

# **MEDIA DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNICATING NORTHERN THAI FOOD IDENTITY AMONG GENERATION Z IN CHIANG RAI PROVINCE, THAILAND**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to 1) examine the factors and approaches influencing media development for communicating the identity of Northern Thai food among Generation Z, and 2) develop media that effectively communicates such identity. A qualitative approach was employed through participatory action research, integrated into the teaching of Digital Media Strategy for Marketing Communication and Digital Printing Production courses for third-year Digital Multimedia students at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University. The findings revealed four key factors contributing to the identity of Northern Thai food: migration and settlement patterns, geographical conditions, climate, and religious beliefs. In terms of media development, after literature exploration and participation in training on the history of food, students identified three directions for presenting content to communicate food identity: 1) the historical background of Northern Thai cuisine, 2) cooking methods, and 3) nutritional values. Based on these insights, students created media products including short video clips, posters, and cartoon mascots. These outputs were used to present four selected dishes representing Northern Thai food identity: Sai Ua (Northern Thai sausage), Kaeng Khanun (jackfruit curry), Kaeng Hung Lay (pork curry), and Larb Mueang (Northern-style minced meat salad).

**Keywords:** Media Development, Northern Thai Food Identity, Cultural Identity, Generation Z

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## INTRODUCTION

Chiang Rai Province, once part of the former Lanna Kingdom, is located in the northernmost region of Thailand, bordering the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The province is rich in natural resources and has long been recognized as a center of historical civilization, giving Chiang Rai its distinctive identity in terms of lifestyle, traditions, and cultural heritage. Among these, food culture serves as a vivid expression of the province's cultural identity. Owing to its strategic geographical position connecting Myanmar, Laos, and southern China, Chiang Rai has absorbed external cultural influences through waves of migration and settlement. These interactions have shaped a distinctive and diverse food culture, such as Kaeng Hung Lay (a pork curry influenced by Myanmar), Nam Ngiao (a noodle curry dish from the Tai Yai people), and Khao Soi (a noodle curry dish influenced by the Haw or Yunnanese Chinese) (Onanong Thongmee, 2015).

Northern Thai cuisine, or Lanna food, represents a form of local cultural capital derived from ancestral wisdom that has been created, accumulated, and transmitted across generations. Most Northern dishes rely on locally available ingredients and naturally grown produce (Sudsawath et al., 2022), particularly herbs and vegetables gathered from forests. The region's cool climate has also influenced the cuisine, with many dishes containing higher fat content to help keep the body warm. Northern food is characterized by simple preparation methods, minimal seasoning, and the avoidance of added sugar, relying instead on the natural sweetness of vegetables. Moreover, local cuisine is deeply interwoven with cultural beliefs and traditions. For example, during the New Year festival (Songkran), households commonly prepare Kaeng Khanun (jackfruit curry), which is believed to bring prosperity and family well-being, while Larb is regarded as a dish symbolizing good fortune (Chiang Rai Provincial Cultural Office, 2013).

However, the advancement of technology and the rise of the digital society have accelerated cultural exchange worldwide. While international food cultures are increasingly introduced to Thai society and to younger generations through social media, films, and television series, traditional local food—particularly Lanna cuisine—has been declining in popularity (Onanong Thongmee, 2015). Similarly, Tantivitayapitak (2022) observed that compared with other regional cuisines, Northern Thai food tends to be less popular due to its reliance on distinctive local spices and herbs such as makhwaen (Northern Thai pepper), dok ngio (cotton tree flowers), and thua nao (fermented soybean). Unlike the strong and spicy flavors of Northeastern or Southern Thai cuisine, Northern food emphasizes subtle harmony derived from its spice blends. In addition, its preparation is often elaborate and time-consuming. These factors may not align well with the consumption habits and fast-paced lifestyles of today's younger generations.

Building upon these issues, this study focuses on Northern Thai food as a case for exploring ways to communicate its cultural identity and developing media to convey that identity among Generation Z. The aim is to raise awareness among young people, especially students, about the value of Northern Thai culinary heritage so that it can be preserved and passed on to future generations. The research adopted a qualitative participatory action research approach, integrated into two courses—Digital Media Strategy for Marketing Communication and Digital Printing Production—for third-year students in the Digital Multimedia Program at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University. The participants consisted of three groups: 1) students who developed and created media; 2) Generation Z audiences in Chiang Rai, who acted as media consumers and evaluators; and 3) stakeholders, including nutritionists, food historians, media design professionals, and school teachers, who contributed expertise and feedback.

### Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are 1) to examine the factors and approaches for developing media to communicate the identity of Northern Thai food among Generation Z, and 2) to design and develop media that effectively conveys this identity to Generation Z.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Scope

This study employed a participatory action research (PAR) design with a qualitative approach. The objectives were to explore the factors and approaches in developing media for communicating Northern Thai food identity and to create such media for Generation Z in Chiang Rai Province. The participants were divided into three groups:

- 1) Undergraduate students-Third-year students in the Digital Multimedia Program, enrolled in the courses Digital Media Strategy for Marketing Communication and Digital Printing Production, who played active roles in developing and producing media.
- 2) Secondary school students-Grade 7 students at Mengrai Maharaj Wittayakom School, Chiang Rai, who served as media recipients and participated in evaluating the developed media.
- 3) Stakeholders-Including experts such as Northern Thai nutritionists, historians, and scholars; communication and media design professionals; and teachers from Mengrai Maharaj Wittayakom School, who contributed information, feedback, and evaluation.

The study was conducted over a nine-month period from October 2023 to June 2024.

### Data Collection

- 1) Literature Review-Review of related studies on Northern Thai food identity and local cuisine, media use among Generation Z, and participatory media development for promoting awareness of local food culture.
- 2) Participatory Teaching and Learning-Conducted within the two courses (Digital Media Strategy for Marketing Communication and Digital Printing Production), where lecturers and students collaboratively developed media using a three-stage process:
  - 2.1) Understanding: Exploring problems and contexts of Northern Thai food consumption, especially among young people. This included interviews with stakeholders to identify key factors and appropriate media approaches, followed by defining issues and directions for media development.
  - 2.2) Creation: Generating ideas and developing media through classroom learning activities and workshops designed to enhance knowledge of local food and digital media production skills. Students produced media prototypes (e.g., storyboards, sketches, digital drafts), presented them for feedback, and refined them into completed prototypes.
  - 2.3) Testing: Piloting the finalized media with stakeholders and target audiences to collect opinions and suggestions for improvement, ensuring alignment with the interests of Generation Z.

### Research Instruments and Data Analysis

- 1) Interviews and Focus Groups-Conducted with stakeholders and participants, both individually and in groups, to collect insights at each stage (understanding, creation, and testing). Data were compared, analyzed, synthesized, and reported descriptively.
- 2) Observation (Participant and Non-Participant)-The researcher observed students' participation in media creation during classroom activities and workshops, recording processes and outcomes. Observational data were analyzed, compared, and summarized in descriptive form.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### Understanding Stage

The study began by examining the current context of Northern Thai food consumption, especially among younger generations, through stakeholder interviews to identify suitable approaches for media development. Findings highlighted Northern Thailand's rich Lanna heritage, shaped by migration and cultural exchange with neighboring regions, which influenced its diverse culinary practices. For example, Khao Soi Gai (chicken curry noodles), adapted from Chinese Muslim or Indian migrants, blends spicy curry soup with noodles and remains a signature dish. Local geography, with its valleys and forests, provides distinctive

herbs and vegetables such as pak wan (*Melientha suavis*), dok khae (*Sesbania flowers*), taro stems, and banana blossoms, forming the basis of dishes like Kaeng Khae (mixed vegetable curry) and Kaeng Yuak (banana blossom curry). Northern Thai cuisine is characterized by natural sweetness from stocks, vegetables, or fruits rather than added sugar, with flavors emphasizing harmony and key ingredients. While some dishes use animal fat, many remain light, including Nam Prik Num (green chili paste) and Kaeng Phak Kut (fern curry), reflecting the region's unique culinary identity.

In the next stage, students conducted a field visit to explore the perceptions and understanding of Northern Thai food among young people. The focus was on Grade 7 students, who were chosen as the study's target group because they are considered capable of learning about and engaging with cultural knowledge, and of influencing change within their communities. Findings from the interviews revealed that the youths had only a limited understanding of Northern Thai food identity and were familiar with only certain dishes. Their knowledge was mainly based on: 1) dishes commonly encountered in daily life or through media exposure; 2) foods they had previously tasted; 3) dishes that were easily available in local markets and restaurants; 4) foods widely popular among the general public; and 5) dishes with relatively simple preparation processes.

The findings indicated that Chiang Rai youths possessed only a limited understanding of Northern Thai cuisine, recognizing mainly popular dishes such as Sai Ua (Northern sausage), Nam Prik Noom (green chili dip), Nam Prik Ong (tomato and minced pork dip), Kaeb Moo (crispy pork skin), Nam Ngiao (spicy noodle soup), Khao Kan Jin (steamed rice with pork blood), Khao Soi Kai (chicken curry noodles), Larb Moo (spicy minced pork salad), Kaeng Khanun (jackfruit curry), and Kaeng Ho (mixed stir-fried curry). This reflects broader social factors: 1) lifestyle changes, where fast-paced routines reduce the practice of home cooking and favor simple dishes, and 2) cultural influence from global media, in which social media, influencers, films, and series overshadow local dishes, leaving only a few Northern foods widely known.

Interviews revealed that several traditional dishes—such as Jor Phak Kat (pickled mustard green soup), Kaeng Kradang (jelly pork curry), Ong Poo (crab paste dip), Nam Prik Nam Poo (fermented crab chili dip), Kaeng Hed Phor (termite mushroom curry), Khai Pam (grilled egg in banana leaf), and Kaeng Phak Kood (fern curry)—were unfamiliar to the youth. Moreover, some dishes were easily confused with others; for instance, Kaeng Hung Lay was often mistaken for Central Thai stewed pork leg due to the shared use of pork belly and similar fatty appearance.

### **Creation Stage**

This stage focused on developing media to communicate the identity of Northern Thai food among young people. In addition to embedding activities within two courses, the researcher organized training workshops to strengthen the knowledge and creative capacity of third-year students, who served as media producers.

In the Digital Media Strategy for Marketing Communication course, the first workshop was held on January 21, 2024. Associate Professor Malee Muakkul, Chairman of the Applied Home Economics Program at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University, delivered a lecture on the History, Context, and Identity of Northern Thai Food. The session provided both historical and nutritional perspectives, enabling students to analyze content and design communication strategies suited to Generation Z. Key factors emphasized were: 1) migration and cultural exchange within Thailand and neighboring regions; 2) the use of local ingredients such as pak waan, dok khae, taro stems, and banana blossoms in iconic dishes like Kaeng Khae and Kaeng Yuak; 3) the influence of the cool climate, which led to fatty dishes for warmth and flavor profiles that favored salty and sour over sweet; and 4) beliefs and religious practices that shaped food traditions. These insights underscored the deep cultural roots of Lanna food identity.

In the Digital Printing Production course, the second workshop, Developing Computer Graphics Skills for Communicating Local Identity, was conducted on January 27, 2024. Assistant Professor Dr. Ratanapat Suchat from School of Information and Communication Technology, University of Phayao provided training on Approaches and Processes for Communicating Local Identity and Applying Computer Graphics for Local Food Communication. This workshop enhanced students' design skills by integrating computer graphics into digital media production. Students developed mascots, menu characters, and posters as tools to creatively and effectively communicate Northern Thai food identity in ways that would resonate with Generation Z audiences.

After gathering information and participating in the training workshops, the students—organized into four groups—produced media aimed at communicating the identity of Northern Thai food to younger audiences. The outputs included 1) short video clips, chosen for their ability to capture attention and effectively reach Generation Z audiences, and 2) posters, designed to complement the videos by providing clear and accessible knowledge about Northern Thai food. In addition, students practiced creative thinking and design skills by developing cartoon mascots to represent Northern food identity. Across all formats, the media focused on three key themes: 1) the history of Northern Thai cuisine, 2) cooking processes, and 3) nutritional values.

### **1) Short Video Clips**

**Sai Ua Group** - This group of students presented their work through a role-play performance as characters from the popular Japanese cartoon Doraemon, which is well-known among young audiences. The story depicted Nobita's dream of making Sai Ua (Northern Thai sausage) for his friends to enjoy. The presentation illustrated the cooking process from preparing ingredients and seasoning to grilling, while also incorporating the historical background and nutritional values of Northern Thai food.

**Kaeng Khanun Group** - This group presented Kaeng Khanun (young jackfruit curry) through a camping scenario featuring teenagers, adding humor to engage the audience. Performers searched for simple local ingredients, such as young jackfruit and tomatoes, to prepare the dish. The presentation emphasized the cultural belief that Kaeng Khanun is an auspicious food, traditionally prepared for merit-making ceremonies, New Year, Songkran, and weddings. The jackfruit (khanun in Thai), symbolizing support and prosperity, reflects the belief that eating the dish will bring good fortune and harmony in life and relationships.

**Kaeng Hung Lay Group** - The students presented knowledge about Kaeng Hung Lay (Northern pork curry) through a hip-hop song. The performance conveyed the dish's history, ingredients, cooking process, and nutritional values. The story highlighted its origins from Burmese influence on Lanna cuisine. Kaeng Hung Lay is known for its salty, sour, and mildly spicy flavor, prepared with local vegetables such as pickled bamboo shoots, long beans, wild betel leaves, eggplants, and pea eggplants, along with pork belly. The dish is slowly simmered with herbs and spices, including ginger, shallots, dried chilies, and hung lay curry powder, offering both rich flavor and medicinal benefits.

**Larb Mueang Group** - The students presented their work in the form of a cartoon motion graphic, illustrating the history and cultural significance of Larb, which originated in Yunnan Province, China, and spread to Lanna, Laos, and Northeastern Thailand. The term Larb carries two meanings: as a verb, "to mince," and as a homophone of "prosperity" or "good fortune," giving the dish strong social and cultural symbolism. The uniqueness of Northern Larb lies in its spice blends, which fall into two categories: one emphasizing makhwaen, popular in Chiang Rai, Phrae, Nan, Phayao, and Lampang; and the other using a broader mix of spices, more common in Chiang Mai and Lamphun.



**Figure 1** Examples of short video clips produced by the Kaeng Khanun Group (left) and the Sai Ua Group (right).

## 2) Poster and Cartoon Mascot Design

**Sai Ua Group** - The students designed a poster to highlight the health benefits of Sai Ua (Northern Thai sausage), focusing on herbal ingredients such as shallots, lemongrass, chilies, kaffir lime, galangal, coriander root, and turmeric. This built on their video of the cooking process, which helped them research the nutritional value of the curry paste components. They also created an anime-style mascot, “Nong Sai Ua,” dressed in yellow to reflect the dish’s warm tones and convey freshness, supported by visual elements of key ingredients including shallots, coriander root, and chili.

**Kaeng Khanun Group** - The dish Kaeng Khanun (jackfruit curry) is not very popular among young people, as it primarily uses vegetables as its main ingredients. To address this, the students chose to highlight its nutritional benefits, such as young jackfruit for its anti-inflammatory properties and ability to regulate blood sugar, garlic for reducing bad cholesterol and lowering the risk of heart disease, cha-om leaves for their high vitamin A content and antioxidant properties, and betel leaves for stimulating appetite and aiding digestion. For the mascot design, the students created “Nong Khanun”, a yellow cartoon character symbolizing playfulness, intelligence, and agility, with a passion for cooking and trying new activities. The mascot was illustrated with multiple hands to represent the ability to cook quickly and efficiently.

**Kaeng Hung Lay Group** - The students highlighted pork, the main ingredient of Kaeng Hung Lay, as a key source of protein that helps build muscle, provides energy, and supports overall health and strength. They also emphasized the nutritional benefits of other ingredients. For the posters and mascot design, the mood and tone incorporated brown, orange, and yellow to reflect the dish’s colors—linking to the hues of tamarind, peanuts, galangal, and pickled garlic.

**Larb Mueang Group** - Students presented the history and origin of Larb, tracing its roots to Yunnan Province before spreading to Lanna, Laos, and Northeastern Thailand. The presentation combined photographs of Northern Larb with collage-style graphics to align with short video media. The mascot “Nong Larb Mueang” was designed as a Chiang Rai boy in traditional attire, using light brown tones to reflect the dish’s color and green tones to represent accompanying vegetables.





**Figure 2** Cartoon mascot designs created by students from all four groups—Kaeng Khanun, Sai Ua, Hung Lay Curry, and Larb Mueang (from left to right).



**Figure 3** Example of Poster Media by the Larb Mueang Group

## Testing/Evaluation Stage

### 1) Evaluation from Students

The evaluation, conducted with 30 Grade 7 students from Mengrai Maharaj Wittayakom School, revealed that all media formats were well-received, reflecting their overall effectiveness in communicating the identity of Northern Thai food.

**Sai Ua Group** - The video was regarded as the most engaging and entertaining, while also enhancing knowledge and stimulating appetite. Posters and mascots were particularly effective in creating strong recall, making Sai Ua suitable for communication through entertaining and visually memorable media.

**Kaeng Khanun Group** - Although this dish is less popular among youth, the media succeeded in presenting its cultural and nutritional values from new perspectives. However, its ability to motivate consumption remained moderate, highlighting the need for stronger connections between the dish's value and modern lifestyles.

**Kaeng Hung Lay Group** - The media were commended for their informative value and potential for peer recommendation, but they were less effective in stimulating appetite. Posters were found to be more impactful than videos in creating lasting impressions, suggesting that

explanatory visual media may be more suitable than entertainment-focused approaches for this dish.

Larb Mueang Group - the media received the highest ratings across all aspects, including knowledge-building, enjoyment, and motivation to consume and recommend the dish. Posters and mascots were especially well-received, indicating that Northern Larb resonates strongly with youth preferences and can balance cultural and consumption-oriented communication.

In summary, the results demonstrate that the developed media effectively fostered learning and positive motivation toward Northern Thai food among Generation Z. Sai Ua and Larb Mueang proved to have the highest potential for communication through creative media, while Kaeng Khanun and Kaeng Hung Lay, despite their cultural and nutritional significance, require more strategic storytelling and lifestyle-oriented approaches to enhance their appeal to younger audiences.

## **2) Evaluation from Stakeholders**

Stakeholders—including scholars in communication and media design, food history and culture, Northern Thai nutrition, and teachers from Mengrai Maharaj Wittayakom School—generally agreed that the media effectively and creatively conveyed Northern Thai food identity.

The short video clips each showed unique strengths. Sai Ua (Northern sausage) employed storytelling through the Japanese cartoon Doraemon, making the presentation engaging while communicating cooking steps, history, and nutritional value. Kaeng Khanun (jackfruit curry) used a camping scenario among teenagers to highlight the simplicity and accessibility of natural ingredients. Kaeng Hung Lay adopted a hip-hop music video format, combining rhythm, lyrics, and performance to appeal to youth audiences. Larb Mueang applied motion-graphic animation with relatable cartoon characters, effectively building a connection with the target group.

Posters and mascots also reflected thoughtful design and research. Examples include the Northern Larb mascot in traditional dress and the Sai Ua mascot styled in anime. However, some outputs were less effective: the Hung Lay mascot did not clearly represent the dish, while the Kaeng Khanun mascot, though based on a jackfruit, did not fully capture its cultural identity.

Overall, the evaluation confirmed that the media were engaging and valuable for cultural communication. Still, improvements are needed in enhancing clarity and diversifying both content and visuals to better represent the cultural essence of Northern Thai cuisine.

## **CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION**

### **Factors and Approaches for Developing Media to Communicate Northern Thai Food Identity**

The findings from the Understanding stage revealed both opportunities and challenges in developing media to communicate Northern Thai food identity to younger generations. A field study with Grade 7 students indicated that while youths had some awareness of Northern Thai cuisine, their knowledge was limited to a small number of familiar dishes. Their perceptions were shaped primarily by everyday exposure, media representations, foods they had previously tasted, dishes available in local markets and restaurants, foods widely popular among the public, and recipes with simple preparation processes.

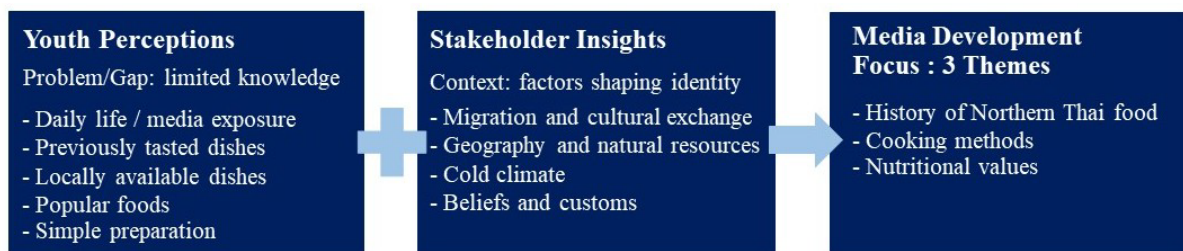
The results clearly show that knowledge of Northern Thai food is only partially transmitted to Generation Z in Chiang Rai. Young people tend to recognize dishes that are common, visible in the media, or easy to access, while their awareness of less-promoted or more traditional dishes is limited. Some also confuse Northern dishes with Central Thai cuisine, indicating gaps in cultural distinctiveness. This pattern reflects selective cultural transmission, shaped by modern lifestyles (Md. Norazmir, Norazlanshah, & Zaiton, 2012) that have reduced home cooking and encouraged reliance on simple or ready-made meals. At the same time, global



cultural influences—circulating through social media, influencers, and entertainment—play a dominant role in shaping how youth perceive food (Ogge, 2024).

These findings suggest that younger audiences may lack deeper cultural and historical knowledge of Northern Thai food, highlighting the need for media interventions that enrich understanding while maintaining accessibility. This resonates with Rattikan Jenjad (2013), who emphasized that food should be understood across multiple dimensions—including history, food culture, nutrition, health, religion, society, economy, lifestyle, and local wisdom. Incorporating these dimensions into media design can provide youth with a more holistic perspective on Northern Thai food identity.

Analysis of stakeholder interviews further identified four key factors shaping the identity of Northern Thai cuisine, each offering implications for media development. First, migration and cultural exchange with Myanmar, China, and Laos contributed to the blending of culinary traditions, forming distinctive Lanna food practices. Second, geography and natural resources provided access to unique herbs and plants—such as pak waan and banana blossoms—that define many regional dishes. Third, the cold northern climate influenced the development of recipes that are relatively high in fat to provide warmth and energy, while the flavors characteristically emphasize salty and sour notes rather than sweetness. Fourth, beliefs, religion, and local customs gave symbolic meaning to dishes, as exemplified by Larb Mueang in Chiang Rai, which differs from other provinces in both preparation and cultural significance. These findings align with previous studies. Noppawan (2022) emphasized that the identity of Langkasuka cuisine in Southern Thailand emerged through cultural integration shaped by trade, migration, and religion, while Klinchan-daeng (2020) highlighted technique, taste, and recipe as key dimensions of food identity influenced by environment, tradition, and resource availability. Taken together, the results suggest that the identity of Northern Thai cuisine extends beyond ingredients and flavors to encompass historical, geographical, cultural, and symbolic dimensions. Consequently, media designed for Generation Z should not only present cooking methods and nutritional value but also weave in cultural narratives and local heritage, thereby fostering both learning and engagement.



**Figure 4** Conceptual framework for developing media to communicate Northern Thai food identity among Generation Z. The model integrates youth perceptions, contextual factors identified by stakeholders, and thematic directions for media development.

### Media Development for Communicating Northern Thai Food Identity among Generation Z

The second stage of the study revealed that media content, developed through stakeholder input and Generation Z perspectives, could be effectively structured around three core themes: 1) the history of Northern Thai food, 2) cooking methods, and 3) nutritional value. This aligns with Suwannarong (2022), who emphasized that the communication and construction of local food identity should not be limited to agricultural, culinary, historical, or lifestyle dimensions alone, but should also incorporate nutrition and health perspectives, such as the nutritional properties of specific ingredients.

Short video clips were chosen as the primary medium, given the popularity of short-form video among youth audiences (SpringNews, 2022). This format effectively integrates entertainment with knowledge, making it a powerful tool for enhancing both engagement and understanding. Posters and cartoon mascots played complementary roles as creative, engaging tools—providing cultural memory, offering reinterpretations of traditional stories, and creating contemporary shared experiences. Such creative media also align with the concept of the creative economy, positioning cultural storytelling as a driver of innovation (Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Thammasat University, 2022).

The participatory process reflected earlier studies emphasizing that youth development is most effective when grounded in diverse experiences, including hands-on practice, expert-led workshops, peer exchange, and collaborative planning with adults (Thuangdin, 2013). Similarly, Juilaemlong (2022) demonstrated that food identity can be communicated through model prototypes developed in three stages—preparation, production, and evaluation by community experts. Synthesizing these insights, the study highlights that Northern Thai food identity can be communicated through local ingredients and culinary practices unique to Chiang Rai, which can serve as prototypes representing Lanna cuisine more broadly.

In the testing stage, students' media were evaluated by Grade 7 participants. Results showed that short video clips were most effective, with the Larb Mueang video receiving the highest satisfaction, followed by Sai Ua, Kaeng Khanun, and Kaeng Hung Lay. Students agreed that the videos were enjoyable, engaging, and provided new knowledge about the dishes. This suggests that short-form video is particularly suitable for communicating local identity and culture, as its engaging visuals and storytelling can effectively embed historical, cultural, and lifestyle knowledge. These findings align with Charoennet (2021), who found that video media—produced with community participation—was highly effective in communicating local identity and promoting cultural tourism.

For posters and cartoon mascots, the evaluation found that students were most satisfied with the posters and mascots produced by the Larb Mueang group, followed by Sai Ua, Kaeng Khanun, and Kaeng Hung Lay. Overall, learners expressed strong appreciation for the creative designs, particularly the cartoon mascots of Sai Ua and Larb Mueang. These results were consistent with expert evaluations from scholars in media design and communication, who noted that these two groups most effectively conveyed the identity of Northern Thai food. For example, the Larb Mueang mascot reflected local identity through traditional clothing, while the Sai Ua mascot integrated key ingredients of the dish into the character design. Additionally, student feedback highlighted that posters and mascots helped them vividly recall the dishes, reinforcing the role of visual media in linking cultural identity with food recognition.

This finding is consistent with insights shared by Assistant Professor Dr. Ratanapat Suchat, who emphasized during the student media-production workshop that effective communication of cultural identity requires identifying clear connections between the intended message and the design outcome. Similarly, Arifen Hasani, an independent cartoonist, highlighted that digital-age cartoonists must develop the ability to link everyday stories and contexts into creative concepts. In the same direction, Assistant Professor Karntachat Raungratanaamporn, a media scholar, argued that designers and illustrators need to understand cultural products and know how to adapt and reinterpret them in order to extend their creative potential. (Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Thammasat University, 2022)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1) Content Dimension

Beyond linking Northern Thai food identity to health and nutritional values—such as the benefits of herbs, vegetables, and cooking processes—there are broader dimensions that can be emphasized. These include history, culture and lifestyle, economy, community power, religion,

and consumption practices across generations. If students recognize and integrate these connections, the resulting content will become more meaningful, layered, and engaging.

## **2) Presentation Dimension**

Some student groups conveyed the identity of Northern Thai food less clearly. Effective media design should go beyond showcasing dishes and ingredients, incorporating surrounding cultural elements such as dining traditions, cooking practices, utensils, and related rituals. Integrating these aspects into posters and mascot designs can create richer representations that more authentically reflect local identity.

## **3) Media Types Dimension**

Short video clips, posters, and cartoon mascots all proved effective in communicating Northern Thai food identity to Generation Z. However, each medium has distinct strengths in different contexts. Cartoon mascots are particularly effective in capturing attention and stimulating interest among youth. Short videos combine entertainment with storytelling, making them suitable for delivering both knowledge and engagement. Posters and infographics are well-suited for presenting more detailed or in-depth information. Therefore, when planning communication strategies, students must understand the unique strengths of each medium and select them according to context and objectives.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study focused on a small group of Grade 7 students in Chiang Rai, so the findings cannot be widely generalized. Future research should expand the sample size, include participants from different regions, and examine other age groups to explore how traditional and local food identities are understood across generations. Further studies could also adapt and refine the conceptual framework developed here, which connects (1) youth perceptions of food, (2) key cultural transmission factors such as migration, geography, climate, and beliefs, and (3) approaches to media development through history, cooking methods, and nutrition. Applying this framework in varied cultural contexts would help assess its broader applicability and identify context-specific adaptations. Such comparative work could offer stronger guidelines for creating media interventions that both engage younger audiences and support the preservation of traditional food heritage in the face of modernization and globalization.

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