

Improving the brand awareness of craft villages in Vietnam

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Abstract: *Enhancing the awareness of customers and people about craft village brands is an essential aspect of brand development, especially when craft villages face various difficulties and challenges. This article analyzes the current situation based on an overview of fundamental theoretical issues regarding craft village brands and brand awareness, along with the utilization of survey methods involving 120 production and business establishments in this economic sector; then proposes some solutions to enhance understanding of Vietnamese craft village brands.*

Keywords: *Craft village brands; Vietnamese craft villages; brand awareness; brand development.*

1. Introduction

According to data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, as of 2023, there are approximately 5,000 craft villages and villages with traditional trades nationwide, with over 1,300 recognized as conventional craft villages. These craft villages are mainly concentrated in the northern region, with the five provinces with the highest number of craft villages being Hanoi, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Hai Duong, Thai Binh, and Bac Ninh, accounting for 60% of the total number of craft villages nationwide (Son, 2022). The products of these craft villages, especially those specializing in traditional handicrafts, represent a combination of cultural

values and the technical skills of artisans and craftsmen, accumulated talents passed down through generations, meeting functional needs and reflecting cultural and ethnic values (Minh Son, 2022). However, these craft villages and their products face fierce competition, and their stakeholders need help and development. Consumers' awareness about craft villages, craft village products, and craft village brands with various distinctive values still needs to be improved. Consumers need to be aware of and understand the values of craft village brands. In contrast, the issue of raising awareness about craft village brands has yet to receive sufficient attention and systematic implementation.

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2. The scientific basis of Craft Village brand and brand perception

2.1. Scientific basis of craft villages and craft village brand

According to Article 3 of Decree No. 52/2018/ND-CP dated April 12, 2018, by the Government on the development of rural occupations, “A craft village refers to one or many residential areas in hamlets, wards, or equivalent that practice rural craft(s) under Article 4 hereof” (Government, 2018), including “1. Agro-forestry-fishery product processing and preservation. 2. Production of handicraft products. 3. Processing and preparation of ingredients and materials serving rural crafts. 4. Production of woodwork, straw, ceramic, glass, textile, embroidery, minor mechanical engineering. 5. Production and sale of ornamental animals. 6. Salt production. 7. Other services serve rural inhabitants' production and livelihood (Government, 2018).

According to Article 5 of Decree No. 52/2018/ND-CP, “a craft village must meet all three criteria below in order to be acknowledged: a) At least 20% of total households in the area practicing any rural crafts under Article 4 hereof. b) Business operation remains stable for at least 2 consecutive years prior to the date of applying for acknowledgment. c) Satisfy craft village environmental protection requirements as per applicable laws” (Government, 2018). Accordingly, to be recognized as a craft village, it is unnecessary to have at least 20% of the total households engaged in production and business in the same field. However, as specified, it can include various fields within the rural occupational sector. Some craft villages have been newly formed, while others have existed for a long time and have been operating stably for a considerable period.

The brand of a craft village is one form of collective brand, and it is understood as a

collective brand for one or several groups of products from different production and business establishments incorporated within a craft village area. Building the brand of craft villages involves creating a common image and impression along with the individual image of products and production and business establishments in the craft village. Therefore, increasing brand awareness among customers and the public is crucial for brand development.

2.2. The scientific basis of brand perception

Brand perception typically includes both recognition and recall (Keller, 1993). Enhancing brand perception is an ongoing process that requires investment from organizations and businesses to achieve a high level of awareness in the market. Customers often form associations and perceptions about a brand based on their understanding, experiences, and interactions (Homburg et al., 2010). These are essential factors in the decision-making process for purchases. A high level of brand awareness creates favorable conditions for brand development.

Developing brand perception for craft villages is the process of building and increasing awareness, recall, and understanding of the craft village brand. When customers have more information about the product and an insight into the craft village brand, they will likely choose products from the craft village. Brand perception of craft villages depends heavily on the communication activities of stakeholders regarding products, brands, history, cultural values, traditions, unique features, and the product quality of the craft village.

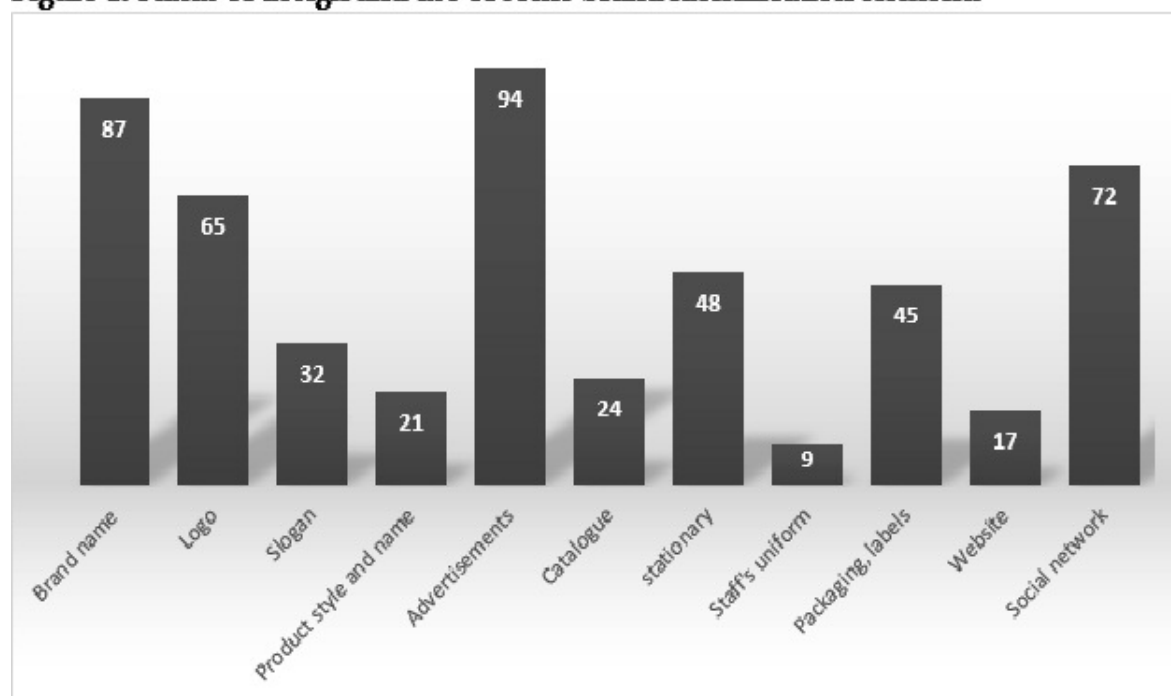
The current activities aimed at enhancing brand perception for craft villages in Vietnam involve various measures, including refining brand identity systems, developing brand touchpoints, brand communication, and

linking with tourism development activities. A survey conducted among 120 production and business establishments in craft villages revealed the following:

(1) Brand identity system: presently, most products from craft villages in Vietnam are associated with a familiar name related to the geographical location of the craft village, such as Bat Trang pottery, Dai Bai bronze, Van Phuc silk, Dong Ky wood, etc. Initial investments have been made by production and business establishments in craft villages for their brands. They have invested in designing brand

identity systems, such as brand naming, logo design, slogans, signage, catalogs, business cards, websites, etc. However, the emphasis on logo design is only apparent in some units, while many establishments need to have identifiable elements beyond the name displayed on signage. The components of the brand identity system of production and business establishments in craft villages, if any, are implemented sporadically, needing more consistency, making it difficult for customers to recognize and even doubt the origin and quality of the products.

Figure 1: Status of design and use of some brand identification elements



Source: Compiled from survey results by the author, 2022.

Several branding elements have been designed and implemented by craft villages' production and business establishments, but the quantity is not evenly distributed, usually concentrated in enterprises. The main elements often designed include the brand name (87/120), logo (65/120), and signage, with 94/120 establishments having developed and deployed them (Figure 1). For production

and business establishments, only about 15% of those surveyed have their logo or unique marks attached; however, they often need to be more attractive, attractive, and impress consumers. A significant proportion almost needs branding or origin information on the product or its packaging (Son, 2022).

(2) Developing brand touchpoints: in each craft village, numerous brand touchpoints

have been established, including sales points, display stores, product introductions, channel systems, offices, websites, and promotional materials, although there are differences in quantity and the ability to connect and convey information between these touchpoints.

Interaction through production personnel and business establishments: In craft villages, customers and the public can directly interact with artisans and producers of handicraft products. Most are willing to share their knowledge and experiences, enthusiastically guiding customers through the production process and techniques and providing information about the significance of the handicraft products they produce. This interaction fosters connections and positive experiences with customers, drives business, creates opportunities to sell products, and helps preserve and promote the brand within the community.

In some craft villages, local authorities have also shown interest in improving the quality of internal interaction through issued plans. For example, in Bat Trang, the People's Committee of the commune issued Plan No. 104/KH-UBND on implementing the Code of Conduct for officials, civil servants, employees, and public behavior standards, as well as the family behavior criteria in the area in 2023. The issuance and compliance with these regulations and codes of conduct contribute to building a more friendly and appealing brand image for the craft village, enhancing the experience for customers when visiting the village.

Interaction through websites and social media: despite some craft villages and establishments having developed websites and utilized social media to increase customer interactions, the interfaces often need to be more visually appealing, with infrequent updates of images and information. Moreover, the inability to maintain information exchange and respond to inquiries is a common issue,

resulting in limited quality of interaction. Additionally, most establishments must know how to use websites and social media platforms effectively.

Interaction through retail stores and points of sale: at retail stores and points of sale within craft villages, customers can directly view and touch products to assess their quality. They are also provided with information, advice, and answers to related questions. However, based on observations at some surveyed retail points in typical craft villages, the prevalence of overcrowded product displays, lack of aesthetics, unattractive products, and indifferent or uninterested staff towards visiting customers are common issues.

(3) Connecting with tourism development activities: currently, traditional handicraft villages possess all the necessary elements to become attractive tourist destinations, including product brands, enterprise brands, collective brands, destination brands, and human factors alongside historical and cultural characteristics. However, in interviews with some owners of production and business establishments in traditional craft villages, many expressed that developing tourism requires the local government's attention, investment, and meticulous management to avoid unhealthy competition and ensure the quality and origin of products and gifts.

(4) Regarding the services provided: some tourist-serving craft villages have been able to offer various types of services to cater to tourists, including accommodation, dining services, sightseeing tours, experiential activities, shopping services, and guided tours. In Bat Trang, for example, visitors can experience some stages of the pottery-making process to create their products. In Phu Vinh craft village, tourists can experience weaving products under the direct guidance of artisans and craftsmen, using techniques such as net weaving, flower weaving, or cross-stitching.

However, overall, the tourist products in these craft villages are still relatively monotonous and have not yet truly captivated tourists.

(5) The quality of tourist products in craft villages: despite many tours designed to visit craft villages such as Bat Trang, they often only offer limited activities such as sightseeing and shopping. Customers have not had the opportunity to experience the production process or engage with the local culture. According to assessments from many experts and businesses, craft village tourism development remains limited in scale, quantity, and quality of products. Most establishments operate informally, lack professionalism, and offer mediocre products and services. The transportation infrastructure is inconvenient, failing to meet the needs of tourists. Moreover, environmental pollution is also posing a serious problem for these craft villages.

Based on interviews with some production and business establishment owners in traditional craft villages, concerns about potential negative impacts may increase if tourism is not adequately controlled. However, the survey results of villages such as Bat Trang, Dong Ky, and Van Phuc show that locations combining tourism with enhanced interaction with the brand through tourism development have better opportunities for the development of craft village brands. Commercial activities related to the products of these craft villages have also been significantly boosted.

3. Some solutions to enhance the brand awareness of craft villages in Vietnam

Firstly, improving the branding identification system of craft villages and the production and business establishments' brands. Establishing a unified branding identification system for craft villages requires standardizing essential elements such as brand names, logos, and trademark templates and developing standard regulations for using collective trademarks, a prerequisite for

trademark registration activities. This will help create a consistent brand image, facilitating recognition, recall, customer trust, and loyalty. The selection of brand names for craft villages typically involves a combination of product categories and the village's name. To use the village's name in the brand name, representative organizations of production and business establishments in the craft village must follow procedures and obtain permission from the local authorities.

The emblem of a craft village brand plays a crucial role in recognizing and representing its unique characteristics. It is also a determining factor in the brand's visibility, differentiation, and ability to convey brand messages. During the logo design, simplicity in lines and colors is an essential factor. Additionally, each production and business establishment must invest in design work to complete the brand identification system for their premises.

Secondly, enhancing signage, decorate sales points, and print materials such as catalogs, posters, letterheads, membership cards, employee cards, packaging, labels, websites, social media, etc. Each unit may choose a set of printed materials containing various documents depending on the conditions. It is necessary to compare with the standards of the brand identification system that has been established to promptly adjust activities accordingly. Additionally, craft villages may consider establishing and issuing codes of conduct or a system of regulations to regulate the activities of production and business establishments as well as residents, contributing to protecting the rights of members and increasing the awareness and perception of the brand among customers and the public.

Thirdly, integrating craft village with tourism development. Combining craft village brand development with tourism development activities has been proven to be

a successful model widely applied in many countries worldwide. This model has been implemented in some craft villages in Vietnam and has yielded promising results, helping craft village brands become more famous and leaving an impression on customers and the public. Investing in and upgrading infrastructure such as transportation, electricity, water supply, and drainage systems is necessary to create favorable conditions for tourism development. Establishing exhibition and promotion points for craft village products for residents and tourists is also essential to this process.

4. Conclusion

Currently, efforts to enhance brand awareness among customers in craft villages are fragmented and lack coherence. Consumers need help recognizing and distinguishing products and brands from different craft villages, and they are sometimes unable to determine the origin and source of the products. Therefore, implementing solutions in a systematic and organized manner is necessary. In improving customer and public awareness of Craft Village brands, it is essential to coordinate communication activities, focusing on cultural, historical, ecological, and conservation aspects to create favorable conditions for promoting Craft Village brands. Developing comprehensive development plans for craft villages, accompanied by support measures and promotional programs, is necessary to ensure craft villages' synchronized and effective

development. Additionally, enhancing the quality and diversification of products and tourism-related services such as accommodation, tour guidance, and craft village experiences play a crucial role in attracting customers and the public, creating opportunities for developing craft village brands.

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