

DEVELOPING PRODUCT BRANDING AND PACKAGING TO ENHANCE COMPETITIVENESS OF GREEN TRAVEL. THE COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES IN THAILAND

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Abstract. As Thailand's COVID-19 situation improves, the country is easing travel restrictions and welcoming back visitors. Green travel has gained popularity post-pandemic, with the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Wang Sam Mo District, Udon Thani Province, Thailand. Reopening after previous COVID-19-related closures. To align with this eco-conscious trend, community enterprises are preparing by creating new products and rebranding to reflect a green image. This study aimed to 1) enhance product branding and packaging and 2) test the market appeal of these updates for the Green Travel Community Enterprises. The objective was to help these enterprises add value, increase competitiveness and boost income by incorporating local identity and storytelling. The study engaged two target groups: (1) 10 stakeholders, who participated in a focus group to discuss branding and packaging needs and (2) 100 consumers, who provided feedback via a questionnaire. Results highlighted a preference for branding that emphasizes the community's unique identity, wisdom and culture, as well as packaging that adds value and represents the community's character. Both expert evaluations and consumer feedback reflected high satisfaction with the new designs, confirming their effectiveness in meeting market expectations.

Keywords: Branding development, packaging development, Green Travel Community Enterprises, competitiveness, Wang Sam Mo District, Udon Thani Province.

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1. Introduction

Since the COVID-19 outbreak began in April 2021, the transmission of the virus in Thailand has shown signs of improvement. With the relaxation of travel restrictions, the tourism sector has a valuable opportunity to reposition itself by focusing on group travel, which is expected to experience increased demand (UNWTO, 2022). This shift aims to showcase Thailand's rich heritage, such as its natural environment and cultural traditions-while introducing new activities like wellness and lifestyle tourism to enhance its appeal (Hall *et al.*, 2020).

Economic structural issues have long been a significant factor contributing to poverty, particularly among farmers and general laborers. These groups, characterized by low and unstable incomes, primarily engaged in agriculture, manual labor and self-employment. Many of them face challenges in accessing essential resources, including agricultural land, financial capital and relevant knowledge necessary for planning, developing and enhancing their products.

Moreover, there is a strong emphasis on expanding group travel and encouraging more frequent visits from both domestic and international travelers, mainly free independent travelers (FITs) and those interested in customized tours. Green travel has emerged as a sustainable solution to stimulate interest in secondary cities and mitigate over-tourism in popular destinations (Gössling & Higham, 2021). This approach has the potential to boost the Thai economy to approximately 60-80 % of its pre-pandemic income levels (Prajongkarn & Chunanantatham, 2021). While Thailand offers a wide range of products derived from local wisdom that captivates consumer interest, significant challenges persist in product distribution and quality development. One critical issue is the underutilization of effective branding and packaging design, which significantly influences perceptions of product quality and marketing success (Klinkaewnarong, 2015). According to the Resource-Based View (RBV), branding and packaging are key intangible assets that enhance product differentiation and contribute to sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991). However, many products in the local market lack a strong brand identity and distinctive packaging, making them less competitive. This lack of differentiation diminishes customer recognition and reduces market competitiveness (Puttaphumithak, 2015).

In Wang Sam Mo District, Udon Thani Province, the Green Travel Community Enterprises offer a variety of products that reflect local wisdom, including handicrafts, woven textiles, agricultural tourism and food souvenirs. However, these products have traditionally been sold without effective branding and packaging, limiting their market visibility, pricing potential and marketing opportunities (Reyhle, 2016). Consequently, this has resulted in low community income and limited growth for local enterprises. Enhancing branding and packaging is, therefore, essential to improving product distribution, increasing market competitiveness and elevating the attractiveness and value of these enterprises' offerings (Kotler & Keller, 2016). From the perspective of Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory, branding and packaging can serve as differentiation strategies that allow community enterprises to establish unique market positions (Porter, 1985). Strong branding communicates authenticity, quality and cultural significance, which are critical factors in consumer decision-making (Aaker, 1996). Additionally, innovative packaging designs that incorporate sustainability elements can appeal to eco-conscious consumers, further strengthening competitive positioning (Pavitt, 2000).

This study focuses on developing product branding and packaging for the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province. The initiative aims to increase the value and competitiveness of their products by enhancing their distinctiveness and effectively showcasing local identity. By leveraging competitive advantage theories, the study seeks to demonstrate how branding and packaging can influence consumer purchasing decisions, boost community income, strengthen the foundational economy of community enterprises and reduce social and economic disparities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Importance of Product Branding

Branding is essential for creating a sustainable competitive advantage in today's market. It enables organizations to differentiate themselves and secure a long-term market position, drawing on sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) theories. Effective branding produces valuable, rare and inimitable resources that drive market success and

communicate core competencies, fostering dynamic capabilities that adapt to changing conditions (Zhe *et al.*, 2023; Tungate, 2020).

A strong branding strategy supports sustainable development through market differentiation, stakeholder engagement and value communication related to environmental responsibility (Zhe *et al.*, 2023). It enhances both market positioning and internal capabilities for long-term competitiveness (Barney, 1991; Zhe *et al.*, 2023).

2.2. Importance of Packaging

Packaging is a key element in sustaining competitive advantage. It helps achieve cost leadership and differentiation, primarily through unique design features tailored to market needs (Porter, 2011; Zhe *et al.*, 2023). Innovative packaging, viewed from a resource-based perspective, becomes a valuable and rare asset when it incorporates hard-to-imitate attributes such as:

- Protection that preserves product integrity;
- Information supporting consumer decision-making;
- Design that enhances brand recognition;
- Functionality that improves user experience;
- Sustainability aligned with environmental responsibility (Tuuli-Anna, 2020).

From a dynamic capabilities perspective, packaging must evolve to address market demands, regulations and environmental concerns (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Zhe *et al.*, 2023). This comprehensive strategy helps balance objectives like product protection, brand communication and sustainability, supporting both immediate and long-term goals (De Wit & Meyer, 2005; Zhe *et al.*, 2023).

2.3. Improving Operational Effectiveness Through Sustainable Supply Chain Management

For supply chains to be truly sustainable, they must not only meet conventional financial performance metrics but also incorporate broader assessments that include social and environmental factors—commonly referred to as the triple bottom line (Elkington & Rowlands, 1999; Kleindorfer *et al.*, 2005; Esty & Winston, 2009). Research indicates that sustainable supply chain management not only mitigates negative environmental and social impacts but also enhances operational efficiency across several key areas:

- **Green Design:** A systematic approach to minimizing environmental impacts and health risks throughout a product's entire life cycle, beginning from the initial stages of product and process development (Fiksel, 1998).
- **Green Operations:** The integration of environmentally responsible practices in various operational activities, including product manufacturing, remanufacturing, usage, handling, logistics and waste management after the design phase is completed (Srivastava, 2007; Lund, 1984).
- **Green Manufacturing:** Aims to reduce ecological impact through the selection of appropriate materials and production processes, such as incorporating recycled content or adopting refurbishing and remanufacturing methods (Srivastava, 2007; Lund, 1984).
- **Waste Minimization:** This involves reducing hazardous waste generated during production and operational processes and ensuring proper treatment, storage and disposal (Lund, 1984).

- Reverse Logistics is the strategic planning, implementation and management of cost-efficient flows of raw materials, in-process inventory and finished goods from the point of consumption back to their origin. This process aims to recapture value or ensure proper disposal at the end of a product's useful life (Zhu & Sarkis, 2004; Rogers & Tibben-Lembke, 1999).

3. The Conceptual Framework

The current study utilized research and development (R&D) methods to design product branding and packaging aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Wang Sam Mo District, Udon Thani Province, Thailand. This enterprise was guided by a conceptual framework focused on improving the branding and packaging of tourism community enterprises to boost their competitiveness, as illustrated in Figure 1.

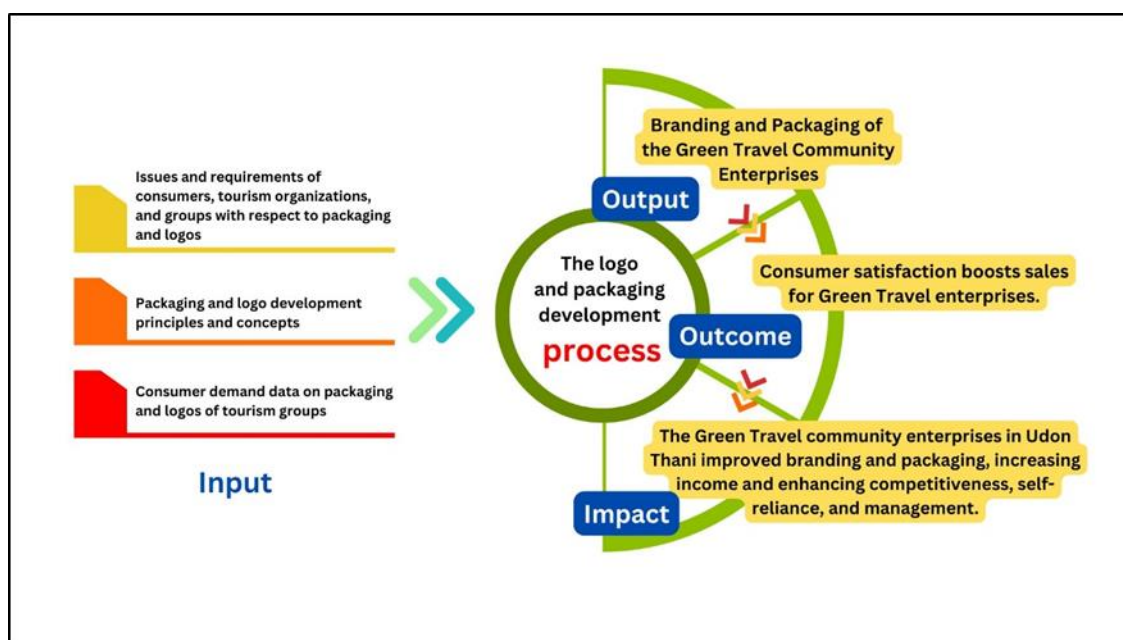


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework (source: created by authors)

4. Hypothesis

To assess consumer response, branding and packaging for community tourism enterprises in Udon Thani Province, Thailand, will be developed and tested in the market. The testing will evaluate consumer satisfaction, following a conceptual framework aimed at enhancing these enterprises' competitiveness through improved branding and packaging design.

5. Objectives of the Study

1. To develop product branding and packaging for the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province, Thailand.

2. To conduct a market test on the product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province, Thailand.

6. Research Methodology

The current study utilized a research and development (R&D) method to enhance the competitiveness of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Wang Sam Mo District, Udon Thani Province, Thailand, by developing their product branding and packaging. These enterprises can be categorized into three product types: (1) handicrafts, local woven textiles and processed textiles; (2) agricultural tourism and (3) food souvenirs. The target group consisted of three samples: Nakorn Wangyai Textile Community Enterprise, Mae Somporn Organic Agriculture Community Enterprise and Mae Lamoon Dried Fish Community Enterprise. The research procedures were adapted from Kongjaroenkiat and Kongjaroenkiat (1999) and Jam & Co Design (2017) and can be divided into two phases as follows:

6.1. Phase 1: Developing product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises

The development of product branding and packaging for the Green Travel Community Enterprises involved three main procedures:

1. Fieldwork: A survey was conducted to identify the problems and needs related to product branding and packaging, as well as to examine tourism behaviour following the COVID-19 outbreak. Data was collected through focus group discussions using interview forms with ten participants, selected via purposive sampling from the community enterprises' stakeholder population. The collected data was then analysed to create a conceptual framework for improving product branding and packaging, thereby enhancing competitiveness in Udon Thani Province.

2. A prototype for product branding and packaging was designed using insights derived from the conceptual framework, which was developed through focus group discussions and expert evaluation.

3. Evaluation: The prototypes were evaluated by three packaging and design experts using a Five-Point Likert scale evaluation form. The results were using descriptive statistics, including the mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (S.D.), to assess distribution potential. Based on the experts' suggestions and recommendations, the prototypes were adjusted to produce branding and packaging for the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province that would be suitable for actual distribution.

6.2. Phase 2: Testing the market for product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises

The Testing the market for product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province involved two main procedures:

After adjusting the prototypes based on the experts' suggestions and evaluations, these revised prototypes were used for market testing through a satisfaction questionnaire. This questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale to evaluate consumer satisfaction with the branding and packaging. The interpretation of the scores was as follows:

Mean Score Between 4.51 - 5.00: The Highest Level of Satisfaction

Mean Score Between 3.51 - 4.50: High Level of Satisfaction

Mean Score Between 2.51 - 3.50: Moderate Satisfaction

Mean Score Between 1.51 - 2.50: Low Level of Satisfaction

Mean Score Between 1.00 - 1.50: The Least Level of Satisfaction

The quality of the questionnaire was assessed using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC), achieving a consistency index value of 0.50 or above, indicating exceptional quality. The validity was further evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient after a pilot test with 30 individuals who shared characteristics with the study participants. This study resulted in a value of 0.70 or above, confirming high validity (Kaemkate, 2012).

The participants consisted of 100 consumers selected through accidental sampling. The questionnaire evaluated satisfaction levels regarding the product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises. The data from the market testing was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (S.D.), to determine overall satisfaction levels.

7. Research of the Study

The result was divided into 3 sections and could be explained as followed:

7.1. The result of analysis of problems and needs towards product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province

The analysis of the problems and needs related to product branding and packaging for the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province was conducted after gathering data from 10 stakeholders through fieldwork. This information was used to construct a conceptual framework aimed at improving the branding and packaging of tourism community enterprises to enhance their competitiveness. The results are summarized in Table 1.

As presented in Table 1, the Green Travel Community Enterprises and their consumers identified several challenges and requirements related to product branding and packaging. They expressed the need for branding that incorporates the community's name to highlight its unique identity, cultural heritage and traditional wisdom. Additionally, they sought packaging designs that represent their cultural identity while adding value to their products for broader distribution.

Issues and Needs of Nakorn Wangyai Textile Community Enterprise

Utilizing local craftsmanship, this community enterprise produces and sells sarongs, loincloths, collars, bags and other textile products. However, these items have been distributed without branding or proper packaging to signify group identity. The enterprise requires branding that integrates Thai-inspired fonts with illustrations to convey both Thai culture and the local identity effectively.

Issues and Needs of Mae Somporn Organic Agriculture Community Enterprise

This community enterprise specializes in fresh lemon juice, banana chips and organic fertilizers, such as bio-fermented insect repellent and composted liquid fertilizer. Due to their low pricing, increasing product value has been a challenge. To address this, the enterprise requires branding under the name "Mae Somporn Organic Agriculture", with a strong emphasis on Thai-style typography that reflects its local heritage. Currently,

these products lack branding and packaging that effectively represent the community's identity.

Table 1. Analysis of Branding and Packaging Needs for Green Travel Community Enterprises

Green Travel Community Enterprises	Problems and Needs
Nakorn Wangyai Textile Community Enterprise 	1. The community enterprise produced and distributed sarongs, loincloths, collars, bags and cloth from local wisdom. 2. Products were distributed without branding and packaging, which represented group identity. 3. Branding was needed to combine fonts with an illustration that could convey Thainess and locality.
Mae Somporn Organic Agriculture Community Enterprise 	1. The community enterprise produced and distributed banana chips, fresh lemon juice and there were also natural fertilizers, such as bio-fermented water for insect repellents and detritus-based fermented water had a low price and could not up price. 2. Products were distributed without branding and packaging which represented group identity, so the community enterprise needed branding entitled "Mae Somporn Organic Agriculture" and emphasized Thai-style fonts representing locality.
Mae Lamoon Dried Fish Community Enterprise 	1. The community enterprise produced and distributed dried fish (cirrhinus jullieni and hard-lipped barb) which had a low price and could not up price. 2. The ineffective hand-sealing caused by the presence of air after hand-sealing needed to be solved to extend the shelf life and distribution time of the products. 3. Products were distributed without branding and packaging which represented group identity, so the community enterprise needed branding entitled "Mae Lamoon Dried Fish Community Enterprise" with illustration of Ms. Lamoon.

Issues and Needs of Mae Lamoon Community Enterprise: Dried Fish

Mae Lamoon Community Enterprise produces and sells dried fish, including hard-lipped barb and *Cirrhinus jullieni*, at a low price that limits profitability. One major challenge is the ineffective hand-sealing process, which allows air to enter the packaging, reducing shelf life and limiting distribution potential. To enhance product longevity and marketability, the enterprise requires improved packaging solutions. Additionally, since the products are currently sold without branding or packaging that reflects group identity,

the enterprise seeks a distinctive branding strategy under the name “Mae Lamoon Dried Fish Community”.

7.2. The result of developing product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province

After gathering data on the challenges and requirements, the information was analyzed to establish a conceptual framework for improving branding and packaging for community tourism enterprises. The primary goal was to enhance their competitiveness across key sectors, including handicrafts, tourism and food. This framework served as the foundation for developing branding and packaging solutions for three community enterprises, as illustrated in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Conceptual framework for enhancing competitiveness in tourism community product branding and packaging

Figure 2 shows that the development of product branding and packaging for the Green Travel Community Enterprises focuses on three main packaging functions (Con3): (1) Containment and Protection, which addresses preventing damage during transportation and protecting products from spoilage; (2) Convenience, which emphasizes the suitability of packaging for use, transport and storage in the warehouse and (3) Consumer Appeal, which pertains to the psychological impact of packaging on consumer purchasing behavior.

After implementing the conceptual framework for designing and developing improved product branding and packaging for tourism community enterprises, the results for three community enterprises were as follows: For the Nakorn Wangyai Textiles Community Enterprise, the branding was developed to reflect the beauty of women and textiles, incorporating the identity of Ms. Khumbang, a woman from local legend in the Wang Sam Mo District. The branding also featured Mudmee textile in golden colors to symbolize prosperity and wealth, along with fonts that convey a sense of Thainess. The packaging was designed as a paper shopping bag with a tag, using indigo purple and white to enhance readability. The design emphasized curves reminiscent of water waves, which are a key attraction of Wang Sam Mo. The newly packaged product is shown in

Figure 3 and evaluations by experts indicated a high level of satisfaction, with a mean score of $\bar{x} = 4.30$ and a standard deviation of S.D.=0.67.



Figure 3. Branding and Packaging of Nakorn Wangyai Textile Community Enterprise

For the Mae Somporn Organic Agriculture Community Enterprise, the branding was developed with a minimalist approach. Balanced fonts and floral decorations symbolize abundance and golden tones convey prosperity and wealth. The packaging was designed for three products: banana chips, fresh lemon juice and a plastic bag.

1. **Banana Chips:** The packaging was a plastic box with a handle designed for easy carrying and distribution in tourist shops. The box lid opens and closes securely to prevent air from degrading the chips. A round label was created to fit both the sides and the top of the box.

2. **Fresh Lemon Juice:** The packaging was a 600-ml bottle with a minimalist-style label that emphasizes simplicity and appeal.

3. **Plastic Bag:** A white plastic bag with green floral patterns was chosen to convey cleanliness and safety.



Figure 4. Branding and packaging of Mae Somporn Organic Agriculture Community Enterprise

Figure 4 shows the redesigned products and expert evaluations indicated a high level of satisfaction, with a mean score of 4.18 and S.D.= 0.45.

For the Mae Lamoon Dried Fish Community Enterprise, the branding was designed using an illustration inspired by “Ms. Lamoon”, the business owner. A toque blanche (chef's hat) was added to the image to signal that this is a food product, with a friendly tone to convey care in providing quality food. Warm colors were chosen to create a cozy feel, while a blue frame representing Wang Sam Mo's community color-symbolized water abundance.

The updated packaging included a vacuum-sealed dried fish pack and a paper shopping bag:

1. **Dried Fish Pack:** The product was vacuum sealed with a top label to extend shelf life.

2. **Paper Shopping Bag:** The bag was designed in vibrant colors to enhance memorability and approachability.

Figure 5 shows the redesigned product packaging. Expert evaluations indicate a high satisfaction level, scoring a mean of 4.26 and S.D.=0.43.



Figure 5. Branding and Packaging of Mae Lamoon Dried Fish Community Enterprise

7.3. The result of testing the branding and packaging market of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province

Table 2. The result of satisfaction towards product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises

Aspects	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Levels of Satisfaction
The branding was beautiful and suitable for the product.	4.32	0.65	High
Design and structure of packaging corresponded to the branding and product.	4.37	0.65	High
The color of the packaging was beautiful and suitable for the product.	4.44	0.60	High
The structure of packaging was suitable for transportation.	4.39	0.64	High
Structure of packaging was suitable for displaying on shelf.	4.41	0.62	High
Packaging could be standard for Green Travel Tourism.	4.39	0.64	High
Packaging was easy to use and suitable for the product.	4.42	0.60	High
International and modern	4.36	0.64	High
Clear product information and contact	4.38	0.65	High
Overall Satisfaction	4.39	0.63	High

The market test for the product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province was conducted using a questionnaire to assess consumer satisfaction with the branding and packaging intended for real distribution. The survey included 100 randomly selected consumers. Results categorized by gender showed 47% male and 53% female respondents. Age distribution was as follows; 33% were aged 15-23, 41% were aged 24-41, 17% were aged 42-56 and 9% were aged 57-75. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

According to Table 2, the market test results for the product branding and packaging of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province indicated a high overall satisfaction level ($\bar{x} = 4.39$, S.D. = 0.63). The highest satisfaction was in the aspect

of the packaging color, which was perceived as beautiful and suitable for the product. This was followed by ease of use and product suitability of the packaging. The lowest satisfaction levels were noted in the aspects of branding attractiveness, suitability and modern appeal.

8. Conclusion and Discussion

The analysis of the branding and packaging needs of the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province revealed that stakeholders desired branding that would incorporate the community's name to highlight its unique identity and showcase local wisdom. They also wanted packaging that would reflect group identity through cultural and traditional elements, adding value to the products for better distribution. These findings were used to guide the development of branding and packaging aimed at enhancing competitiveness, with a focus on three key packaging functions: (1) Containment and Protection, (2) Convenience and (3) Consumer Appeal, all of which significantly influence purchasing behavior. The resulting prototypes received high evaluation scores from packaging and design experts, aligning with the studies by Rundh (2016) and Azad and Hamdavipour (2012), which underscored packaging as a competitive tool in marketing, capable of adding value and boosting sales. These tools also supported Hamad and Al-Ghabban's (2022) research, which emphasized packaging's fundamental roles in product protection, transport facilitation and communication with consumers. Additionally, the findings echoed Khuong and Hong's (2016) research on the impact of brand awareness and recognition, driven by effective packaging design, on purchasing decisions.

Maximizing packaging's marketing potential is crucial for distinguishing your brand and establishing a strong connection with your target audience. Whether it involves retail product packaging or other forms of packaging, the strategies outlined in the following sections can help integrate packaging as a vital component of a brand's marketing approach. Well-designed packaging enhances brand perception, shapes customer interactions and plays a significant role in overall brand success.

The market test conducted with 100 consumers using accidental sampling revealed a high level of overall satisfaction with the product branding and packaging after accurate distribution. This unique satisfaction with packaging is described as attractive and well-suited to the product with Javed and Javed's (2015) findings on color's influence on purchasing satisfaction, indicating that vibrant colors can positively impact consumer purchasing decisions. High satisfaction with the packaging structure, which was deemed suitable for shelf display, was consistent with Alhamdi's (2020) research on how packaging design, color, size and shape attract consumers. Moreover, the ease of use and practicality of the packaging corresponded with Mohan's (2021) findings that packaging should prioritize usability, especially for retail and rapidly expanding e-commerce markets.

In conclusion, the developed product branding and packaging for the Green Travel Community Enterprises in Udon Thani Province are well-suited for actual distribution, meeting stakeholder needs and consumer satisfaction.

9. Suggestion and Recommendations

The findings of this study are applicable to specific regions. Future research in other areas should be explored in greater depth, considering various factors that influence the development of product branding and packaging unique to each region, such as differences in art, culture and local wisdom.

Future research should incorporate strategic elements of the fashion industry, including factors such as market size, diversity, industry events and investment opportunities.

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