

# Brand Awareness and Perception on Sustainability of Business Students towards Social Business in Thailand

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**Abstract**— The purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent business students in university in Thailand have brand awareness and perception about the sustainability impact of social businesses in Thailand. The study focuses on triple bottom line concept of sustainability framework—economic, environment and social. The research employs quantitative approach composing 400 business students who are studying undergraduate or graduate business programs at one of the government universities in Bangkok, Thailand. The finding indicates that the business students' awareness toward the overall concept of sustainability of social businesses is in moderate level. In comparison, business students can recall mostly social business that are governmental projects, with the focus on social sustainability. Meanwhile, undergraduate students report higher brand awareness toward social business when compared to graduate students.

**Keywords**— Brand Awareness; Sustainability; Social Business.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, consumers like us have been living lifestyles that are not environmentally friendly and have been surrounded with social problems which result in our changing lifestyles. As in any part of the world, people could sense that the world has changed negatively with regards to the economy, politics, culture, social and environment. With enormous problems surrounded, government can no longer sustain their role as the sole provider of social services and benefits. It is essential that driving long-term promotion of sustainability can only be achieved through partnership with other sectors.

In the educational sector, many universities have taken the initiatives to actively supported government through facilitation of educational programs by expanding their existing business curriculum to include social responsibility component, integrating extracurricular activities to instill social value and sustainability concept, developing new curriculum in the field of social business or social entrepreneurship.

In Thailand for the past five years, many government universities have pioneered educational programs in the field

of social entrepreneurship, social innovation or social business, by delivering short courses, new degree programs or expansion of existing business programs.

Therefore, this study aims to explore to what extent business students in university in Thailand have brand awareness and perception about the sustainability impact of social businesses in Thailand. In assessing business students' perception on sustainability, triple bottom line approach focusing on economic, environment and social, is applied.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *The Emerging Concept of Social Business*

In any society, three actors, public, private, and NGOs have significant roles to make the world a better place. Ironically, the demographic and natural resource challenges confronting many countries all over the world make the government sector increasingly unable to guarantee some services they once provided to their population. Their enormous responsibilities, limited resources, and political instability often lead them to failure in pursuing public mission of eliminating negative externalities in order to improve societal wellbeing [1]. While in the private sector, some manufacturing processes and business operations generate negative effects on the environment and gigantic destruction of natural resources. Balancing between economic opportunity and environmental health is a highly discussed topic among companies around the world. On the other hand, the non-government organizations (NGOs), are facing high competition for fundraising and also their services provided to the public are often seen as inefficient and ineffective. With these traditional organizational circumstances, a new kind of organization called 'social enterprise' or 'social business' emerges as it attempts to offer a new approach.

The term 'social business' was developed by Professor Muhammad Yunus, the founder of Graeme Bank in Bangladesh in 1983. He attempted to help poor people escape from poverty by providing small loans to them, and increase their quality of lives. A social business is a 'no-loss, no-dividend, self-sustaining company that repays its owners' investments' [2]. He defines social business as non dividend company that does not distribute all its profits, and a no loss

company. Social businesses differ from charities since they do not depend solely or primarily on donations in carrying their social activities.

However, today, the notion of social business has a wider scope. In many parts of the world, including Thailand, the term social business is now used to include many types of organizations, for-profit or not-for-profit, that allow for redistribution of profit; as long as their primary objectives are fulfilling social missions.

The social entrepreneur is often regarded as possessing a unique set of characteristics. There are 5 characteristics of social enterprise which included social missions that adopt relentless pursuits of new opportunities, engagements in developing continuous innovations, adaptation, and learning, acting without limited resources currently in hand, and a demonstration of heightened accountability to constituencies served for the outcomes created [3].

### B. Sustainability Framework

The concept of Triple bottom line (TBL) is part of sustainability construct and the origin of sustainability has a long history [4]. TBL concept is defined by Elkington (1997) as the terms—profit (economic), people (social), and the planet (environment). TBL serves as a framework for measuring the performance of the business using three lines: economic, social, and environmental lines [5].

### C. Brand Awareness Construct

Brand awareness is defined as the ability of consumers to recognize or remember that a brand belongs to a certain category of product [6]. This ability ranges from a vague feeling that the brand is known to a belief that it is the only acceptable one in a determined product class. Figure 1 shows the four stages of brand awareness as a pyramid.

The first stage, 'Unaware of Brand', indicates consumers with no awareness to the brand. The brand plays an insignificant role in the purchasing decision. At this stage, the brand is seen as having no brand equity. The second stage, 'Brand Recognition', indicates consumers who can recognize a brand when giving names or some hints. The third stage, 'Brand Recall', consists of consumers who are able to recall brand. At this stage, consumers can recall not only brand names, but also brand communications associated with the brands. Finally, the top level of the pyramid consists of 'Top of Mind' Awareness (TOMA). TOMA refers to a brand or specific product being first in customers' minds when thinking of a particular industry or category. At this stage, consumers who purchase the brands often become committed buyers. They feel proud to buy the products and the brands are closely tied in with their personal values. They are willing to recommend the brands to others.



Figure 1: Brand Awareness Pyramid (Aaker)

## III. RESEARCH BACKGROUND, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study employs quantitative approach using self-administered questionnaire. The respondents are composed of 400 business students studying undergraduate and graduate programs at Srinakharinwirot University, a government university in Bangkok, Thailand. Srinakharinwirot University is chosen as the unit of the study as the university has placed emphasis on social entrepreneurship field. It has offered short course training in social entrepreneurship in Thailand to the public. At the department of business administration, it has developed new curriculum in social business for undergraduate students and has accepted 1<sup>st</sup> enrollment in 2016. Additionally, the university constantly hosted competitions, seminars, and conferences in promoting the field of social entrepreneurship or social business.

The questionnaire measuring perception and sustainability scores are consisted of closed questions using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where (1) denoted 'very low' and (5) denoted 'very high'.

## IV. DISCUSSION

The goals of the present study were to examine brand awareness and perception on sustainability of business students towards social business in Thailand. In studying social businesses, certain criteria are applied as followed:

- That trades for a social/societal purpose;
- where at least part of its income is earned from its trading activity;
- Is separate from government; and.
- where the surplus is primarily re-invested in the social objective.

Table 1 provides the lists of 30 social businesses in Thailand that are included in the study.

Table 1: List of Social Businesses

Social Business	Product & Services
1.) B.R.E.A.D.	-Rice & School for the poor -Eco-rubber wood toys
2.) PLAN TOYS	-Underwear
3.) TRY ARM	-Organic Farm/Restaurant
4.) DAIRY HOME	-Fair price/fair trade
5.) Thai Craft Fair-trade	-Recycle furniture
6.) OSISU	-Organic Retailer
7.) LEMON FARM	-Garbage bank
8.) RUEM-MIT 2011	-Coffee roast/Shop
9.) AKHA AMA	-Restaurants/Souvenir
10.) CABBAGES & CONDOMS	-Organics Egg
11.) UDOMCHAI FARM	-Handicap bakery/Craft
12.) FRIEND’S CAFÉ	-Courses for Deft People
13.) THAI HANDI CLUB	-Bike Messenger/Delivery
14.) BIKE-XENGER	-Creative Toys
15.) CLUB CREATIVE	-Co-Working Space
16.) MA-D	-Creative Media for Social
17.) BEGIN AGENCY	-TV Broadcast
18.) PA-YAI CREATION	-Publishing/Shop/Fair
19.) SUEN-GNUEN-ME-MA	-Magazine/Pocket Books
20.) SARAKADEE	-Dharma Publishing/Books
21.) THAMMASAPA	-Bicycle Tour/Selling Bike
22.) BIKE AND TRAVEL	-Homestay/Agricultural Tour
23.) THA-KAN-THONG HOMESTAY	-Homestay/Cultural Tour
24.) BAN-DONG HOMESTAY	-Hotel & Resort/Eco-tourism
25.) CHUMPORN CABANA	-Website Development
26.) OPEN DREAM	-Food Stall for New Mom
27.) FIGHT FOR KIDS	-Products from Hill Tribe
28.) DOI TUNG	-Earth House
29.) Siam Baan Din	-Garbage Recycle
30.) Wong Pa Nitch	

Table 2 Shows the Profile of Respondents Who Are Studying Business Programs at Srinakharinwirot University in Undergraduate or Graduate Level at the Time of Study.

Table 2: Profile of Respondents

Factors		
<b>Gender:</b>	Female 58%	Male 42%
<b>Age Group:</b>	16-26 63%	27-37 37%
<b>Level of Study:</b>	Undergraduate 51%	Graduate 49%

Table 3 Summarizes The Findings of The Study Derived From Quantitative Data.

The findings suggest that overall, undergraduate students possess higher brand awareness, compared to graduate students. Undergraduate students show higher brand recognition, brand recall and top-of-mind awareness, compared to graduate students. This can be explained by higher level of exposure to social activities by undergraduate students when compared to graduate students. This is due to most university’s events and activities are hosted during the weekday, where majority of graduate students are enrolled in weekend program (over 70%).

The results of the present study also indicate that business students, in general, reveal higher perception score on social businesses that focus on social sustainability; compared to social businesses whose social missions lie on environmental or economic concern. Among all the Thai social businesses, Doi Tung Development Project, part of Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage, scores the highest. Doi Tung is recognized as a social business originated since 1968 to help hill tribe people in the Northern part of Thailand with poverty and lack of opportunities for legitimate livelihoods. Doi Tung operates many coffee shops and products cultivated from hill tribe communities. Although the project also promote environmental and economic sustainability, the project is largely known for solving social problems for hill tribe people who previously rely on opium cultivation and lack of education.

Table 3: Mean Comparison of Sustainability Perception and Brand Awareness of Business Students

Factors	Level of Study	
	Undergraduate	Graduate
<b>Perception on Sustainability:</b>		
Economic	3.78	3.52
Environment	3.53	2.48
Social	4.20	3.34
<b>Brand Awareness</b>		
Recognition	4.73	3.21
Recall	2.31	2.24
Top of Mind	1.50	1.23

Finally, when being asked about what brands comes to mind when talking about social businesses in Thailand, the top of mind brand are Doi Tung and Lemon Farm. Doi Tung is largely recognized as a social business and students often recall the brand with coffee shop. On the other hand, Lemon Farm which is an organic shop or retail store, gained the second highest score. Although almost all students can recognize Lemon Farm brand, however, only half of the respondents recall the brand as social business. The reason that these brands gain high recognition could possibly explained by the long years of operations. Both Doi Tung and Lemon Farm, have been in business for over 15 years. While most social businesses in Thailand have been operated less than 10 years. However, this should be noted that, both brand recall score and top-of-mind brand score for all the social businesses in Thailand are rather low.

## V. CONCLUSION

In summary, the findings of the present study suggest that students generally recognized social businesses in Thailand. The true challenge relies on moving brands from a state of recognition, on to recall, and ultimately to top-of-mind awareness (TOMA). This stresses the importance of communicating the brand consistently and meaningfully.

Similar to other commercial businesses, it is imperative that social businesses work on their brand communications. As the brands progress from the bottom of the pyramid, and move into higher level, the brand increase its level of competition in the marketplace. The stronger the awareness of the brand is in the mind of a consumer, the greater the possibility that he or she will buy it and then in turn will continue to purchase the product again and again which will create a loyalty to the brand. Brand awareness is key to the decision making process of the consumer. The awareness of the brand highlight the brand image and how it can attract a consumer [7].

To facilitate brand recall, it is important to choose a name that is easy to pronounce and to write, so as to reduce the cognitive

effort of consumers. The pronunciation of the name should be taken into careful account, because it is an important factor in word-of-mouth dissemination and should be familiar and accessible to the class in which the product is inserted [8].

To gain competitive position, it is essential that social businesses operators develop a brand mindset. Having social missions as the core value of social business by no means suggest that social business need no brand building. In fact, any success of social business comes from having entrepreneurial mindset that begins with clear social mission. It is important to keep in mind, 'while its primary purpose is to serve society, a social business has products, services, customers, markets, expenses and revenues like a 'regular' enterprise .It is a no-loss, no-dividend, self-sustaining company that repays its owners' investments' [9].

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