SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY: URBAN FOREST IN THAILAND

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Abstract - Social media advocacy is a new strategy that is emerging in the public community. It is defined as the strategic use of social media to advance public policy initiatives. It shifts the focus from the personal to the policy. This article "Social Media Advocacy: URBAN FOREST in Thailand" is to distribute information regarding urban forests to the public through information management by creating a Facebook fan page named "URBAN FOREST" as a public space for the communication and exchange of knowledge about urban forest issues. The case study demonstrates the value of a well-planned campaign and including public environmental advocacy in public environmental practice, as an important strategy to facilitate the creation of healthy environments through healthy public communication and the importance of understanding the existing values and beliefs motivating the public in urban forest.

Index Terms - Social media advocacy, Facebook fan page, urban forest, public communication, Thailand

I. INTRODUCTION

URBAN FOREST in Thailand is the new concept for Thai people. Not only they don't know the importance of URBAN FOREST, but also they don't know the meaning of it, despite it improving our air, protect our water, contributing to energy savings and providing a link to nature and a source of enjoyment. Thus, there is a need for public communication to create understanding in every sector of society that will bring about mutual acceptance and responsibility in dealing with such problems. Although there seems to be a general awareness of climate change threats in Thai society, a spirit of cooperation among citizens in coping with possible threats still needs to be encouraged. Both public and private organizations have integrated the environment dimension into their own contexts, especially corporate social responsibility and sustainable development. However, in the area of public communication, issues have been raised about how to communicate environmental concerns to the target audience in different contexts and cultures. This article is to distribute information regarding urban forests to the public through information management by creating a Facebook fan page named "URBAN FOREST" as a public space for the communication and exchange of knowledge about urban forest issues. It demonstrates the value of a well-planned campaign and including public environmental advocacy in public environmental practice, as an important strategy to facilitate the creation of healthy environments through healthy public communication.

OBJECTIVE

1. To communicate the importance of understanding the existing values and beliefs motivating the public in urban forest.
2. To empower people and communities in urban forest.

II. OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

Urban Forest Project aims to educate the public about benefits of urban forests and to create awareness of its importance which will lead to a collaborative management of urban forests for a good ecosystem. The project is conducted under the research project Issues and Information Management for Public Communication about the Willingness to Pay for the Forest Areas of the Bangkok Dwellers.

Facebook Fan Page URBAN FOREST refers to a social media space, Facebook, which is a driving force in sending messages about urban forests to people in the urban society to make them understand and aware of urban forest issues. Facebook is also used to build an online community for members to interact with each other by sharing news, information and ideas about the city, its dwellers and forests, or expressing public opinions.

Communication driven by media advocacy is a social media strategy used for public communication to create an understanding of urban forest issues. The understanding will develop social awareness and solidarity that empower individuals and groups to push for an effective policy in urban forest management for a good ecosystem.

Communication process means the approaches developed by this project to achieve the objectives by communicating information to the public through activities and social media strategy in the form of storytelling video clips.

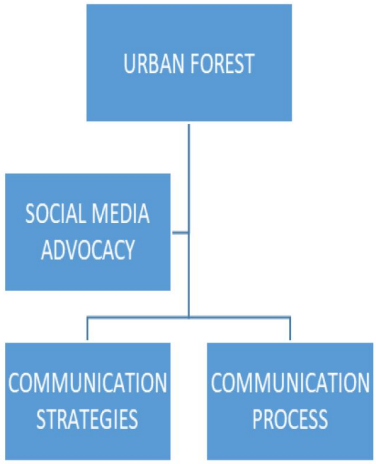
Communication process comprises the following 7 steps: 1) raising awareness, 2) adapting to changing situations, 3) engaging the target audience on Facebook Fan Page Urban Forest, 4) pushing forward urban forest issues; 5) joining forces with alliance networks, 6) engaging the target audience through activities, and 7) publicizing on Facebook.

Social Media Advocacy:
Facebook Fan Page URBAN FOREST





Facebook Fan Page Urban Forest was designed to provide an online space to build a community of knowledge in which dissemination of research information, such as video clips and infographic presentation, took place. On this Facebook Fan page, various forms of communication occurred, e.g., news-sharing from mass media and participating organizations, communicating information about urban forest issues, and publicizing related events and activities. The application of Facebook Live as a live-streaming tool could broadcast live the public forums. As a social networking site, Facebook also offered the opportunity to the media consumer, who was interested in urban forest issues, to search for, ask about, and exchange needed information and share experiences related to the issues. Facebook, therefore, serves as a channel of information distribution for urban dwellers in the digital age.





As a subset of new media, social media, without being confined by time and space, can respond to the needs of information seekers more effectively than old media. New media refers to a communication system which is connected to global electronic networks (Kawamoto, 1997). The application of the Facebook Fan Page Urban Forest as a communication space to create a community on a social network helped heighten awareness on urban forest issues of individuals in urban society. It also facilitated networking of social groups with shared interest in environment, for instance, BKK Museum, the Big Trees group, the Sueb Nakhasathien Foundation, theFacebook Fan Page NithesNIDA, and the Facebook Fan Page APDA. The Facebook Fan Page APDA was a community of amateur photographers that ran an online campaign to raise awareness of the issues and gained participation from members in sending their photographs for the exhibition on Forests, People, and Cities. It is evident that such a communication approach aims to encourage collaboration, mutual support, and information exchange for shared learning goals. The point is well supported by Kaewthep and Chaikoonpol

(2012) who explains that the characteristics of online social networks include media convergence that facilitates real-time interactions, and one-to-many communication that disseminates information to different groups of people with shared interests, enabling instant access to and communication of information. The Urban Forest project, the Metro-Forest Project, and Urban Forest Thai are examples of social media groups who have a shared interest in increasing and managing the green area of the city.



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