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Communication Strategies for Strengthening Cultural Identity in Community-Based Tourism in Thailand's Southernmost Provinces: An Analysis Based on the SMCR Model

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of communication strategies in strengthening community capacity and promoting sustainable tourism development within community-based tourism (CBT) management in Thailand's southernmost provinces, with an emphasis on fostering local participation and strengthening cultural identity. Using Berlo's SMCR model as an analytical framework, the study examines the roles of senders, messages, channels, and receivers in CBT communication. A qualitative study was conducted across six CBT sites using in-depth interviews. The findings indicate that the key elements of effective communication in CBT include credible community leadership, culturally embedded messages, and participatory communication channels. Messages grounded in local identities, such as fishing-based livelihoods, peace narratives, cultural practices, and place-based norms, were perceived to facilitate mutual understanding and community engagement. Face-to-face interactions, group meetings, and digital platforms such as LINE were identified as important channels for facilitating local participation and ongoing communication among stakeholders. The findings also indicate that CBT leaders and committee members viewed community members as active participants in knowledge sharing and decision-making processes. Overall, the findings highlight that participatory communication may contribute to strengthening social capital, reinforcing cultural identity, and supporting sustainable, community-driven tourism development.

Keywords: communication strategies, cultural identity, community-based tourism, southern Thailand, SMCR model

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1.0 Introduction

The effectiveness of tourism and hospitality management largely depends on communication, particularly in the context of community-based tourism (CBT) (Chin & Noorashid, 2022). In this regard, communication in CBT refers to the exchange of information among community members, involving interactions between senders and receivers in which both parties actively participate in the communication process (Aruma, 2018; Okwor, 2009). This process goes beyond simple information exchange and functions as an important mechanism for collaboration, opinion-sharing, and participatory decision-making in CBT development. Through the active involvement of community members in communication and decision-making processes, consensus can be built, social cohesion can be fostered, and tourism initiatives can become more responsive to local needs. Ultimately, these dynamics contribute to more effective and successful tourism management that appropriately reflects and advances community goals (Adedokun et al., 2010).

Since Murphy's (1985) research on the impact of tourism in developing nations, CBT, which highlights the significance of communities as both operators and managers of tourism initiatives, has garnered considerable interest (Pham Hong et al., 2021). This approach strongly advocates the active engagement of local residents in income generation and local economic development through their participation in the development and management of available resources (Boronyak et al., 2010). Effective communication is an indispensable part of participation, feedback, and decision-making, all of which are critical elements for the continued growth of CBT (Aruma, 2018).

Despite the vital role of communication in CBT, communication practices remain an area that requires further improvement in order to enhance local engagement. Greater awareness of the significance of proactive communication can encourage deeper cooperation and the sharing of ideas across numerous sites (Jackson, 2025; Witchayakawin et al., 2024). CBT can also contribute to social cohesion, regional development, and the preservation of cultural identity in local communities in the southernmost part of Thailand. To realise this potential, effective communication is essential for enabling community members to participate in planning, resource management, decision-making, and local tourism activities. Communal communication promotes tourism activities that reflect the aspirations of local communities, facilitates collaboration among stakeholders, and supports the sharing of local knowledge. However, communication problems, including limited mutual understanding and weak collaboration between communities and external parties, remain barriers to community involvement in CBT and reduce its effectiveness (Reindrawati, 2023). Recent studies in Thailand further suggest that communication issues and a lack of understanding of CBT can hinder programme implementation and constrain the development of local tourism activities (Chaiyakot et al., 2023).

Thailand's southernmost provinces, namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, have become important centres of global social science (Laeheem et al., 2025). The hybridisation of cultures and traditions within these provinces provides considerable potential for tourism development. In this context, CBT draws on local cultural assets, indigenous knowledge, and community identity, which are valuable not only for creating tourism products but also for fostering tourism development in the region. However, community-based initiatives may struggle to bring together people from different communities with diverse cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, and life experiences to work towards common goals (Benharoon & Mudor, 2024). This diversity can make shared tourism goals difficult to achieve and may hinder consensus-building and communication. Thus, participatory communication has become increasingly important for achieving mutual understanding and trust. Its aim is to transform diversity into a resource that can improve the effectiveness of CBT.

Although the region has great potential to utilise CBT to improve social and economic development, operational challenges remain. One of the biggest issues is the lack of organised and consistent communication among tourism stakeholders. Limited communication and misinformation regarding the benefits of CBT result in low community support and cooperation. Such communication gaps not only hinder inclusive participation but also impede collaboration in planning, innovation, and resource management, all of which are fundamental to the successful implementation of CBT (Chaiyakot et al., 2023; Suparjo et al., 2024).

This highlights the increasing importance of communication in the establishment of CBT in Thailand's southernmost provinces. Effective communication enhances relationships among tourism leaders, local communities, and external stakeholders, contributes to the achievement of common goals, and reduces generational and cultural gaps. Moreover, it strengthens the region's unique cultural narratives and increases the visibility of local tourism products and services. Such communication barriers must be addressed in order to maximise the benefits of CBT and achieve a development model that reflects community values while sustaining and supporting community aspirations in an inclusive manner (Nakaray et al., 2023).

Numerous aspects of CBT, such as natural resources and cultural identity (Sofiani et al., 2025), community empowerment (Klinmuenwai, 2024), income generation and local engagement (Phayakkanant et al., 2023), human resources (Jujia et al., 2025), and marketing and communication strategies (Chuatrakul & Waiapha, 2021), have been widely examined. However, previous studies have largely focused on participatory frameworks, empowerment outcomes, tourism management, and economic benefits (Pham Hong et al., 2021; Phayakkanant et al., 2023; Pramono et al., 2022; Yodsurang et al., 2022). While previous studies have examined communication in tourism, most have focused on tourism promotion and marketing rather than on the communication processes that support community participation, the preservation of cultural identity, and the sustainable development of tourism enterprises. Moreover, limited research has examined communication models that explain the roles of communicators, messages, channels, and audiences in CBT settings. This gap is particularly significant in multicultural and culturally sensitive contexts such as Thailand's southernmost provinces, where tourism development depends on community participation, trust, and the communication of local cultural values. As such, there is a lack of empirically grounded communication frameworks to support CBT entrepreneurs in designing and implementing effective communication strategies that enhance tourism sustainability and cultural preservation. This study therefore applies Berlo's (1960) SMCR model to investigate the communication strategies designed and implemented by CBT entrepreneurs and how the elements of the model are used to engage and interact with the community in order to promote community participation and strengthen cultural identity in Thailand's southernmost provinces. Accordingly, the research questions (RQs) are as follows:

RQ1: How do CBT entrepreneurs design and implement communication strategies to promote local participation and strengthen cultural identity in support of sustainable tourism development in Thailand's southernmost provinces?

RQ2: How do the elements of the SMCR model interact within CBT to facilitate effective communication and reinforce cultural identity?

Applying the SMCR model in the context of CBT offers an organised framework for enhancing stakeholder participation and communication effectiveness. The findings are expected to contribute to the strengthening community-based initiatives in Thailand's southernmost provinces and provide practical recommendations for enhancing CBT management. Overall, this study advances more efficient, inclusive, and sustainable tourism development that benefits nearby communities in the long run.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Communication Strategies for Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

In order to maximise the benefits of local resources, communication strategies are essential for successful and sustainable CBT. These strategies connect communities, government agencies, the private sector, and tourists, while promoting collaboration among them. According to Benharoon and Mudor (2022), a communication strategy is a planned approach that sets out the guidelines, techniques, and procedures for communication within and outside an organisation to achieve its goals. It goes beyond simply delivering messages; it also involves selecting strategies that are appropriate to the context, subject matter, and target audience. Formal and informal communication strategies are two common categories of communication strategy (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Since strategies and outcomes are interdependent, effective communication is crucial for improving organisational performance.

Without strategic communication, performance may deteriorate in terms of both communication activities and the achievement of goals (Zulkeifli et al., 2023).

Nakaray et al. (2023) proposed four communication strategies for CBT: (1) involving local people with strong verbal communication skills to provide information about local attractions and traditions; (2) promoting activities and engaging with tourists through social media platforms such as Facebook and LINE; (3) employing storytelling to communicate community identity through rituals and personalised interactions; and (4) incorporating continuous feedback from visitors and stakeholders to support community development. These strategies enable more effective management interventions by responding to local needs and enhancing community participation.

The role of communication in CBT has also been extensively studied in recent years. Roy and Upadhyay (2024) discuss the importance of communication strategies in promoting tourism activities and decision-making processes in South Sikkim, India, where communication is a key part of governance. Communication functions not only as an operational tool but also as a governance mechanism that enhances community quality of life and promotes cross-cultural interaction and sustainable development. In addition, Mubarok and Imaddudin (2024) recommend strengthening CBT communication by creating CBT promotion groups aligned with shared visions and objectives, promoting cross-sectoral cooperation, and enhancing local knowledge through training. The use of digital media and awareness-building has also become increasingly important for tourism competitiveness.

Recent studies have also emphasised the role of communication in shaping and preserving cultural heritage within CBT. Sofiani et al. (2025) demonstrate how effective communication can be used to convey the historical and cultural significance of Lasem Batik's Javanese-Chinese heritage to tourists. Likewise, Pinijvarasin et al. (2025) argue that effective communication of cultural heritage can support the development of specialised and meaningful tourism experiences. Recent studies have also increasingly examined digital storytelling, user-generated content (UGC), and AI-driven communication tools, which can enhance tourist engagement, personalisation, and cultural interpretation. These approaches also promote heritage protection and innovation in CBT settings (Alrasheedi, 2025; Sujatmiko et al., 2025).

These studies show that effective communication strategies are pivotal to the success of CBT. Key themes include the selection of appropriate communication channels, the articulation of messages rooted in community identity, and the facilitation of two-way communication between communities and stakeholders. When grounded in local cultural contexts and supported by emerging digital innovations, these strategies contribute to community resilience and support robust, competitive, and sustainable long-term tourism development.

2.2 The SMCR Model of Communication

Communication is central to the success of CBT. The communication process involves content creation, transmission, reception, and interpretation (Shonubi & Akintaro, 2016). In CBT, communication between tourism leaders and the community is particularly important for promoting collaboration and dialogue. Berlo's (1960) SMCR model offers a useful framework for examining how information is generated and transmitted within CBT systems.

The SMCR model consists of four components: (1) Sender, the person or group that creates and delivers the message, including CBT leaders, committee members, and local people; (2) Message, the content being communicated, such as travel itineraries, cultural norms, local regulations, and conservation strategies; (3) Channel, the medium through which the message is conveyed to the intended audience, such as social media platforms, community meetings, and interpersonal communication; and (4) Receiver, the person or group who receives, interprets, and decodes the message (Aruma, 2018; Berlo, 1960; Muyanga & Phiri, 2021).

Although Berlo's SMCR model was originally developed as a linear model without explicit feedback, two-way interaction, or co-creation, this study applies it through a participatory communication perspective while retaining it as the primary analytical framework. The model suggests that effective

communication takes place when these four components are interconnected. When the sender, message, channel, and receiver are well coordinated, communication can lead to greater cooperation, reduced misunderstanding, and more successful long-term CBT management. In this regard, the SMCR model is highly applicable to community-based communication. Viewed from a participatory communication perspective, these components interact through ongoing exchanges between stakeholders rather than through one-way information transmission alone.

In this study, the SMCR model is used to examine how communication strategies promote community participation and cultural identity in CBT in Thailand's southernmost provinces. The model provides the basis for a systematic analysis of how CBT leaders and tourism entrepreneurs as senders communicate cultural values, local knowledge, and community narratives as messages through various communication channels to engage residents and stakeholders as receivers. Through a participatory communication perspective, communication is viewed as an interactive process in which receivers actively interpret, respond to, and shape messages, contributing to the maintenance and reinforcement of cultural identity in an inclusive and sustainable tourism environment.

3.0 Methods

3.1 Study Area

The CBT sites selected for this study are located in the three southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Thailand launched the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) campaign, "Amazing Thailand Go Local", to promote CBT in less-visited destinations and encourage the development of a domestic travel culture. This initiative is part of the "Amazing Secondary City Project – Must Try, Must Love", in which these three provinces are classified as secondary cities (Klinsreesuk et al., 2024). Tourism in these provinces is characterised by distinctive cultural features that set them apart from other regions.

In this study, a purposive sampling approach was used to select cases that could provide diverse and relevant information to support the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). The target communities met two primary criteria: (1) they operate as CBT enterprises; and (2) they possess distinctive attributes that appeal to tourists seeking authentic local experiences, including ecotourism, fishing-based tourism, historical tourism, cultural tourism, and eco-cultural tourism.

The six communities were selected to ensure diversity in terms of community type and province, with two CBT sites selected from each of the three provinces within the study area. This cross-provincial and multi-type selection helped provide a more comprehensive understanding of how communication strategies operate across different CBT contexts in Thailand's southernmost provinces. Therefore, the selected cases are considered appropriate for capturing variation across different CBT contexts. As shown in Table 1, the sample consists of six CBT communities distributed across the three provinces.

Table 1

Locations and Types of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Sites

Case	Provincial Locations	CBT Type
CBT1	Pattani	Fishing-based tourism
CBT2	Pattani	Fishing-based tourism
CBT3	Yala	Ecotourism
CBT4	Yala	Historical and eco-cultural tourism
CBT5	Narathiwat	Cultural tourism
CBT6	Narathiwat	Historical and eco-cultural tourism

3.2 Participants

There were two groups of key informants in this study. The first group consisted of six participants, namely the chairpersons of CBT enterprises from each study site. Purposive sampling was used to select these participants (Campbell et al., 2020). The second group comprised CBT enterprise committee members, with two participants recruited from each community using snowball sampling (Naderifar et al., 2017). However, in CBT4, only one committee member was available at the time of data collection due to the limited number of active members. Consequently, 11 committee members participated in the study. In total, the study included 17 key informants, consisting of 13 males and four females aged between 28 and 66 years, with six to 18 years of CBT management experience. The participants' knowledge and experience were highly relevant to the research topic (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

It should be noted that the findings of this study are mainly based on the perspectives of CBT leaders and committee members. Community members, tourists, and external stakeholders were not included in the data collection process. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting CBT management perspectives rather than representing the broader community. Table 2 summarises the demographic characteristics of the 17 key informants.

Table 2

Informants' Demographic Characteristics

Key Informants (KI)	Age	Gender	CBT No.	Years of Experience in CBT
KI01	45	Male	CBT1	9
KI02	53	Male	CBT1	9
KI03	53	Male	CBT1	9
KI04	57	Male	CBT2	8
KI05	35	Male	CBT2	7
KI06	51	Female	CBT2	7
KI07	51	Male	CBT3	6
KI08	54	Male	CBT3	6
KI09	35	Female	CBT3	6
KI10	66	Male	CBT4	18
KI11	34	Female	CBT4	8
KI12	57	Male	CBT5	8
KI13	57	Male	CBT5	8
KI14	42	Female	CBT5	8
KI15	31	Male	CBT6	9
KI16	64	Male	CBT6	9
KI17	28	Male	CBT6	9

3.3 Research Instruments

This study employed a qualitative research approach guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. An inductive approach was used to explore participants' experiences, perceptions,

and beliefs in relation to CBT communication. Subsequently, a deductive framework based on the SMCR model was applied. Data were collected through semi-structured, informal in-depth interviews, using a conversational approach to elicit rich insights (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The interviews were guided by open-ended questions, allowing flexibility while ensuring coverage of the key themes. These questions were developed from the literature review and refined through a pilot study with three CBT participants to enhance clarity and validity. To ensure trustworthiness, peer debriefing was employed throughout the data analysis process to review and refine the interpretation of the findings.

The interviews were conducted between November 2021 and July 2022 and lasted approximately 60–90 minutes each. Before each interview, participants were informed about the study, provided written informed consent, and gave permission for audio recording. Participation was voluntary, and participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw at any time. When participants were not comfortable speaking Thai, the local Malay dialect was used alongside Thai to facilitate communication. Participants were encouraged to share their views openly, with follow-up questions used to clarify responses. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, at which point no new themes or insights emerged (Cobern et al., 1999; Muellmann et al., 2021).

3.4 Data Analysis

Following a systematic process, the interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. Interviews were conducted in Thai or the local Malay dialect, according to participants' language preferences, and transcribed verbatim by research assistants in the original language (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Transcripts in the local Malay dialect were translated into Thai by the researchers before analysis, while English quotations were translated and reviewed by a bilingual researcher to ensure accuracy. The researchers repeatedly read the transcripts to become familiar with the data and identify initial patterns (Edwards & Hollands, 2023).

The interview data were analysed using a coding reliability thematic analysis. The analysis involved initial inductive coding, in which relevant segments of the data were manually labelled according to the research objectives and emerging patterns. These codes were then compared, grouped, and categorised into broader categories based on similarities and recurring patterns. The themes were later developed through an iterative process, and the SMCR model (Sender, Message, Channel, Receiver) was applied as a deductive framework to organise and interpret the themes in relation to communication processes within CBT. Also, to enhance the credibility and reliability of the analysis, a coding reliability thematic analysis approach was employed alongside researcher triangulation. The researchers independently reviewed the transcripts, compared coding interpretations, and discussed emerging codes and themes during the coding and theme development processes. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion to achieve consistency in coding decisions and ensure that the findings were grounded in participants' accounts.

4.0 Results

The SMCR model was used as an analytical framework to examine four key components of communication: sender, message, channel, and receiver. Within each component, specific communication strategies were identified, including sender strategies, message development strategies, channel selection strategies, and receiver engagement strategies. Together, these strategies illustrate how CBT leaders and committee members communicate with local residents effectively and strategically.

4.1 Sender Strategies

The findings indicate that CBT leaders or key actors, as the primary communicators, are very important for engaging community tourism initiatives. If they communicate well with their community members, it has an important effect on the extent of cooperation and trust, particularly when they demonstrate to the locals that they are sincere, credible, and genuinely committed. Those rated as good communicators usually have extensive experience, practical knowledge, and know local customs. The findings also highlight trust and credibility as key strategies in all six community cases, as they enhance community awareness of tourism and prepare the community for the various tourism initiatives, making it easier to carry out tourism activities. Community members find it easier to trust and support leaders who

demonstrate accountability and communicate regularly, as the interview findings also indicate. Based on what the informants reported:

“Trustworthiness, accountability, and openness are critical... this applies to the work process. What we say today must also be said tomorrow for the community to trust in us and have faith in us.” (CBT1-KI01)

“You have to be able to communicate well. For others to think we can deliver, speak truthfully, and act in a certain manner. We also need to talk with credibility. Our performance has improved over time, gaining the acceptance of the community.” (CBT2-KI04)

The interview data from CBT1 and CBT2 demonstrate the importance of consistency in practice and communication. Trust among community members is more likely to be achieved and maintained when leaders fulfil their promises and act responsibly over time. When leaders make themselves available for open discussion and keep their word, communities are more likely to trust them, which in turn encourages engagement in tourism development and management. Credibility is also a key factor in fostering cooperation within the community. This can be achieved when leaders communicate honestly and act consistently with what they say. Other informants also stated the following:

“We have to show that we are reliable and capable. The community trusts us and supports our actions when they see that we follow through.” (CBT3-KI07)

“Gathering people is made easier when a leader is trusted. People in the community are more inclined to react and take part in meetings when a leader is seen as trustworthy.” (CBT4-KI11)

In this study, credibility is established through concrete and tangible actions. CBT leaders who share credible stories will develop long-term trust and commitment in the community and will promote more involvement in tourism. From the sender component of the SMCR model, the interview data indicate that, in addition to tourism information that CBT leaders are conveying, they are also communicating stories of local culture, history, livelihoods, and cultural practices as cornerstones for the community. These stories help local residents understand the significance of their cultural heritage, build a sense of belonging to the community, strengthen their collective identity, and get involved in community-oriented tourism.

4.2 Message Development Strategies

Message development is a strategic communication tool in CBT management that highlights core strengths and community identity. The findings illustrate that in order to foster cultural pride and to appeal to locals and visitors, CBT leaders and coordinators orient the messages in relation to local lifestyles, history, and indigenous resources. Evidence from case studies reveals that this purposeful framing enhances audience interaction and the effectiveness of the message. Thus, as Table 3 shows, the analysis is organised around four strategies for message development covering the different types of CBT.

Table 3

Message Development Strategies for Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

Message Strategy	Message Content	CBT
Traditional fishing community identity	Traditional fishing practices & livelihoods	CBT1, CBT2
Place-based identity	Place-based norms	CBT3
Historical identity	Historical struggle & peace narratives	CBT4, CBT6
Cultural identity	Cultural practices	CBT5

4.2.1 Traditional Fishing Community Identity

The traditional fishing communities, CBT1 and CBT2, employed fishing-based cultural identities, such as fishermen's lifestyles and local natural resources, as key messages to promote tourism. According to the informants, showcasing traditional fishing methods and offering mangrove boat tours enhances tourist appeal and generates additional income for the community:

"We have a wealth of resources and assets in our community. Many boats are available after fishing, so we modify them for tourism-related purposes. These projects, which are backed by a thriving mangrove ecosystem and a unique way of life, have increased local ecotourism and brought in more money for the community." (CBT1-KI01)

The interview data demonstrate a resource-based development strategy that promotes tourism by utilising the region's natural resources, identity, and traditional means of subsistence. CBT leaders made it possible for locals to see their potential and work together to create tourism activities through mangrove boat tours. According to the following informants, marine products are also marketed as core messages to support value-added processing and community-based product marketing:

"Here, participation is especially high due to the obvious concrete results. The community's great potential is demonstrated by the way its members use indigenous knowledge and processing techniques to make fish crackers and other seafood products from traditional fisheries for sale to tourists." (CBT2-KI05)

Based on the data, CBT leaders and committee members perceived that the value of local products has increased, and that the grassroots economy has been strengthened through messages emphasising the community's capacity to process seafood. Such communication promotes both cultural sustainability and economic development by highlighting that these products are rooted in local traditions and represent valuable local knowledge worthy of preservation.

4.2.2 Place-Based Identity

CBT3 refers to Ban Bannangluwa. Although this community was discussed in previous research (Benharoon & Mudor, 2024), the present study adopts a distinct analytical focus and does not duplicate the earlier findings. In this study, CBT3 illustrates how "Hukum Pakat," a set of mutual agreements or community rules, functions as a communication mechanism for guiding tourism resource management. CBT leaders use the principles of Hukum Pakat to highlight the significance of everyone's participation in maintaining and growing the community. According to the informants, this agreement reflects unity and fair distribution of responsibilities, embodying the distinct identity of southernmost communities:

"We abide by our community's rules, Hukum Pakat. Everyone plays a part in upholding law and order, managing waste, guaranteeing cleanliness, preserving the environment, and protecting tourism resources. Every member shares accountabilities and takes part in monitoring when there is theft or drug use." (CBT3-KI07)

The findings reveal that Hukum Pakat serves as a means of promoting social harmony and preserving natural resources. This can be considered the culture and unity of the community. CBT leaders use it to foster an understanding of shared responsibility and ownership for the management of tourist destinations. Cleanliness, disposal of waste, security, and protection of the environment are among its features, which are part of the local people's pride, and the Hukum Pakat is important to curb social issues like drug abuse and crime, and thus it helps to prevent negative events in the community.

4.2.3 Historical Identity

Located near the border between Thailand and Malaysia, CBT4 and CBT6 are historically connected to the Malayan Communist Party. CBT leaders base their message development on accounts of historical struggle and peace, highlighting the importance of history and the preservation of natural resources associated with these historical events. These communities create opportunities for historical and eco-cultural tourism, strengthen collective identity, and cultivate a sense of pride by fusing historical knowledge with local environmental stewardship.

“To maintain it as a tourist destination, the authorities have banned deforestation, and there is a tunnel. The area has been progressively developed since 1990, including the establishment of exploration routes and nature study trails surrounding the historical tunnel.” (CBT4-KI10)

Emotional ties to local identity and resources are strengthened, and pride in the past is fostered when messages rooted in the community's history are presented. Through the conservation of forests and historically significant sites, the area has become a historical tourism destination that attracts visitors. To promote collaboration and increase awareness of the significance of environmental conservation, CBT leaders also place a strong emphasis on collective stewardship of shared spaces.

“Using the community's historical museum, which documents past struggles, the committee worked together to encourage residents to take care of shared spaces.” (CBT6-KI15)

Local identity is strengthened, pride is fostered, and a long-lasting sense of responsibility for maintaining and caring for shared community spaces is cultivated through history-based messages that assist community members to understand the significance of their local roots.

4.2.4 Cultural Identity

With its rare and distinctive traditional and ancient local treats, CBT5 stands out as a riverside cultural market community. By highlighting local expertise and the preservation of cultural heritage through the production of these sweets, CBT leaders use this uniqueness as a core message to boost tourism and generate income, as evidenced by the following statements from the informants:

“We established a floating market, where the locals are well known for making traditional sweets. These sweets are produced and sold by locals as a source of income, preserving local identity, and enabling tourists to buy a variety of traditional treats. The community's own need gave rise to this initiative.” (CBT5-KI12)

Local products, customs, and a sense of pride in the community's cultural heritage are closely linked to communication. Beyond generating profits, local people create and market cultural goods and products that reflect the community's stories, traditions, and way of life. The traditional foods sold at the floating market also represent local customs, beliefs, and cultural practices that have been passed down from generation to generation. By establishing a floating market, local people can create a unique tourism attraction by offering products and services that reflect the community's identity and cultural heritage. The market can also attract tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences and meaningful interactions with local residents, thereby enhancing its appeal as a tourist destination. Besides generating employment and income opportunities, the floating market serves as a social space where visitors and residents can interact with one another.

With regard to the message component of the SMCR model, the findings indicate that messages function not only as vehicles for tourism information but also as a means of reinforcing cultural identity. CBT leaders strategically craft messages around local livelihoods, cultural practices, historical experiences, and place-based values in order to develop shared meanings within the community. Messages that focus on traditional fishing livelihoods, Hukum Pakat rules, local history, and cultural heritage promote community pride, a sense of belonging, and community identity. The findings reveal that, according to CBT leaders and committee members, these messages encourage community members to preserve their cultural heritage and actively participate in the promotion and development of CBT.

4.3 Channel Selection Strategies

The findings indicate that interpersonal interactions: face-to-face meetings, group discussions, and communication through LINE, are key mechanisms employed across all six community case studies to share information and opinions, and to convey nonverbal cues, as identified by the informants:

"We place a great emphasis on individual-level communication, through spoken conversation that allows the members to ask questions and receive answers. Meetings are a routine thing once a week, and that's where routine issues are discussed, and we use the LINE group for fast communication to convey urgent issues." (CBT1-KI01)

"We do meet once a week to talk about plans and deal with the money, including covering daily income. Committee members must attend, and urgent issues are reported from the LINE group, an open-door policy that everyone should know about." (CBT3-KI09)

"The committee and vendors gather once a week after the market closes to review problems and work together to fix them. Every member is in the LINE group to share relevant information." (CBT5-KI14)

These interview data reveal that communication is informal and two-way, with both senders and receivers actively participating in the exchange of information. LINE group communication enables rapid and effective exchanges that are comparable to face-to-face interaction in terms of responsiveness and actionability, while group meetings facilitate immediate and extensive feedback. Overall, two-way communication through both spoken interactions and LINE groups is a key mechanism for managing CBT and is widely regarded as an effective approach.

This contributes to understanding the context of Thailand's southernmost provinces, which are characterised by CBT practices supported by spoken interactions and LINE group communication. Such communication enhances participatory problem-solving, community cohesion, shared responsibility for local resources, and the long-term viability of community-managed and community-owned tourism initiatives.

According to the channel component of the SMCR model, the findings indicate that communication channels facilitate participation by enabling dialogue, feedback, and collaborative decision-making. Face-to-face meetings, group discussions, and the use of LINE enable community members to exchange opinions, share ideas, and address tourism-related issues collectively. Such participatory communication promotes trust, social cohesion, and a sense of ownership of tourism initiatives among community members. In the view of CBT leaders and committee members, it also transforms community members from passive recipients of information into active participants in community development and tourism management.

4.4 Receiver Engagement Strategies

The findings reveal that community members are the main receivers of communication. In all six cases, community participation is promoted through voluntary and non-coercive approaches, as well as shared objectives that guide collective efforts toward long-term CBT development, job creation, and income generation, as illustrated in the informants' statements below:

"Most of the villagers participate voluntarily because tourism can augment their traditional fishing income." (CBT1-KI02)

"Everyone in our community supports what we do. Capital is contributed by members, and involvement is optional and flexible. Contributors receive profits in the form of dividends, and those with greater capacity invest more, which benefits everyone." (CBT4-KI11)

The interview results indicate that because they share the advantages of local resources, residents voluntarily contribute to the development of their community as a tourist destination. Based on informants' descriptions, participating in CBT management goes beyond voluntariness and allows members to share their views through interaction and feedback:

"Open communication is actively encouraged, and all members, regardless of age or gender, are encouraged to freely express their opinions." (CBT6-KI16)

Based on the perspectives of CBT leaders and committee members, the findings indicate that encouraging community participation in CBT requires inclusive and participatory communication approaches. Open communication and shared benefits encourage group action, boost community participation, and support sustainable tourism growth that creates jobs and generates income for local communities.

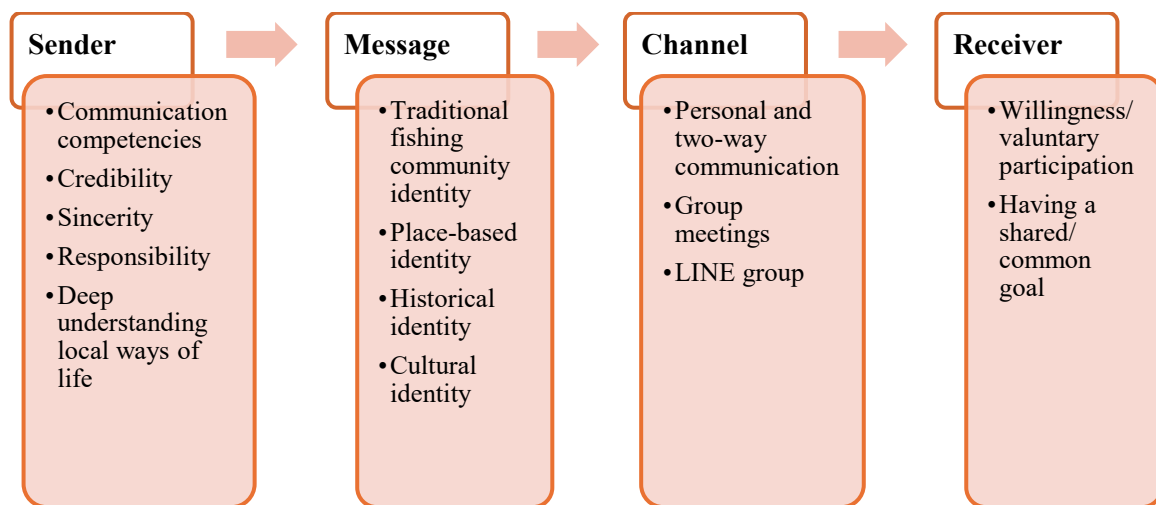
Within the receiver component of the SMCR model, participation is enhanced when community members perceive clear social, cultural, and economic benefits from tourism. Participation is further encouraged through voluntary involvement, open communication, and shared decision-making processes. Therefore, communication serves not only as a management tool but also as a social process through which cultural identity is preserved, community relationships are maintained, and sustainable tourism development is promoted.

5.0 Discussion

The analysis is based on community participation and the reinforcement of cultural identity through a strategic alignment of senders, messages, communication channels, and receivers as part of the SMCR model of communication. All these factors are critical for effective engagement in communities: credible leaders as senders, clear and strong messages about identity and values, interactive communication channels, and community members as receivers. Accordingly, the results are systematically organised by SMCR components, as seen in Figure 1, which also demonstrates the analytical framework and how these components cooperate to support effective CBT management.

Figure 1

SMCR Components in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Thailand's Southernmost Provinces



The findings indicate that CBT leaders, as senders in community communication, should possess credible communication skills, sincerity, responsibility, and an understanding of the local way of life. Good communication skills enable leaders to inform community members and encourage them to participate in community development, both of which are critical to the successful development of CBT. Effective communication and empathy are therefore essential for CBT leaders, as Luxchaigul and Tongsri (2024) point out. Furthermore, source credibility is crucial in determining message acceptance and receiver response (Berlo, 1960), thereby strengthening community members' motivation, collaboration, and sense of ownership in the development of sustainable tourism.

Shared values and cultural identities associated with particular community types, such as traditional fishing-based community identities, historical struggles and peace narratives, cultural practices such as traditional food, and place-based norms such as the Hukum Pakat rules, are reflected in the messages conveyed in CBT communication. By encoding locally relevant meanings for the community and tourists, these culturally anchored messages contribute to the core message content in the SMCR

model, fostering shared understanding and participation. Saengdounghae (2021) argued that message content that reflects important local identities, such as lifestyle, cuisine, tourism activities, and folk wisdom, can convey culture, heritage, and customs in a particular locality, thereby increasing destination authenticity. Such content also encourages community pride and participation in tourism-related activities, supports the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, and fosters responsible and authentic travel, all of which are essential features of sustainable CBT (Mora Forero et al., 2025).

Beyond facilitating participation, the findings suggest that communication plays an important role in maintaining and strengthening cultural identity in CBT. Through fishing-based livelihoods, Hukum Pakat principles, peace narratives, and cultural practices, community members are encouraged to recognise and value their cultural heritage. These culturally relevant and shared messages foster collective pride, a sense of belonging, and community-centred development by transforming local knowledge and traditions into tourism assets. Communication is also a social process that not only facilitates tourism development but also disseminates cultural values, preserves local identity, and strengthens community identity within sustainable tourism settings (Mora Forero et al., 2025; Saengdounghae, 2021).

Communication channels are central to CBT management. The effective use of two-way interpersonal communication in face-to-face meetings or group settings can facilitate participation through mutual understanding, prompt clarification, and the interpretation of non-verbal cues. In addition, digital communication platforms such as LINE add value to traditional channels by providing timely and continuous updates, as well as ready access to information for tourism planning and communication. These findings align with the SMCR model by highlighting the role of channels in facilitating message transmission. In this study, feedback and interaction between senders and receivers are interpreted through a participatory communication perspective, in which communication occurs through ongoing dialogue and mutual exchange among stakeholders. Previous studies on CBT communication have also shown that blending digital channels with two-way interpersonal communication can increase communication engagement, promote community bonding, and support cooperative decision-making (Rudeloff et al., 2022; Saengdounghae, 2021).

In the CBT context examined in this study, receivers, according to CBT leaders and committee members, are positioned as active contributors rather than passive recipients. Using Berlo's SMCR model as an analytical framework, receivers are considered central to the communication process because their willingness to interpret and respond to the message influences communication outcomes. In the present study, such interaction is understood through a participatory communication perspective rather than as an explicit component of the original SMCR model. Receiver responsiveness encourages mutual understanding, dialogue, and community-level collaboration within the participatory communication context of CBT. This finding supports previous studies on participatory communication in CBT, which highlight the importance of active community engagement in facilitating empowerment, shared decision-making, and collective learning, all of which promote sustainable tourism (Rudeloff et al., 2022; Saengdounghae, 2021; Tosun, 2006). Community members support locally grounded tourism practices, reinforce cultural values, and help co-create knowledge by actively exchanging information and engaging in dialogue.

Rather than operating independently, the sender, message, channel, and receiver components of the SMCR model are interconnected within the context of CBT. From a cultural perspective, CBT leaders communicate messages related to local livelihoods, traditions, historical experiences, and community values through participatory approaches using both face-to-face and online channels. The effectiveness of these messages depends not only on their content but also on the extent to which they resonate with community members and encourage engagement and dialogue. From the perspectives of CBT leaders and committee members, community members play a crucial role in sharing and co-creating knowledge that supports cultural identity, strengthens trust, and promotes tourism development. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that participatory communication promotes community engagement, learning, and collective decision-making in CBT (Rudeloff et al., 2022; Saengdounghae, 2021). Therefore, within the participatory communication context of this study,

effective CBT communication depends on the interaction among SMCR components and the ongoing dialogue among stakeholders.

In summary, Berlo's SMCR model provides a useful framework for understanding how senders, messages, channels, and receivers contribute to effective CBT communication. When interpreted through a participatory communication perspective, the interaction among these components supports shared understanding, community participation, and coordinated tourism management. When these components work together, communication may foster shared understanding, strengthen community participation, and support tourism management. These processes may contribute to the growth of the grassroots economy, job creation and income generation, the preservation of cultural identity, community self-reliance, and social cohesion. Together, these interrelated outcomes have the potential to enhance the long-term sustainability of CBT in Thailand's southernmost provinces.

6.0 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Berlo's SMCR model, interpreted through the lens of participatory communication, provides a useful framework for understanding communication in CBT. When credible leaders, culturally embedded messages, appropriate communication channels, and community engagement are aligned, participatory communication may foster shared understanding, collaborative decision-making, and coordinated tourism practices. Rooted in local identity and knowledge, such communication may also strengthen social capital, community resilience, cultural preservation, and the sustainable development of CBT. Therefore, contextually appropriate and participatory communication strategies may provide a foundation for enhancing community involvement in sustainable tourism in Thailand's southernmost provinces.

7.0 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study provides valuable insights into CBT in Thailand's southernmost provinces, several limitations should be acknowledged. The generalisability of the findings may be limited by the small number of community case studies, while the reliance on interview-based data may have introduced respondent bias.

Moreover, the study does not include divergent or competing perspectives from various stakeholders. Therefore, power dynamics, disagreements, and challenges related to CBT development may not have been fully captured. Future studies could use larger sample sizes, longitudinal designs, and cross-regional or cross-border comparisons to identify broader patterns and regional or cultural differences. Further research should also examine digital communication technologies, the economic, social, and environmental impacts of CBT, and related policy and governance implications. Such a holistic approach to CBT development and management would contribute to long-term sustainability and provide valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and community organisations, helping to maximise benefits while protecting cultural and natural resources.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest are disclosed in this study.

Author Contribution Statement

SYB: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Methodology, Validation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing; HM: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing.

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Ethics Statement

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee for Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus (REC No. psu.pn.2-048/64; approval date: June 20, 2021).

Data Access Statement

Research data supporting this publication are available upon request to the corresponding author.

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