ds of digital are very important for the future of business marketing. Considering thoroughly, it can be found that Digital Marketing is related to various products that consumers use. It is no longer

just a website or email, [12]. It becomes related to the management of the 5Ds of Digital. These 5Ds help consumers better interact with brands and entrepreneurs can access and learn to know better about their customers through a variety of channels and methods, [13]. The current digital marketing is about consumer interaction patterns rather than websites and emails. Thus, 5Ds can provide opportunities for consumers to interact with businesses to reach and learn from their customers in various ways, [14], including:

1. Digital devices – Consumers are more connected to brands. This is because they interact with business websites and commonly connected mobile applications, such as smartphones, tablets, computers, desktops, TVs, and gaming devices.

2. Digital platforms – The consumers mostly interact with these via browsers or applications from major platforms or services such as Facebook, Line OA, YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

3. Digital media – The paid communication channels to reach and engage consumers include the email advertising and social networks such as Text Message, Email Ads, Social Media and Search Engines.

4. Digital data – Insight businesses collect information about consumer profiles and business interactions. It is now required by law to be protected in many countries such as competition, environment, and surveys.

5. Digital technology – Chatbot Marketing technology that businesses use to create interactive experiences from websites and mobile applications is, for example, Chatbots.

2.3 The global e-Commerce Situation

From 2013 until now, China is the largest online retail market in the world in terms of Gross Merchandise Volume (GMV). E-commerce is an extremely competitive infrastructure. It has changed people's lifestyles as they say, "Make it easy and do business anywhere." In the Chinese market, Alibaba will help many new merchants enter a new way of doing business online in China. However, overseas surveys reveal that many SMEs lack knowledge and skills in e-commerce, [15]. Thus, a global e-commerce program has been initiated. The global economy and the structure of business have changed. Internet payment systems have been implemented in China and mobile internet has evolved a lot and has become more stable. Due to the growing demand between suppliers and buyers worldwide, Alibaba.com has a huge number of users which is one of the perfect cross-border e-commerce, [16].

Table 1. Purchasing behaviors of people in each country

Country	Population occupies	Behaviors
China	36%	40% ever bought from overseas platform
USA	67%	90% considered the free shipping is necessary
England	81%	73% purchase online but collect offline
Japan	70%	80% have Rakuten account
France	66%	53% accept the products with discount coupon only

Source: Trading Economic (2022)

The above table shows that the purchasing behaviors of people in each country have different needs. It is evidence that the e-commerce business model needs different strategies and policies including the method to deal with the customer's demand. As such, each country's entrepreneurs must have their own unique approach to the e-commerce business. The main point is different histories, cultures, and traditions of each country making it difficult to find the most qualified e-commerce entrepreneur, [17].

2.4 Research Conceptual Framework

The scope of research consists of 3 main activities including the supply side, feedback loop learning, and demand side. The framework of the research concept was shown below.

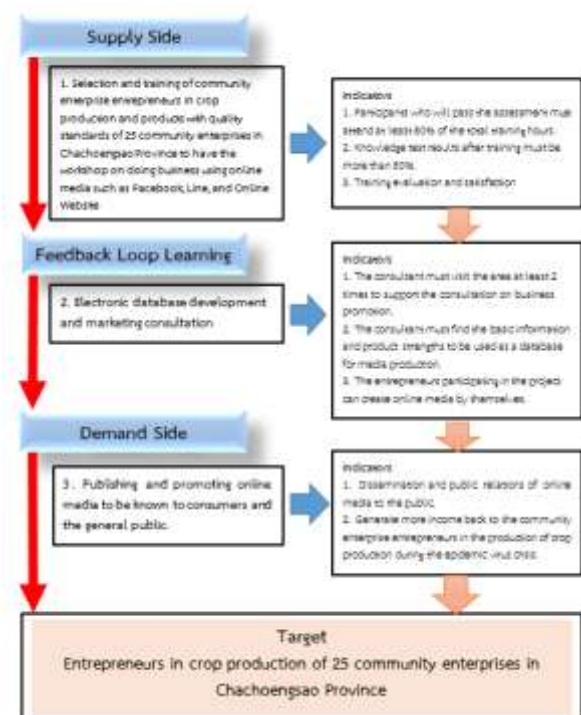


Fig. 1: Three main activities.

3 Research Methodology

This research is Participatory Action Research based on the pursuit of cooperation between researchers and stakeholders, especially community enterprises and people who participate both, directly and indirectly, to make changes and lead to better things. It creates a new body of knowledge and then develops it to achieve results through the practical implementation of the stakeholders, [18]. The key informants were selected by purposive sampling based on the selection criteria. They must be entrepreneurs in the form of community enterprises in Chachoengsao province related to plant production and registered with the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives for 25 enterprises. The main products and the products must be suitable for delivery by mail. Enterprise leaders must have the intention of developing their enterprises to expand the market through online sales channels. The 3 main operational processes are as follows:

1. Selection and workshop training for community enterprise entrepreneurs in crop production to understand and be able to practice.
2. Development of electronic databases and marketing consulting from the researcher to collect data from the real place and have experts to give advice to community enterprise entrepreneurs.
3. Dissemination and publicity of online media developed to create awareness among consumers and the general public to increase sales opportunities and increase income for community enterprises.

4 Research Results

4.1 Selection and Training Workshops for Community Enterprise Entrepreneurs

The selection process begins with collecting community enterprise data from the community enterprise information system prepared by the Community Enterprise Promotion Division, Department of Agricultural Extension. The community enterprises must be registered in each province. The groups of enterprises related to crop production were contacted and selected. They must be present at the time of selection and express their intention to participate in fieldwork. In this research project, 25 enterprises have participated.

For the workshop training in terms of organizing training on online marketing for community enterprise entrepreneurs, the consultant team has liaised with online marketing experts and people who have expertise from real experience to be the

main lecturer in the training to educate. This research project has conducted/prepared learning details in the curriculum with training documents. 2 training sessions were organized at the Knowledge Center of Chachoengsao (KCC). The 1st session was held on 15th March 2021, as a training course on doing business using online media and a workshop on doing business using online media and websites. The 2nd session was held on 5th April 2021, as a workshop on doing business using online media, website, Facebook, and Line Official Account (OA). Community enterprises learned online trading and began to try to sell online by themselves.

During the group interview process, the research team collected in-depth information through conversation with a group of five selected representatives about the past situation of each enterprise before and after the outbreak of COVID-19 problems, impacts, guidelines for adaptation, and barriers to adaptation. In addition, the interview also attempted to obtain data on the past sales of each community enterprise since before joining the project, during the project, and until the end of the project in order to compare the changes in occurred sales achieved with the goals of each community enterprises' goal settings related to increasing income proportion.

4.2 Electronic Database Development and Marketing Consultation

Regarding the electronic database development, IT experts and consultants met with the chairman of the community enterprise group having the entrepreneurs to welcome and facilitate well. The important information was collected such as the name of the group's chairman, telephone number, the position of the enterprise, number of members, and product history, to find the identity and strength of the product. All are for being used as a database in media production.

Regarding the marketing consultation, the consultants were on site to help entrepreneurs create important online media such as the website, Facebook, and LINE OA by themselves. They were taught how to communicate with customers both in the way that entrepreneurs answer questions by themselves and use an automated answering system to provide advice on shipping, creation, and development of online media to suit each community enterprise entrepreneur.

4.3 Dissemination and Publicity of Online Media to Be Known to Consumers

Community enterprises are able to reach more of their customers. Necessary information was disseminated to create a point of interest for their customers, such as product details, trading information, and pictures of products to help customers make purchasing decisions. This information was publicized on at least 3 important online platforms, namely Website, Facebook, and Line Official Account. Some people who are ready to develop marketing channels for other platforms such as Lazada and Shopee, etc.

4.4 Summary of Outcomes, Results, and Impacts of Research

After data analysis, the research outcomes, results, and impacts can be summarized as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of outcomes, results, and impacts of research.

Module	Output	Outcome	Impact
1. Selection and training of community enterprise entrepreneurs or a group of professionals with the potential to attend online marketing training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Selected participants shall attend training at least 80% of the total training hours. - Knowledge test results after training are more than 80%. - Assessment of training satisfaction 	Community enterprise group who are participants learn about new online sales.	The community enterprise group can use knowledge to develop and pass on to create a model of community strength and generate income for community enterprises.
2. Prepare and develop electronic database system and do the field visit for product development consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The consultant must visit the area at least 2 times. - The consultant must find the product strengths to be used as a database for media production. - Evaluation and satisfaction of being a consultant - 100% of the entrepreneurs participating in the project can create online media by themselves. 	The participants in community enterprise groups have the opportunity to develop their own businesses.	
3. Dissemination and publicizing of online media to be known to consumers and the general public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online commerce database for at least 3 platforms out of 25 community enterprises 	The community enterprise group participating in the training have skills in online marketing.	

4.5 Problems and Obstacles Encountered in the Project Implementation

Problems and obstacles encountered in the project implementation can be portrayed as follows.

1. Problems in coordinating with government agencies of Chachoengsao Province in some districts, officials were delayed in providing information related to community enterprises resulting in more time consumed for contacting

community enterprises from that specified in the plan.

2. In some community enterprises, most of the group members are elderly people making learning in technology challenging for both the entrepreneurs and the experts in training and mentoring.

3. Some community enterprises still do not see the importance of the project or not cooperating. This may be because government projects that support from many agencies are overlapping.

4. Due to the epidemic situation of COVID-19 still existing during the project implementation, there were still many limitations from the government's policies and measures to prevent the spread of the epidemic.

5. Many agricultural products are easily perishable because they are short-lived. They cannot be stored for a long-time causing problems and difficulties in long-distance transportation.

6. Many agricultural products have relatively low commodity values compared to the shipping price, therefore, some products are not suitable for online marketing.

7. Popularity of ordering agricultural products online for the Thai market is still relatively low compared to other products. However, there are exceptions for some ornamental plants that are in trend. It has attracted the attention of the market and has a high selling price. Therefore, there is no problem with the cost of delivery.

8. Most community enterprises have difficulty accessing capital sources. There is a need for funding to develop products with higher quality in order to be competitive. Therefore, there is a problem in investing in machinery or technology that can reduce costs or raise the product standard.

5 Discussion

The situation of COVID-19 spread creates problems and has a huge impact on community enterprises resulting in reduced revenues and increased inventory management costs of community enterprises due to the inability to distribute products to the market. This agrees with the previous research finding that COVID-19 poses a threat to the economy, especially small businesses on a macro level. Ways to improve business operations were proposed for small businesses to survive in the midst of the crisis by heading into the online market through the use of various tools and channels effectively, [19]. Therefore, this project was implemented in accordance with the need to be able to bring products to market and increase business sales starting from the training of community

enterprises in crop production to have knowledge of online trading techniques to develop marketing communication and innovation of community enterprise products. It is very beneficial to the enterprise. This allows participants to acquire knowledge and skills about online marketing. After training, the community enterprises can create learning in online trading forms and start to try to sell online by themselves. The key skills for entrepreneurs are communication skills and career innovation, [20]. In addition, the creation of a process of collaboration between the government and the community people is an important process that creates community learning. Training will lead to the capacity building and management skills needed for community organizations in order to have the capacity to manage problems and restore the community's economy by themselves, [21]. Organizing training to educate community enterprise members, especially in the case where community enterprises are still lacking and want to learn more. Not only enable members to gain more knowledge but an opportunity is also created to exchange ideas and experiences among each community enterprise in the area, [22].

Subsequently, the consultation given to the community enterprise group on the elements, procedures, and techniques of online trading to develop public relations for community enterprise products is important. The consultant team introduced entrepreneurs in the context of different community enterprises. The strengths were found and the weaknesses were analyzed variedly by product type. The entrepreneurs were encouraged to find these things based on what they do and what they overlook. This makes it possible to develop online sales more efficiently. In addition, an important marketing technique for community enterprise businesses is the Word of Mouth marketing resulting from customers being satisfied with products and services. As a result, the same customers of the community enterprises will come back to use the service again and also spread the word to close people or through social media, [23]. The previous research studied the model of local wisdom knowledge management: a case study of community enterprises in Nakhon Ratchasima Province. It was found that in managing local wisdom knowledge successfully, one approach is to seek and seize knowledge that comes from within the group and from the outside consultants in order to create specific knowledge of the group and lead to further knowledge exchange, [24]. However, important variables that make the community enterprises of Thailand remain strong even if they

are adapted to the changes that occur is Thai culture which must be maintained to communicate with soft power strategies through artist media and various online media evidently, [25].

The last process is to create a platform that arises from the implementation of this project. Consultants have helped entrepreneurs systematically collect important information on community enterprise products. All product information and past stories of each community enterprise can be brought online. This action is extremely important because, in the past, entrepreneurs have not yet implemented it. Moreover, in some places, it is still working but not up to date with updated information. In some places, there is no effective access to consumers. Especially when the COVID-19 outbreak has caused the production process to be halted, the product cannot be sold in the same channel.

Small and medium-sized business entrepreneurs should adapt to the use of e-Commerce. Apart from giving entrepreneurs more channels to sell products and income, it can also increase the level of closeness to customers and business integration with other business owners, [26]. The operational performance of the community enterprise depended on the management and marketing factors mainly. The shortage of operating funds is not the real obstacle for community enterprises. The lack of knowledge in the management of community enterprises is the main cause and marketing factors are the first reason for the business dissolution, [15], [27].

6 Conclusion

The situation of COVID-19 dispersal creates problems and has a huge impact on community businesses, resulting in lower revenues and increased inventory management costs for community businesses as they are unable to distribute their products to the market. This project was carried out in accordance with the need to bring products to market and increase the sales of businesses, starting with the training of community businesses to gain knowledge of online trading techniques and develop marketing communication and innovation of community business products. This enables entrepreneurs to gain knowledge and skills in online marketing.

After the training, the community enterprises can familiarize themselves with the forms of online trading and try to sell online themselves. The team of consultants helped the entrepreneurs systematically collect important information about the products of community enterprises. All the

product information and past stories of each community enterprise can be put online. This action is extremely important because entrepreneurs have not implemented it in the past. Moreover, it still works in some places, but the information is not up to date. In some places, there is no effective access to consumers. The results of the study show that most entrepreneurs can use their knowledge to sell products made in the community, and they can also generate revenue and become known among consumers in online media. The distribution channels should become more diverse. In addition, entrepreneurs can change and improve the media themselves to ensure sustainability.

Among the conclusions from the implementation of the achievement of the set goals, the researchers can also propose policy recommendations to the government sector and entrepreneurs in other regions as follows:

Policy recommendations

1. The government should act as an intermediary in providing low-interest funds or loans to community enterprises. Thus, community enterprises with low capital can have access to funding sources for the development of their products to increase their competitiveness.

2. The government should have a clear, concrete and continuous policy to support and promote community enterprises, such as organizing training to educate community enterprises to improve the quality of production of goods and services, from the basics that urge community enterprises to use the e-commerce system in doing business to developing higher skills or technologies to expand business sustainably.

Recommendations for community enterprises

1. Community enterprises should raise awareness about the importance of real participation of each member of a community enterprise in order to understand the role and work together to develop their community enterprises. They can operate in collaboration continually. Working all together as a team will be important to develop and ultimately generate additional income.

2. Community enterprises should develop their products to meet the changing needs of customers. Entrepreneurs can find and collect big data from the e-commerce system. They also need to develop clean and safe packaging that extends the shelf life. Processing to increase product value by adjusting the perspective of customers needs to design a variety of agricultural product processing. Therefore, technology should be used in production

or processing. This will help make the products of community enterprises more attractive and easier to sell through online channels. The awareness of Thai agricultural products that are unique can be created.

3. The leaders or presidents of community enterprises with high commitment and leadership will be the mainstay in bringing community enterprises to transform into organizations that can use technology in online distribution channels. An efficient form of online trading will facilitate communication between consumers and community enterprises ultimately leading to a sustainable increase in income.

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Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

The authors equally contributed in the present research, at all stages from the formulation of the problem to the final findings and solution.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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