



**READINESS OF THAI ARTISTIC HANDICRAFTS FOR
GLOBAL ONLINE MARKETPLACE**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes into the landscape of Thai artistic handicraft producers, examining their readiness to embrace global e-commerce platforms as a supplementary sales channel to international customers. The literature review shows significant export value of Thai craft product, increasing adoption of e-commerce, and the global success achieved by a few Thai craft brands through online marketplaces. Through qualitative interviews with six diverse Thai craft brands, the research discovers valuable insights into challenges and opportunities associated with venturing into e-commerce. While only a fraction has ventured into e-commerce platforms, the majority express interest in reaching international audiences through online marketplaces. Challenges in joining e-commerce platform identified include production capacity limitations, fragile product shipment concerns, and the unique characteristics of one-of-a-kind items. The study recommends addressing these challenges, advocating for the establishment of a government-supported Thai e-commerce platform dedicated for craft products, and enhancing the alignment between the nature of Thai artisan producers and global audience. The envisioned platform aims to serve as a full-fledged platform for Thai craft ecosystem where it will be the final destination for all enthusiasts of Thai craft.

Keywords: Thai craft, artisan products, online marketplace, e-commerce



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Thai artistic handicrafts industry is a significant aspect of Thailand's cultural heritage and economy. It encompasses a wide range of products from hand woven fabric, silverware, goldware, ceramics, and other crafted items. These handicrafts serve as a mirror that reflects the way of life in each era. It reflects the history, economics, social dynamics, and cultural vibrancy of Thailand. They are not merely products but rather embodiment of the beliefs, traditions, and unique aspect of Thai people, intricately crafted with exquisite workmanship, patterns, and materials.

In recent years, the market for Thai handicrafts has experienced significant growth driven by an increasing global demand for unique, culturally rich, and handmade products. In 2022, the total Thai handicrafts export value reached 349.03 billion baht, making an increase of 71.04 billion baht or 25.56% compared to the previous year. The United States, German, and Japan were the top three importing countries which collectively accounting for 45% of total export value. The most handicraft export in terms of value is gold jewelry, and the product with highest growth rate is the travel accessories. This is the opportunity for Thai handicraft producers to expand their customer base and reach foreign markets. (SACIT, 2023)

Even though Thailand has a significant handicrafts export, the production process is predominantly reliant on manual labor which inherently comes with capacity limitations. In the meantime, the rapid pace of digitalization across the globe is driving significant growth of e-commerce. It comes to play vital role in retail industry offering numerous advantages particularly for small and medium size business. E-commerce has helped in a faster, more cost-effective route to market, and enabling smaller enterprises to compete with industry giant. This paradigm shift from traditional brick-and-mortar commerce to digital transactions is reshaping the business landscape. In

alignment with the global trend of e-commerce, Thailand's e-commerce market has experienced substantial growth in recent years. According to the 'e-Conomy-SEA 2023' reported by Google and Bain, the e-commerce market in Thailand achieved a gross merchandise value (GMV) of USD 20 billion in 2022 and this figure is expected to soar to USD 60 billion in 2030. This rapid growth e-commerce market presents both an opportunity and necessity for the Thai craft industry. Consequently, there is a need for Thai handicraft producers to invest in the enhancement of their operations, production processes, and alongside a comprehensive understanding of customer demands to elevate the industry's competitive stance both domestically and internationally. It is imperative for the Thai craft industry to adapt and embrace the e-commerce trend to not only thrive but also relevant in a dynamically changing global marketplace. This study would like to explore the readiness of Thai artistic handicrafts for online marketplace as this shift to e-commerce is not a choice but a potential strategic move to ensure the survival and prosperity of the Thai craft industry.

1.2 Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to conduct in-dept analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing the Thai artistic handicraft industry, especially in its pursuit to attract boarder customer base to include more international consumers through online sales channel. This research aims to:

1. Analyze the current state of the Thai artistic handicraft industry and its significance to the national cultural heritage and economy
2. Identify and assess the challenges and limitations to scale up faced by Thai handicraft producers especially on the online sales by conducting a qualitative survey with artisans and producers involved in the handicraft industry
3. Provide strategic recommendations for Thai handicraft producers to improve their competitive advantage through online marketplace

1.3 Scope of the study

This research is aimed to study the readiness of Thai artistic handicraft producers to expand their customer base to incorporate larger foreign customers through online marketplace. The study will focus on artisans and producers across Thailand who specialize in various sectors of the handicraft industry, in diverse of business models and stages. In order to access the Thai artistic handicraft landscape, this research employs both secondary research consisting of the analysis from existing reports, studies, available market data to extract valuable data insights to build a solid foundation for the study, and qualitative interviews with 6 Thai handicraft producers to develop a well-rounded perspective of the industry which allow for an exploration of the challenges, opportunities, and strategies that currently shaping the industry. By focusing on these specific segments of the handicraft market, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current landscape, challenges, and potential strategies for Thai handicraft producers to effectively engage with and meet the demands of international consumers.

1.4 Expected Contribution

This research is intended to contribute the valuable insights and holistic understanding of the Thai artistic handicraft industry, specifically in the context of globalization and international market expansion through online channel to facilitate the sustainable growth, the preservation of cultural heritage and economic prosperity of the country. It will provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by the producers. This study can be beneficial for academic research to gain better understanding of Thai artistic handicraft producers in terms of challenges and opportunities to expand sales channel to online and be the useful reference for future studies in this field. Moreover, this research can be beneficial for Thai handicraft producers for actionable strategies to enhance their competitiveness in the global market, as well as for handicrafts e-commerce marketplace to understand deeper in seller sides. The recommendations derived from this research can also guide the policy

makers and industry associations in formulating initiatives to support the growth and development of Thai handicraft industry.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Thai artistic handicraft landscape

Craft or artisanal products are defined by UNESCO as products produced by artisans, either completely by hand or with the help of hand-tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product.

Thai artistic handicrafts hold a deeply heritage of Thai people, representing not only practical usage but also appears for beauty and culture. Thai handicrafts have gained recognition and popularity on the global stage, further underscoring their significance. According to The Sustainable Arts and Crafts Institute of Thailand (SACIT), a public organization dedicated to promote and support the integration of vocations leading to the creation of folk arts and crafts in line with Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's projects as well as to promote their marketing domestically and internationally, the types of Thai handicrafts can be categorized into 12 product types; textile, weave, gold ornaments, silverware, ironware, pottery, stoneware, woodwork, lacquer, leatherwork, paperware, and glassware. (SACIT) Followings are some of the explanations of the products that relevant to Thai handicraft sector, the research or being top exporting value of Thai handicrafts.

2.1.1 Textile

Textile, having been woven into the fabric of daily life across the nation for generations. The craft of textile production is a delicate, handcrafted process that breathe life into intricate and diverse patterns, ranging from the simplicity of dyed designs to the nature-inspired or geometric motifs. Thai textiles are more than just functional fabrics, they are woven narratives that convey the stories of wealth, culture, and tradition unique to each region. The color, patterns, and materials used in Thai textiles serve as a mirror reflecting the nation's cultural diversity.

Figure 2.1*Samples of Thai weave***2.1.2 Weave**

Weave, basketry was created from the wisdom of people to use in everyday life especially as a container for various things. Thailand's landscapes feature a profusion of perennial plants, annual plants, forests, and grasslands, making it an ideal environment for the cultivation of materials used in basketry. However, not all plants are equally suited for the art of weaving. Only those that can be effectively processed into fibers, such as papyrus, water hyacinth, and perennial plants. Traditionally, these crafted containers facilitated the growing of crops and animal care. Yet, as time has passed, basketry has evolved to meet contemporary needs and preferences. While its fundamental utility remains intact, the designs and functions of woven creations have adapted to suit modern demands.

Figure 2.2*Samples of Thai weave*

Bamboo farmer's hat



Jute Basket

2.1.3 Gold ornaments and silverware

Gold ornaments and silverware, long heritage since Sukhothai era made by expertise craftsmen with special skill and sophistication both in terms of shape and pattern that shows finery and culture of Thai kingdom. Currently, there has been an improvement in design to be modern and more in line with foreigner taste.

Figure 2.3*Samples of gold ornaments and silverware*

Gold Ornaments



Silverware

2.1.4 Pottery

Pottery, holds a profound connection to the lives of Thai people, spanning generations as a tool for daily existence. It has been instrumental in tasks as fundamental as food storage and various other domestic necessities. The decorations and patterns vary significantly according to the region and its unique geographic influences. Through the procedure of firing and with various color, ceramics is another traditional product known as Sangkalok or Sukhothai ware which gain popular demand far beyond Thailand's borders, captivating the hearts of consumers worldwide.

Figure 2.4

Samples of Thai pottery



Sangkalok

2.1.5 Case study of Thai craft brands in international market

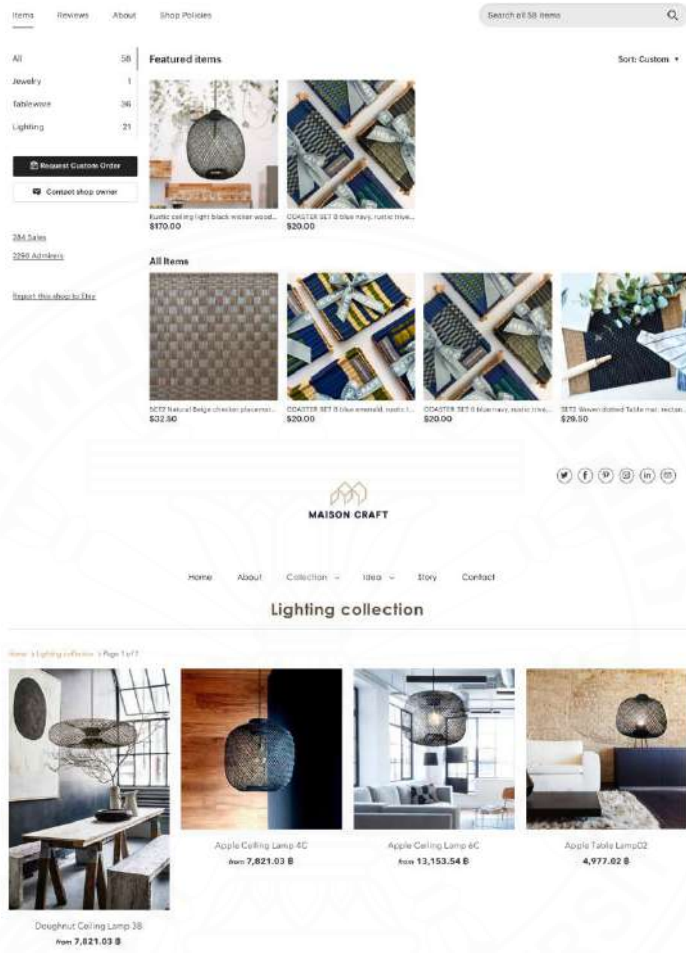
Thai handicrafts have a long history and meticulous production techniques that are based on the wisdom of traditional craftspeople. Original artisanal goods are becoming harder to find in today's changing world, which is a reflection of the crafts' ongoing evolution to meet modern tastes, trends, and needs. The younger generation of artists who are renewing and modernizing traditional products is largely responsible for the ongoing evolution. Following will be the sample of Thai artisanal brands that are entering worldwide market in order to obtain an understanding of the present state of the market.

Wisharawish, a fashion studio that was founded in 2012, has made a name for itself by using local materials from Thailand in its garment designs. Wisharawish attracted attention throughout the world by actively participating in design competitions and major fashion events, such as Tokyo Fashion Week, with the strategic goal of breaking into the global market. The strategy used by the brand was to interact with a worldwide audience first, then raise awareness among consumers in the local area. Wisharawish places a lot of emphasis on transforming conventional materials into a fresh, contemporary look. Through social media and its own website, the brand uses the advantages of digital tools to communicate directly with customers. Notably, Wisharawish emphasizes a more direct brand-to-consumer interaction by reducing reliance on middlemen like department stores or e-commerce platforms.

Maison Craft, contemporary Thai living products using materials that are locally sourced from communities, combining traditional techniques with modern designs. made of local material from local communities with the combination of traditional techniques and modern design. Found with the intention to conquer international market, the founder found the opportunity international consumers that value Thai artisan products. The strategy for penetrating the international market involved creating a website, participating in events targeting expats in Thailand, and accumulating a substantial foreign customer base. Currently, international sales contribute to 70% of the total revenue. Given the primary customer base of foreigners, Maison Craft strategically focuses on online marketing through global e-commerce platforms such as Etsy, Amazon, and Bulletin.

Figure 2.5

Maison Craft on e-commerce platform



2.2 Thai Artistic Handicraft Industry

As per the most recent data released by Sustainable Arts and Crafts Institute of Thailand (SACIT), the export value of Thai artistic handicrafts during the period from January to October 2023 stands at 284.26 billion baht. This figure represents a modest decline of 2.54% when compared to the corresponding period in the previous year. The top three destinations for these exports this year are indicative of the industry's international reach and appeal. The United States leads the way with an export value of 78.27 billion baht, followed by Hong Kong at 24.02 billion baht, and Japan at 17.67 billion baht. Crafts market in the United States has experienced an increase in popularity driven by growing interest in cultures and appreciation of artisanal products with inherent story and unique rather than mass products produced from factory. In the context of Japanese preferences, the emphasis places on quality and meticulous craftsmanship with natural material. Thai crafts such as textile aligns with these values as it stands out for its high standards of quality with distinctive and meticulous style.

Taking a closer look at product wise distribution of export values reveals an interesting landscape within Thai artistic handicraft industry. The most export value product is gold ornaments accounting to remarkable 27.44% of the total export value, follow by silver ornaments with 15.9% of the total export value, then furniture as 16.4% of the total export value.

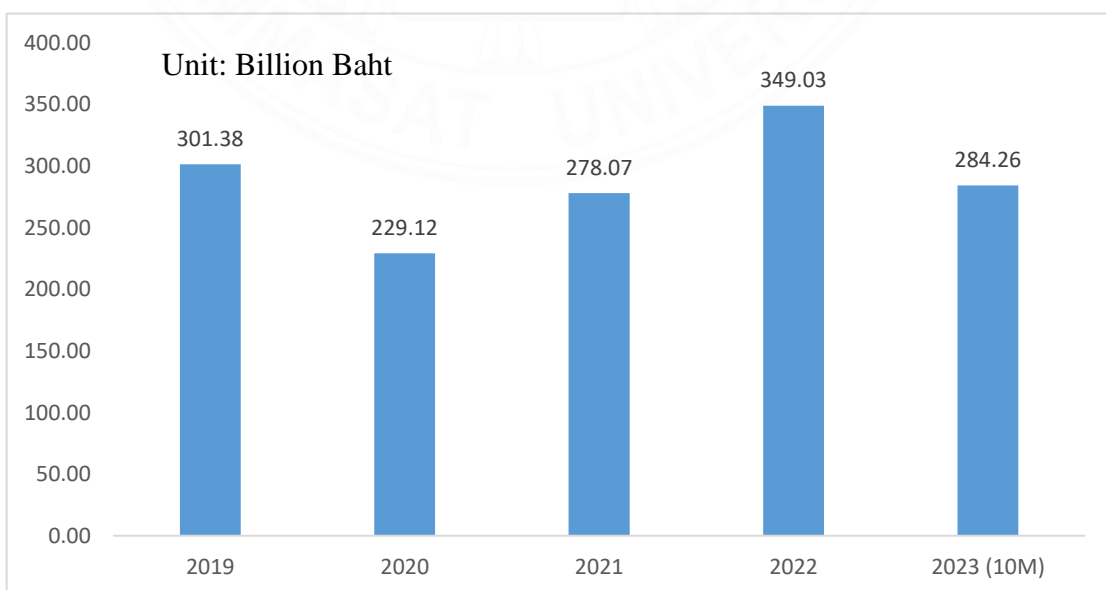
Shifting the focus to the annual export figures, 2022 marked good performance with a total export value of 349.03 billion baht, increased by 25.56% from previous year considered the highest growth since COVID-19 pandemic. Drilling into specific product categories, shawls and scarves exhibited outstanding growth, soaring by an impressive 337.32%. This upward trend has been consistent, with the export value of cotton clothing reaching 21.57 billion baht, reflecting an 11.15% growth. Additionally, clothing crafted from other materials experienced a substantial growth of 27.87%, amounting to an export value of 20.63 billion baht. With this significant growth, SACIT has a direction to support cotton and other clothing materials.

Before the pandemic in 2019, the handicraft export value has reached 301.38 billion baht with a growing number of countries expressing interest in Thai artistic handicrafts. For instance, Singapore showed keen interest in silverware and goldware. However, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges, as governments worldwide imposed lockdowns and social distancing measures to safeguard public health. These policies led to reduced consumption, both domestically and internationally, affecting the Thai artistic handicraft sector. The export value plunged to 229.12 billion baht, signifying a significant 24.04% decrease from the preceding year. While 2019 presented a tough year for the entire world, including the Thai handicraft industry, the Thai handicraft export value decline was largely attributed to external factors. However, the industry exhibited resilience and emerged stronger. In the year that followed, the export value rebounded to 278.07 billion baht, reflecting a substantial 21.36% increase from the pandemic-ridden year. The noteworthy success of Thai products, including the exceptional design and quality of Thai silverware and furniture, continued to meet market demands and bolstered the industry's recovery.

Figure 2.6

Thai craft export value

Source: The Sustainable Arts and Crafts Institute of Thailand



2.3 Government and industry support

Stakeholders in the Thai artistic handicraft industry come in to shape the sector's growth and expansion. They encompass a wide range of individuals, organizations, and public entities with a vested interest in industry's success. Notably, government and Ministry of Commerce play a pivotal role in advancing Thai crafts on the global stage. This influence is evident in various initiatives and efforts as outlined below.

Sustainable Arts and Crafts Institute of Thailand (Public Organization) or SACIT, organization under Ministry of Commerce with the objectives to promote and support the integration of vocations leading to the creation of folk arts and crafts in line with Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's projects as well as to promote their marketing domestically and internationally.

In the year 2022, SACIT placed a significant emphasis on the Craft transformation. As Thai arts and crafts industry is one of the business sectors affected by digital transformation, this industry deeply rooted in the wisdom and craftsmanship skills of artisans. It takes time to produce handmade works that reflect the essence of cultural identity and carry legacy of the past generations. SACIT was aware of the digital transformation while still support other aspects to uplift Thai handicrafts, there were 4 supporting aspects in previous year.

- 1) Develop potential and skills of Thai craftsmen and artisans to produce quality and standard workpieces, inherit wisdom of Thai arts and crafts in order to preserve knowledge
- 2) Promote Thai crafts know-how for further improvement of the products for everyday use and attract buyers attention
- 3) Expand opportunity to access Thai handicrafts through online and offline channels
- 4) Well manage Thai handicraft culture through a variety of digital communication tools to promote and create good perception, easier access, and willingness to support Thai handicrafts. (SACIT Annual report, 2022)

Moreover, SACIT has a direction to support clothing craft category as the highest export growth in the previous year. This involves modernizing product development to align with current lifestyle trends, meeting the demands of both Thai and international customers. Additionally, SACIT aims to provide digital marketing knowledge to expand the target customer base, reaching new generations through platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, as well as various e-commerce channels. This comprehensive approach aims to facilitate the expansion of their customer base and establish a robust foundation for online selling channels, ensuring sustainable growth in the digital era.

According to SACIT 5-year action plan (2023 – 2027), it is aligned with the vision of “To become a Thai handicraft knowledge and preservation center, commercializing globally for sustainable community’s well-being” in order to raise the operation level and adjust to the previous action plan for the continuity in management and operations with maximum efficiency. (SACIT 5-year action plan)

The 5-year action plan is divided into 3 stages

1. Time to change (2023): this year is dedicated organizational improvement and adjustment with new strategic plan. It involves fostering collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, promoting handicrafts to people of all ages, establishing standards for Thai arts and crafts, enhancing organizational infrastructure, building inner strength to fulfill the potential of personnel, amplifying awareness about SACIT. This foundational stage serves as an anchor for subsequent growth and transformation.
2. Growth period (2024 – 2026): These years mark the implementation and delivery phase of the plan. The objectives include the creation and promotion of handicraft products that cater to diverse age groups and customer segments. The focus extends beyond domestic market, with the effort to expand to international stage. It is the period characterized by tangible outcomes and significant growth.

3. Sustainable Arts & Crafts (2027): a year to ensure sustainable handicrafts for local and international. The aim is to establish SACIT as a respected authority in the handicraft field both within Thailand and on global market. The ultimate goal is to make Thai artistic handicraft products embraced worldwide.

This 5-year action plan show SACIT's commitment to nurturing and promoting the Thai artistic handicraft industry to international market. As SACIT works towards becoming a global center for handicraft knowledge and preservation, it contributes the success of Thai artistic handicraft industry locally and internationally.

Other key agencies under the Ministry of Commerce also play pivotal roles in the Thai handicrafts industry. The Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP), a government agency with a primary focus on exports, plays a role in expanding markets for Thai products and services. DITP is dedicated to developing added value for export products and service businesses, providing essential trade services, and enhancing the competitive potential of Thai entrepreneurs in the global market. DITP organizes significant events such as STYLE Bangkok, which stands as Asia's leading lifestyle and fashion trade fair held in Thailand. This event serves as a place to showcase Thai fashion and lifestyle products, with an emphasis on sustainability. STYLE Bangkok has become an annual highlight that crafts brands eagerly anticipate participating in. The event's success is recognized by its ability to attract over 20,000 visitors from around the world, including potential buyers ranging from importers and manufacturers to trading companies and buying agents. For crafts brands, STYLE Bangkok represents a valuable opportunity to build a robust business network. Beyond event organization, Thai handicrafts producers can benefit from a range of general services offered by DITP. These services include training and seminars focused on exporting and product development, business matching to connect producers with potential partners, and in-depth research on the international market for the Thai handicrafts industry. By tapping into these services, handicraft producers gain access to valuable resources and support mechanisms that contribute to their growth and success on the global stage.

The Creative Economy Agency (CEA), a public organization under the Office of the Prime Minister of Thailand, operates with a mission to propel the concept of the Creative Economy as a pivotal force for achieving a balanced and sustainable economy. The agency is committed to nurturing entrepreneurs, fostering the development of creative talents, and cultivating an ecosystem that seamlessly integrates with local wisdom, culture, and production in order to impel Thai cultural soft power. The essence of the Creative Economy lies in the strategic development of the economic system, utilizing creativity, intellectual property, knowledge, and research studies that are intricately connected with culture, history, innovation, and technology. This approach aims to yield new products and services that not only generate added economic value but also contribute positively to society. The Creative Economy in Thailand encompasses a diverse spectrum, spanning 15 distinct fields: handicrafts & crafts, music, performing arts, visual arts, film, broadcasting, printing, software, advertising, design, architecture services, fashion, Thai food, Thai traditional medicine, and cultural tourism. Given that handicrafts & crafts fall within the territory of the Creative Economy, businesses operating in this domain can leverage the resources and support provided by the CEA. The agency becomes a valuable ally for these businesses by offering opportunities for seminar participation, knowledge sharing, building business networks, and engaging in events that foster the growth and visibility of the creative sectors.

2.4 Market trends and consumer preferences

Business Research Insights (BRI), global market research organization, has indicated four global key trends shaping handicraft industry as follow.

1. Sustainable and ethical Practice
2. Digital Transformation
3. Customization and Personalization
4. Heritage Revival

Sustainable and ethical practices from a rising of global environmental concerns, consumers are actively seeking products crafted from sustainable materials and produce ethical practices. While many traditional handcraft products are made from nature materials such as just, bamboo, metal, and cotton, there is a growing trend among manufacturers to use unconventional materials like plastic. As a result of eco-friendly demand, some countries like US, Europe, and Japan have recognized the significance of sustainable production and fair-trade principles and implemented regulations for exporters to adhere to specific social and environmental standards to ensure that products are sourced and produced sustainably. Not only Business Research Insights indicates sustainability as a key trend for handicrafts, Technavio and SACIT also indicate it as significant handicrafts market trends as well.

Digital transformation as today's digitized world and the evolution of e-commerce platforms, it eases the consumers to interact with and make decision to artisans can showcase their creations to global audience. Digital transformation has introduced a wave of convenience for consumers to explore various products with accessibility to detailed product information, customer reviews, and immersive shopping experience. E-commerce has reduced geographical boundaries for artisans as well. They can adopt digital realm to serves as a powerful platform to connect with boarder customer base. Not only for showcasing the products to international audience but also heightened visibility in global market.

Customization and personalization. In the era of mass production and uniformity, there is a noticeable shift in the consumer preferences towards personalized and unique items. Handicrafts present consumers with the opportunity to own one-of-a-kind pieces that reflects their unique personality and preferences. The charm of handicrafts also lies in their inherent capacity for customization. Artisan could adopt this option for a personal touch to build strong relationship with the customers.

Heritage Revival as handicrafts have emerged from the cultural heritage. This revival is driven by a desire to celebrate and preserve age-old practices with skillful artisan incorporating ancient techniques into contemporary designs. The revival is not only by a trend, but it is the thing that all nations give a significant priority since it represents the wisdom of the past and to combine with innovation of the present to

serve the demand with wide range of consumers and preserve the cultural identity in parallel.

Digitalization is unavoidable in today's society, as evidenced by the market trends. It is a collection of technologies that are becoming more widely available to everyone, streamlining many parts of daily life. Thai artisans are no different; this is the perfect time to embrace digital resources, optimizing the channels of sale and reaching a wider audience.

2.5 E-commerce with craft products

2.5.1 E-commerce background

E-commerce first introduced in 1982 by Boston Computer Exchange, the first e-commerce company in the world for trading used computer in United States. Global e-commerce marketplace like Amazon and eBay were launched since 1995 and gradually gaining widespread success worldwide. E-commerce has revolutionized the way consumers access and purchase a diverse array of product especially during COVID-19 pandemic period for Thailand leading to a change in consumer behavior. Faced with lockdowns, consumers turned to online platforms for essential needs, prompting businesses to embrace e-commerce as a vital selling channel. While the pandemic may have subsided, the shift towards digital utilization persists. The 'e-Conomy-SEA 2023' report indicates that Thailand's e-commerce gross merchandise value reached 20 billion USD in 2022, with projections anticipating a further increase to 22 billion USD in 2023.

2.5.2 Etsy

Craft industry has not been exempted from this transformative trend. Platforms like Etsy (<https://www.etsy.com>) have emerged as powerful tools, creating an online marketplace that caters specifically to handmade, unique, and vintage items. Etsy is the global marketplace for unique and creative products, especially from unique handcrafted pieces to vintage treasures, dedicated to connecting independent creators with a global audience.

Founded in 2005 from United States, the platform has become recognized with handmade craftsmanship, offering a diverse range of products crafted

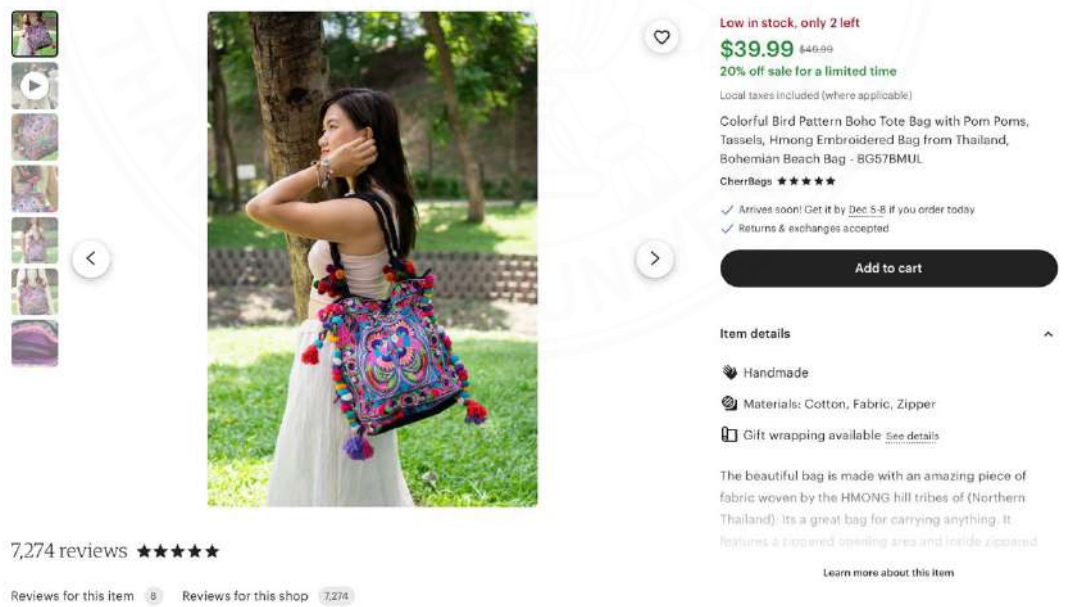
with precision, creativity, and a personal touch. This unique positioning has attracted a community of sellers and buyers who appreciate the authenticity and individuality that craft products bring. Etsy stands out as more than just an e-commerce platform; it's a dynamic marketplace that facilitates seamless buying and selling experiences for artisans and consumers. Etsy's user-friendly interface contributes significantly to its success. The platform prioritizes transparency, providing buyers with comprehensive information about each product. From details about the item's origin and materials used to delivery options and customer reviews, Etsy ensures that potential buyers have all the information they need to make informed decisions. Moreover, the direct messaging feature allows buyers to engage with sellers, fostering a sense of connection and addressing any queries they might have. A crucial element of Etsy's appeal is its commitment to customer satisfaction. The platform's purchase protection program adds an extra layer of trust. Buyers can feel confident in their purchases, knowing that if the received item doesn't match its description or arrives damaged, Etsy has mechanisms in place to address these concerns. This commitment to customer protection enhances the overall shopping experience and contributes to Etsy's reputation as a reliable marketplace. Etsy's support extends beyond buyers to sellers, recognizing that the success of the platform hinges on the success of its artisanal community. With its niche focus on handmade and unique items, Etsy attracts a specific target audience interested in handicraft products. The platform boasts an impressive 31.7 million active buyers, providing a substantial market for sellers. Moreover, Etsy provides a suite of software tools that empower sellers to efficiently manage orders, respond to buyer inquiries, and analyze their shop's performance through detailed statistics. The platform's global reach and specificity make it an ideal space for artisans looking to showcase and sell their craft. As of now, Etsy hosts a remarkable 1.9 million active sellers, collectively listing 45 million items. This thriving ecosystem attests to Etsy's success in creating a marketplace that aligns with the needs and preferences of both buyers and sellers in the scope of handicrafts.

Etsy, while not yet widely popular in the Thai market, is gradually gaining traction among both buyers and sellers. Some distinctive Thai products, including elephant pants, Thai herbal inhalers, silk fabric clothing, and traditional Thai souvenirs, have found a place on the Etsy platform. This suggests a growing interest

among Thai handcraft and design sellers in leveraging Etsy's unique features. The increasing popularity of Etsy among Thai artisans is reflected in the existence of a dedicated Facebook community group called "ETSY Thailand," boasting over 29,000 members. This group serves as a virtual space for discussions and interactions related solely to the Etsy platform. Conversations within the group primarily revolve around seeking assistance and exchanging opinions on various aspects of selling products on Etsy. Topics frequently covered include discussions on payment gateways, available delivery options, and strategies for effective advertising. While the Thai artisan handcraft presence on Etsy is currently relatively limited, the active discussions within the ETSY Thailand community suggest a growing curiosity and eagerness among Thai sellers to explore and navigate the Etsy platform. As awareness and understanding of Etsy's potential continue to expand within the Thai artisan community, it is likely that more unique and culturally rich Thai handicrafts will find their way onto this global marketplace, further enriching Etsy's diverse offerings.

Figure 2.7

Thai products on Etsy



The screenshot shows an Etsy product listing for a 'Colorful Bird Pattern Boho Tote Bag with Pom Poms, Tassels, Hmong Embroidered Bag from Thailand, Bohemian Beach Bag - BG57BMUL'. The main image shows a woman in a white dress wearing the bag in a park setting. To the left is a vertical gallery of smaller images. To the right, the product details are listed: 'Low in stock, only 2 left', price '\$39.99' (discounted from '\$46.99'), '20% off sale for a limited time', and 'Local taxes included (where applicable)'. The seller is 'CherrBags' with a 5-star rating. There are two checkmarks for 'Arrives soon!' and 'Returns & exchanges accepted'. A black 'Add to cart' button is visible. Below the main image, it shows '7,274 reviews' with a 5-star rating and a link to 'Learn more about this item'.

2.5.3 SACIT Shop

SACIT has been supporting Thai artistic handicraft producers through the development of “SACIT Shop”, an e-commerce platform available on both website and mobile application. It is the Ministry of Commerce’s direction to boost online transactions within Thai artistic handicraft market, contributing to income generating and drive Thailand’s digital economy forward. SACIT shop facilitates end-to-end online ordering experience for Thai craft products and builds customer’s trust through SACIT standards by curating the products before launching on the platform. Currently, there are over 330 items on the platform ranging from clothing, bags, jewelry, home decor, to souvenir. However, it's essential to note that the service is currently limited to Thailand, as the platform does not yet support worldwide shipping.

Figure 2.8

SACIT Shop platform



<https://sacitshop.com/home>



SACIT Shop Application

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Methodology

There are studies on the preservation of Thai artistic handicrafts, uplifting the products, and management of artisan communities. However, to ensure the continued sustainability of Thai cultural artisan, commercial dimension is indispensable. The commercial aspect revolves around demand and supply. According to the review of existing literatures in the previous chapter, they demonstrate a conspicuous demand for Thai handicraft products from international market. Yet, there are not many studies on the supply side – the capacity and ability of Thai handicraft producers to scale up operations and cater to this burgeoning demand. This study will focus on the supply side or the Thai handicraft producers, investigating the readiness of Thai handicraft producers to expand their reach to foreign customers through online marketplaces.

3.2 Research Questions

In line with the qualitative research paradigm, this study extends beyond mere numerical data. Instead, it focuses on small sample group of artisan producers to explore individual experiences, gaining profound insights into the challenges and opportunities facing Thai artisan producers. The research questions are thoughtfully designed to address the underlying dynamics of the industry:

1. What are the current challenges Thai artisan producers facing in order to scale up the business?
2. What is the opinion of selling Thai handicraft products online?

The first question is to understand current situation that producers. The interview questions to this research question will trace along the value chains from the very origins of material sourcing, production process, to the final stages of selling products including online channel. This holistic approach will allow us to understand

what the core issues affecting these producers, both arising from internal factors within their control and external factors in the boarder environment. It will reveal how these challenges are managed and the specific stakeholders that producers anticipate could provide valuable support. The second research question is to deep dive into online sales channel, a contemporary gateway to global markets. This question will identify whether digital channel is indeed the importance for Thai artisan producers to scale up their operations and effectively attract international customers. Findings from these questions should uncover the determinant of success in online sales, including the strategies and factors that contribute to the capture of international customers.

The insights from this qualitative research are poised to be instrumental in identifying both the challenges and opportunities within the Thai artistic handicraft industry, particularly in the context of expanding through online platforms. The study aims to pave the way for solutions and support mechanisms that can address the industry's current challenges and enhance its readiness to engage with the global market.




3.3 Data Collection




In this research, the sample group will consist of Thai artistic handicraft producers, carefully selected to encompass a diverse range of product types, business models, and operational stages. The primary goal is to assess the readiness of Thai artisan producers to expand their reach and engage with international customers through online marketplaces. The sample group will be composed of six handicraft brands, chosen deliberately for the variety they offer in terms of products, online presence, and offline sales channels. The selection criteria for the sample group are designed to provide comprehensive insights. The chosen brands not only represent different types of handicrafts but also vary in their business maturity and online exposure. Each brand within the sample group is required to have some online presence, either through their own website or social media, ensuring a baseline level of digital engagement. Moreover, the sample group includes businesses at different stages of development. This ranges from early-stage enterprises characterized by small scale and limited resources to well-established brands boasting strong market presence and operational

efficiency. The inclusion of brands with varying degrees of offline sales channels is intentional. Some brands may operate their own physical stores, others may be present in department stores or other retail outlets, and some may rely solely on online platforms. This diversity in offline channels aims to capture an understanding of each business's conditions, shedding light on factors that might impact their readiness to venture into online marketplaces. By examining multiple perspectives, this approach ensures a more effective and comprehensive assessment of the businesses' preparedness for online marketplace expansion. The detail of sample groups is in the table below.

Table 3.1

Summary of qualitative samples

Brand	Yano handcraft 	Lively Ware 	Natipong 
Description	Hand embroidered cloth	Handmade Ceramic pottery	Nora beads handcraft products
Found	2005	2006	2014
Province	Chiang Mai	Bangkok	SongKhla
Products	Cloths, home decoration, souvenir	Home decoration, dishes, jewelry	Home decoration, jewelry, bag
Selling Channels			
Offline - Own shop	-	Phutthamonthon Sai 2	Baan Khao Community Enterprise - tourism learning center
Offline - exhibition	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online - Own website	-	-	-
Online - Social Media	Facebook	Facebook, Instagram	Facebook
Online - E-commerce	-	-	-

Brand	Pahkahmah	Thorr	Yupa Brand
			
Description	Thai loincloth souvenir and fashion products	Natural crafted home decoration	Hand woven cloths and bags
Found	2016	2018	2018
Province	Bangkok	Amnat Charoen	Nonthaburi
Products	Cloths, bag, gift set, doll	Home decoration, bag, corporate gift	Cloths, bag
Selling Channels			
Offline - Own shop	-	JJ Plaza Thorr Café	-
Offline - department stores/ Other stores	Iconsiam, Siam Discovery Central World Emporium Central PaTong Central Samui Outlet Phuket/Khao Yai/ Cha-am/ Pattaya Robinson Sukhumvit Nai-in Bookstore	Iconsiam Siam Paragon Bayan Tree hotel	-
Offline - exhibition	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online - Own website	https://www.pahkahmahstore.com/th	https://thorrliving.com	-
Online - Social Media	Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok	Facebook, Instagram	Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok
Online - E-commerce	Shopee	-	-

3.4 Research Instrument

This research adopts a qualitative research methodology, utilizing in-depth interviews with Thai artistic handicraft producers to gather comprehensive data. The interviews facilitate around 30 minutes of two-way communication via telephone, fostering a deeper understanding of the research topic. To create a conducive atmosphere for open and candid responses, the author initiates the interview by introducing herself, articulating the study's objectives, and providing an overview of the interview questions. This introductory phase serves to establish rapport and clarity, ensuring that respondents feel comfortable sharing insights. Before commencing the interview, the author seeks permission to take notes and record the conversation to ensure that the data collection is thorough and that no valuable insights are overlooked during the interview. While the sequence of questions may vary based on the suitability of each interview, the interviewer ensures coverage of all prepared questions to align with the research objectives. The flexible nature of the discussion allows for a more organic and insightful exploration of the topic, tailored to the unique perspectives of each participant.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research adopts a qualitative research methodology, utilizing in-dept interviews with six Thai artistic handicraft producers to gather comprehensive data. The interviews facilitate around 30 minutes of two-way communication via telephone, fostering a deeper understanding of the research topic.

4.1 Samples information

In the course of this study, interviews will be conducted with six Thai handicraft producers, each representing a distinct business model, stage, and product type. The background information about these producers has been gathered from their Facebook pages, public websites, and through in-depth interviews. This comprehensive approach aims to provide an understanding of the diverse landscape within the Thai handicraft industry. By delving into the specifics of their business models, developmental stages, and the types of products they offer, the study seeks to capture a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities faced by these artisans for online marketplaces

4.1.1 Yano handicraft – textile

Established in 2005, Yano Handicrafts was born out of the founder's quest for sustainable happiness with a passion for product design, particularly in textiles, staying with family, and working with community. This led to the creation of Yano handicraft, the business that started with a handful of individuals around the founder's house and has since grown to include 300 people across various districts. The way of working with community is also different from others, Yano handicrafts value the happiness of every single member in the team, grounded in the belief that craftwork attains true beauty when created by happy makers. As a designer, the founder crafts dress designs with heart and the production process involves tailoring each design to match the unique skills of individual team members, resulting in dresses that are not

only aesthetically distinctive but also demonstrated maker's skill. Beyond clothing, Yano handicrafts extends its products to home decorations and souvenirs. The primary Other than cloths, Yano handicraft products also cover home decoration and souvenir. The main selling avenue for showcasing and selling is through exhibitions, with a local presence at two annual events and occasional participation in international trade exhibitions held in different countries. To further engage with customers and build awareness, Yano handicrafts leverages Facebook page as its primary online channel.

Figure 4.1

Yano handicraft



4.1.2 Lively ware – Ceramic pottery

Started from art school's founder, Mr. Kit Kanlayanapong, that incorporated ceramic lessons for children transform into a personal passion as the founder is fascinated by aesthetic of ceramics, began crafting cups for his own use. This creative journey led to the development of a diverse range of ceramics and design expertise for becoming commercial with everyday-use products spanning plates, jars, cups, buttons, and music speakers. Ceramic from Lively ware incorporated antique blue patterns into its ceramic pieces, creating a timeless and visually stunning quality. Despite embracing traditional materials, Lively Ware skillfully marries the old-style craftsmanship with modern functionality. The popular product is Thai-style stackable food containers with teak structure featuring a teak structure and holder representing unique design and environmentally friendly. Lively ware positioned itself at

ICONCRAFT area within ICONSIAM and areas in Airports. They recently established its own shop located at Phutthamonthon Sai 2. This offline accessibility ensures that the customers can experience the craftsmanship firsthand. For online, Lively ware has embraced Facebook page and Etsy craft e-commerce platform tapping into a global audience.

Figure 4.2

Lively ware



4.1.3 Natipong – Nora Beads

Natipong, the brand of Nora beads handcraft products, founded in 2014 in SongKhla province. Originating from Nora family, Natipong drew inspiration from the traditional Nora dress, expanding the horizon of Nora beads handicraft beyond clothing to create exquisite home decorations and jewelry. The founder's journey began with the profound connection to his cultural roots, and as he mastered the crafts, he established Baan Khao community enterprise in Songkhla. This enterprise serves as a collective hub for villagers with an interest in Nora beads, providing them with opportunities to contribute to the artistry and generate income for the community. The specialty lies in blending ancient Nora stringing techniques with innovative design, extending the legacy of nora beads beyond their conventional use. Natipong takes the original Nora bead concept and infuses it with universal beauty, appealing to foreigners while proudly representing the rich cultural heritage of Southern of Thailand. While Nora beads may seem commonplace, the true artistry lies in the technique of gluing the

strings – a skill that sits between stringing and weaving which is very difficult when compared to a simple bead stringing method.

In terms of sales channels, Natipong has strategically diversified between offline and online platforms. The Baan Khao community enterprise serves as a nature tourism learning center and physical retail space where tourists can buy products there. Additionally, Natipong participates in few exhibitions throughout the year. For online, Facebook serves as the only the promotional channel. The shop also uses Line application for direct communication with regular customers to update new collections and take orders.

Figure 4.3

Natipong



4.1.4 Pahkahmah – textile

Pahkahmah has carved its niche for lifestyle products, seamlessly blending the rich heritage of Thai loincloth with contemporary design across various product categories. Over a decade, Pahkahmah has evolved from a small business to a nationally recognized brand, distinguished by its unique and innovative offerings. The essence of Pahkahmah's creativity lies in the transformation of Thai loincloth into versatile lifestyle products, including dresses, bags, souvenirs, home decorations, and more, ushering Thai loincloth into the modern era with a blend of functionality and style that resonates with new generations. Nowadays, Pahkahmah captures local customers (fashion products), international tourists (Thai souvenir), and corporate

clients (special and culturally gifts). The selling channel covers offline and online. Offline, Pahkahmah's creations grace the shelves of prominent tourist attractions such as IconSiam, Central Samui, Phuket Outlet, and Suvarnabhumi Airport. These physical locations not only serve as points of sale but also contribute to the brand's visibility, attracting broader customers. For online, Pahkahmah has expanded its digital footprint, establishing a presence across various social media and e-commerce platforms such as Facebook page, Instagram, Tiktok, Shopee, Lazada, and its own website.

Figure 4.4

Pahkahmah Thailand



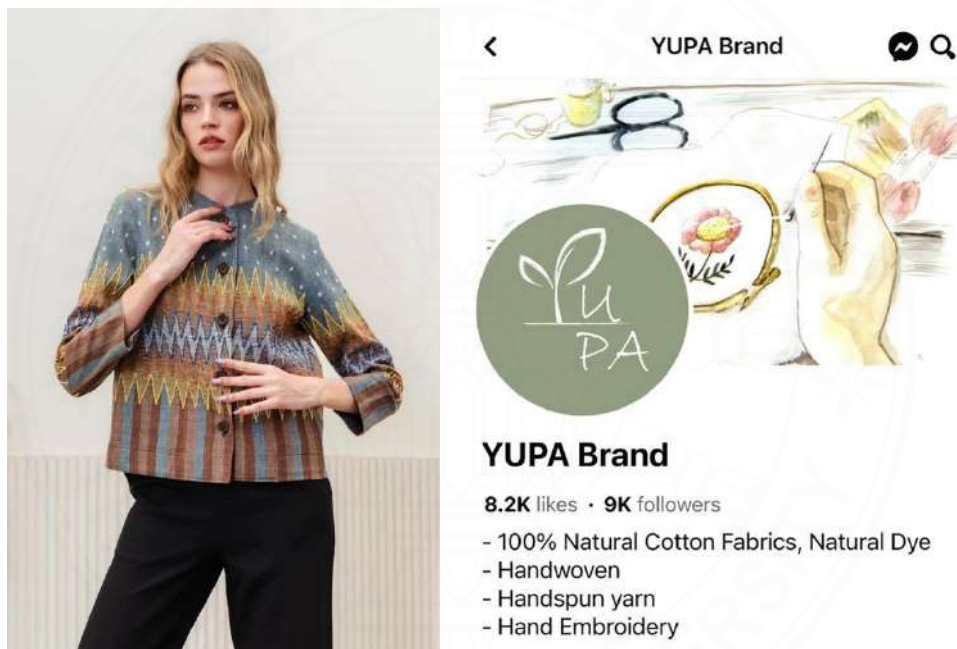
4.1.5 Yupa brand – textile

Yupa brand emerged from a foundation of clothing expertise passed down through the founder's family. Originating as a small-scale OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) business focused on cloth production, the founder envisioned creating her brand centered around crafted clothing. Leveraging the strengths within her family, the founder had responsibility for designing and patterning, blending modern styles with her mother's traditional techniques. The collaborative effort resulted in a unique fusion of contemporary and classic elements. As the business gained momentum, Yupa brand extended its reach by outsourcing sewing work to communities, primarily in Northern Thailand. The recruitment process engaged the Facebook community, fostering online communication to convey design concepts and

coordinate the crafting and sewing processes. Demonstrating a commitment to ethical sourcing, Yupa brand emphasizes materials obtained from tribal communities. With a predominant reliance on online channels, specifically Facebook page and Instagram, comprising 95% of its sales, Yupa brand recently ventured into TikTok to tap into new and dynamic consumer segments. Occasional offline events, particularly those organized by SACIT, provide additional opportunities for engagement.

Figure 4.5

Yupa Brand



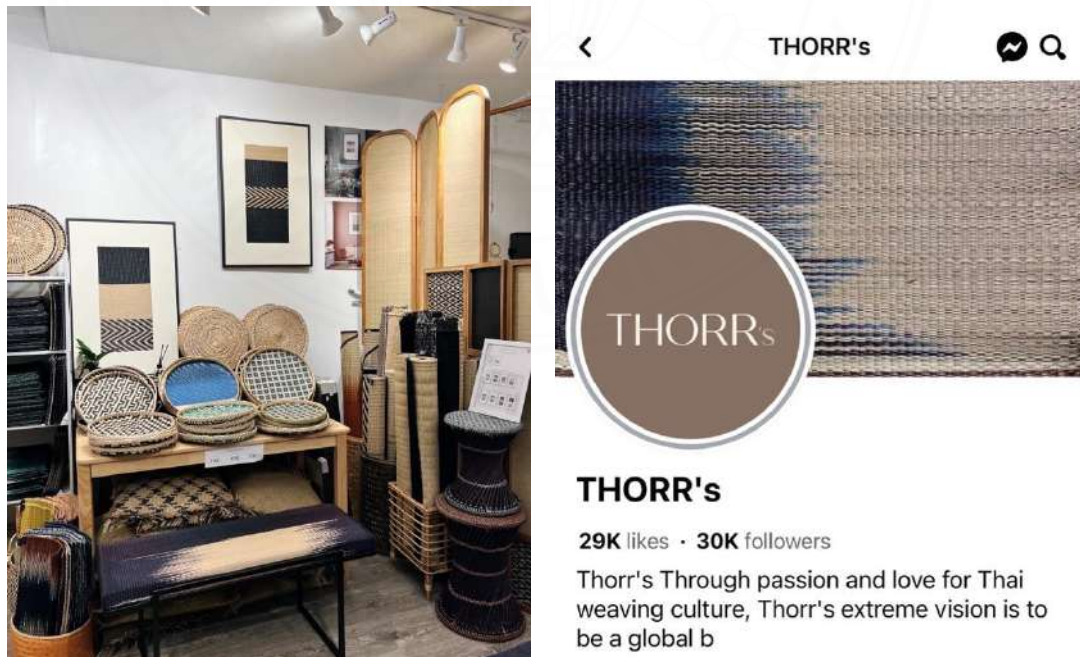
4.1.6 Thorr – home decoration & fashion

Thorr, born from the founder's vision to uplift the income levels in Amnat Charoen province—a region characterized by lower economic prosperity, primarily reliant on agriculture—embodies a unique fusion of design, sales, and marketing expertise from founder. Over the past five years, Thorr has actively engaged with local communities across six provinces in Northern, Northeastern, and Southern Thailand, involving more than a hundred individuals. The primary objectives include the equitable distribution of work, creation of sustainable income streams, and preservation of the traditional weaving culture. Thorr's diverse product range currently encompasses home decorations crafted from papyrus, featuring items such as floor

mats, dining decorations, lamps, wall décor, and furniture. Expanding its repertoire, Thorr also delves into fashion with bags, and envisions corporate gifts as a promising avenue for growth. Recognizing the corporate customer's inclination towards bulk purchases project base, Thorr perceives this as an opportunity to diversify its offerings and augment revenue streams while bag products are for retail customers. The company adopts a multi-approach to sales, encompassing both online and offline channels. Online, the company maintains a dedicated website that serves as a comprehensive platform detailing its offerings and facilitating order placements. Thorr leverages popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to actively engage with potential buyers and support communication efforts. In the physical retail space, Thorr establishes its presence through its own shop at JJ Plaza in home decoration zone, and Thorr café in Amnat Charoen. Additionally, the brand secures visibility through shelves at prominent locations like ICONCRAFT in ICONSIAM, Siam Paragon, and Bayan Tree Hotel Phuket.

Figure 4.6

THORR's



4.2 Research results

The author conducted interviews to find out whether Thai artistic handicrafts producers are ready to scale up to international market through online marketplace. The interviews were conducted by asking the producers based on the questions prepared in advance. To make the participants relax and not pressure, the author did not ask by going through all the prepared questions but added some questions flexibly depending on the respondent's answers during the interview and covered all the significant topics.

4.2.1 What are the current challenges Thai artisan producers facing to scale up the business?

Yano handicrafts, as a long well-established business, went through issues and joys for 17 years. One of the hurdles faced by the founder was the establishment of a distinct brand identity and awareness for their unique clothing with the stories of crafts and community woven into each piece. While establishing brand, the business sustained by other alternative income streams from selling souvenir products that catered to a mass market with large quantities sold to tourist in tourist-centric markets. In terms of sales channel expansion, Yano handicrafts initially was onto the shelves of major department stores. However, this approach proved challenging as it relied heavily on the department stores' promotional efforts, and the associated gross profit margins were deemed excessive. In response, the business pivoted its selling channels, focusing on exhibitions. This shift involved consistent production and stocking to meet the demands of exhibitions, providing a more direct and hands-on approach to reaching customers. At current, the primary challenge faced by Yano Handicrafts is the solitary management by the founder. Acknowledging this, the founder is actively addressing the issue by implementing a training program for team leaders in each district community. This initiative aims to empower local leaders to take on more responsibilities and manage community activities.

Lively ware has relied on offline sales channels, with a dedicated shelf at airports targeting tourist customers. However, this dependence on offline sales, particularly in airport locations, is subject to fluctuations in the macroeconomic

environment. Recently, the business has experienced a decline in sales at airports, contributing to an overall reduction in revenue. The business operates on a low-budget concept, such as the expansion into channels with significant investment requirements as fixed rental fees in department stores may not align with the current business model. Consequently, while the business may not achieve rapid scalability, it aims for steady growth, prioritizing a strong foundational structure. Offline sales have proven more effective than online channels for pottery products, given the fragile nature of the items and the high risk of breakage during delivery. Lively Ware has encountered challenges with international deliveries, experiencing instances where products were damaged in transit.

Natipong began as a solo founder with single-handedly managing every facet of the business, from materials sourcing to closing the deals, specifically sales and marketing parts. Therefore, the internal system heavily relies on the founder's decisions creating challenges for scalability as there is a notable absence of a structured system for control as well as proper accounting. Furthermore, operating as a community enterprise comes with its own set of financial challenges, access to funds is not readily available as the bank loan may not be approved for community enterprise. This financial constraint has impeded Natipong's ability to make inroad into department stores, a move that would require a substantial investment in material storage.

Pahkahmah has navigated a decade in the Thai souvenir business, establishing itself as a strong player with a distinctive focus on design and branding. The brand sources and curates Thai loincloth designs from both handwoven and machine-woven fabrics within local communities. The company used to have material challenges but has tried approaches until found the smooth operation. This approach requires precise planning of production capacity to align with distribution plans across various channels. The brand collaborates closely with the local communities ensuring a timely and reliable supply of loincloth to fuel its production processes. This effort to effective material management has allowed Pahkahmah to expand its offline presence nearly 10 physical stores at present. Pahkahmah's journey has been the challenge of standing out in a market saturated with OTOP (One Tambon One Product) products, particularly those featuring Thai loincloth. The brand tackled this challenge by crafting a unique narrative that goes beyond the product itself. Pahkahmah has successfully

distinguished itself through compelling storytelling, emphasizing both the journey of the loincloth and the distinctive design elements that set its products apart. In the current landscape, Pahkahmah faces a substantial challenge in stock management. With an extensive offline presence, each store may have different best-selling products, complicating inventory management. The company is actively addressing this challenge through targeted marketing campaigns aimed at balancing sales across different product lines. This strategic approach not only enhances stock equilibrium but also ensures that each branch is adequately stocked with the products most in demand.

Thorr's customer segment captures both retail and corporate as different products serve different target customers. However, the company targets more on corporate segment in project based works such as crafting home decorations for office spaces or shops. The company recognizes the importance of clear communication and a professional brand image to effectively cater to the corporate segment. The founder envisions Thorr as a provider of professional craft products characterized by quality and aesthetic appeal, distinct from the perception often associated with products classified under the OTOP (One Tambon One Product) initiative or purchases driven by sympathy. In pursuit of this vision, Thorr is dedicated to enhancing its human resources, production processes, and service standards to align with market demands and differentiate itself from competitors. Crafting a professional image is crucial in overcoming challenges associated with customer perceptions of craft products. Potential customers often prefer physical interaction with products before making purchasing decisions, a challenge that offline shops partially address. However, reaching customers across all regions of Thailand remains a challenge, necessitating a robust online presence. To bridge the gap between customer expectations and the inherent variability in craft products, Thorr has undertaken the task of building an online channel that instills confidence in customers. The challenge lies in managing customer expectations, especially concerning variations in natural materials and colors influenced by seasonal changes. Thorr's approach to addressing these challenges involves establishing a strong brand identity that fosters customer trust and maintaining open lines of communication to provide regular updates and manage expectations. On a macro scale, the founder mentioned the potential impact of government support,

particularly in the form of tax incentives, as a pivotal factor in encouraging and sustaining growth within the craft sector. Thorr envisions a future where governmental backing could serve as a catalyst for the industry, promoting its economic significance and cultural value. Presently, government agencies play a role in supporting Thai handicraft producers by facilitating sales and expanding selling channels through events and exhibitions. However, the founder of Thorr believes that while this support is beneficial in the short term, a more appropriate and tailored approach is necessary to address the diverse needs of handicraft businesses at different stages of their development. In the early stages of a business, the emphasis might be on product design support, helping artisans and producers refine and enhance their creations. As businesses progress into the growth stage, the focus could shift towards providing support for sales channels. This involves helping handicraft producers explore and establish effective avenues for reaching their target audience.

Yupa brand's founder has highlighted the challenge of managing craftsmen located at a distance, many of whom have not been met in person. Communication is exclusively conducted online, presenting a distinctive set of hurdles. The key to successful craftsmanship lies in the synchronization of the artisan's mind and body, an intricate process complicated by external factors beyond the company's control. Personal issues among craftsmen may occasionally impact their work capacity, posing challenges to maintaining consistent quality. Yupa brand, aware of the delicate balance required, strives to avoid excessive pressure that could compromise the excellence of craftsmanship. Furthermore, the scarcity of craftsmen resources imposes limitations on production quantity, hindering the potential for scalable growth. Presently, the online channel operates at nearly full capacity, with products often being pre-ordered. This high demand poses challenges for expanding into alternative sales avenues, such as department stores or exhibitions, despite the recognized opportunities these platforms present. The company grapples with balancing the current limitations imposed by a constrained workforce against the potential for broader market reach.

4.2.2 What is the opinion of selling Thai handicraft products online?

Yano handicrafts has Facebook page as the online communication with existing customers to update the collections. The company had previously explored participation in online marketplace platforms such as Amazon and Etsy,

encouraged by government agency. However, Yano Handicrafts found that these platforms were not ideally suited to its business model. The uniqueness of Yano Handicrafts' products, each being a singular design, presented a challenge in the online marketplace setting. Given that each product is distinct and one-of-a-kind, the approach of posting items and waiting for sales on such platforms did not align with the brand's operational preferences. The nature of Yano Handicrafts' offerings, characterized by individualized designs, makes the faster selling cycle at exhibitions more advantageous in comparison to the relatively slower pace of online marketplaces. Therefore, Yano Handicrafts has prioritized the direct and dynamic interactions facilitated by exhibitions while maintaining relationship and building awareness through online channel.

Lively ware thinks that the world is moving towards online as well as crafts industry. Ceramic product aligns seamlessly with the online ordering experience as the customers can just choose the product by the painting photos. The company had previously registered on Etsy, but there had only been a few instances where the ceramics were damaged while being shipped to customers abroad. In this instance, the company could not receive payment when selling through Etsy, so it is not worth the cost or the customer's expectations. Although the cost is borne by the customers in the case of direct sales, it is not worth losing the customers' impression and expectations of the store. For local market, Lively ware acknowledges the importance of both online and offline channels. Social media platforms contribute to market awareness, reaching new customers, and expanding the brand's digital presence, while physical shop serves as a crucial space where customers can engage in personal discussion with the founder and allow customers to experience the products before making orders. The brand does not build its own website as the founder believes that Facebook page could make awareness to the brand more than the website that the customers need to find. The company also emphasizes the importance of government departments adapting to this online trend by transitioning from traditional offline exhibitions to effective online channels and delivery system support. Nowadays, most of producers expects government support for marketing and selling to international market like a dedicated Thai platform that could serve as a specialized space to showcase and promote Thai crafts, elevating local products onto the global stage.

Currently, Natipong has leveraged social media platforms, through Facebook page and Line account as the main channels for online sales. Facebook page serves as a crucial tool for building reliability among customers, utilizing customer reviews to gain confidence and help potential buyers in their decision making. While this approach has proven effective, there have been occasional challenges such as instances where the actual weight of the product may differ from customer expectations. Another current hurdle faced by Natipong is the irregular posting of content on Facebook. With the founder shouldering the responsibility of content creation and posting, frequency of updates has been affected. For popular online marketplaces like Shopee and Lazada, Natipong has not yet entered as the mass-market audience on these platforms may differ from Natipong's target customer group. However, when the business is ready to scale up, enter into online marketplace will be a consideration as the founder also sees the potential of foreign customers interested in Nora beads' unique home decorations.

Pahkahmah has positioned itself across various online platforms, demonstrating a keen understanding of evolving consumer trends. Actively engaging with customers on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, the brand leverages social media to not only maintain its existing customer base but also attract new audiences. Recognizing the current dominance of short-form videos on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, Pahkahmah has adeptly incorporated these trends into its online presence to ensure a dynamic and appealing approach to consumer engagement. While Pahkahmah has built a robust offline channel with a strong operational system, it equally recognizes the importance of an active online presence. The brand adapts to the shifting consumer behaviors, understanding that trends evolve continuously. The founder's belief in the necessity of aligning with current trends extends beyond product offerings to the brand itself and the individuals behind it. Personal branding through online storytelling emerges as a crucial strategy to enhance brand awareness and resonate with consumers on a more personal level. In terms of e-commerce platforms, Pahkahmah has capitalized on the opportunities provided by platforms such as Shopee and Lazada for the local market, and Amazon and Etsy for the global market. However, as the founder mentioned on challenges, notably in managing product availability across both offline and online channels.

Thorr recognizes the significance of online channels in today's business landscape, even as it establishes a presence in various offline locations. The brand places a strong emphasis on effective storytelling, captivating product photography, and detailed product information across social media platforms, with particular attention to Instagram. However, Thorr has made a decision not to prioritize e-commerce platforms. This decision aligns with the nature of their target customers, primarily corporate clients. The corporate client relationship demands detailed communication, product customization, and bulk purchases, aspects that are better facilitated through direct interaction rather than on e-commerce platforms. Additionally, the brand's customer base tends to discover Thorr through its established brand presence, with decisions influenced more by brand recognition than promotions on e-commerce marketplaces. Consequently, Thorr opts to focus on building its brand through social media, leveraging platforms like Instagram to engage with customers, both locally and internationally.

Yupa brand heavily relies on online sales, constituting nearly 100% of its distribution channels. The company places a strong emphasis on leveraging various online platforms to enhance its brand presence. Actively engaging with audiences on the Facebook page, Yupa brand uses this space to showcase and narrate the stories behind each masterpiece, providing insights into the materials, functions, and the craftsmen involved in the creation of each product. Instagram is used for posting visually appealing product photos to attract potential customers, while TikTok serves as a platform for short videos, a recent addition to the brand's social media portfolio. The communication for order taking is primarily conducted through Line official. Although the company is exploring e-commerce platforms, its current production capacity limitations and the nature of small, limited-collection releases make it challenging to seamlessly integrate with these platforms. The pre-order system, sometimes requiring a month for completion, further complicates the suitability of e-commerce platforms. Despite these challenges, the founder has explored platforms like Etsy, a crafted product online marketplace, though a decision to join has not been finalized since the complexity of payment system. The founder recognized the potential of the international market, Yupa brand is eyeing this segment for future expansion. The brand has had incidental international orders through its Facebook page, even

without active promotion to an international audience. This indicates a promising avenue for growth in the global market, and the company is poised to tap into this potential as part of its strategic direction.



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study aims to analyze the readiness of Thai craft producers adopting global e-commerce platforms as additional selling channel through the examination of the Thai artistic handicraft landscape, the potential market, government support mechanisms, and e-commerce for crafts from existing reports and public information. Qualitative interviews were conducted with representative from six Thai craft brands. Outcome of the interview found that only one out of six brands has already sold through Shopee which is top e-commerce platform in Thailand. Notably, four out of six brands are interested in entering online marketplaces to target both local and international customers, while the remaining two are not interested in joining e-commerce platforms as the business model products do not match.

Thai craft producers face a variety of obstacles when selling on e-commerce platforms, which affects their decision to enter or hold off entering this online marketplace. Due to the limited capacity of craftsmen, two brands shared that their current production capacity limitation does not align with the current structure of fast delivery e-commerce platforms. Regardless of this, the brand is still on a pre-order system. Furthermore, concerns about stock shortages continue due to both offline priority and insufficient capital. The fragility of certain products, ceramics in this case, take high risk of breakage during shipment leading to potential additional costs. Internal management from sole owner presents another difficulty in growing the business, and one-piece product with unique design is also not worth posting online when it can be sold offline more quickly. Business-to-business models that require regular updates to customers and clear communication, such as customized bulk products or home décor, are also challenging to execute on an e-commerce platform.

Moreover, there are some further suggestions for a more efficient and targeted approach from brands that aspire to enter e-commerce space. They propose the establishment of a dedicated online marketplace exclusively for Thai craft products,

facilitated by Thai government. This tailored platform would provide advantages by narrowing the audience to individuals familiar with and appreciative of Thai craft products. It aligns with the understanding that these products carry a unique design and involve longer time in their production. In order to push the Thai craft e-commerce platform forward and boost the sector as a whole, the Thai government is also anticipated to be the lead.

5.2 Recommendation

The findings of this study revealed that the majority of Thai craft producers have yet to enter into the e-commerce space, despite the research shows upward trends of e-commerce market globally. However, there are still opportunity for Thai craft producers to tap into a boarder customer base beyond Thailand as the issues raised by sample Thai brands during the interview can be resolved. The recommendations could be separated into two areas. The initial focus centers on the craft producers for efficient integration into the online marketplace platforms themselves. The second segment directs attention to optimizing e-commerce platform themselves, ensuring they are adapting at serving the unique needs and characteristics of craft products.

The challenge is that their own capacity is limited such that could not explore new things to expand the business or expand at slower pace because they do it themselves at every single step. Many craft producers initially embark on their entrepreneurial journey either as individuals or within their family circles. As their businesses evolve, they extend their reach to local communities with a specialization in handcrafting, thereby creating opportunities for employment and broadening production capabilities. However, a common challenge faced by these craft producers lies in the fact that the owners often find themselves engaged in every aspect of the business—from product sourcing and design to marketing, distribution, and sales.

The bottleneck of having the owner involved in every single step of the process would limit the capacity to scale. To address this challenge, it is crucial for owners to adopt a business mindset from day one, organizing the business structure and building a dedicated team. Alternatively, outsourcing becomes a viable option. To align with global market trends, particularly in the digital age, marketing strategy covering

various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and others is essential to engage the target audience. Small to mid-sized craft makers can consider hiring an outsourced marketing agency or, at a minimum, a social media coordinator to efficiently manage their online presence, especially when catering to an international audience. The communication is essential for craft community as the different style and conditions in each product need a detail explanation. Therefore, the digital skill is important for entering e-commerce, where marketing and sales predominantly operate online. SACIT does not neglect for this issue, they regularly host training sessions on topics such as digital content creation on Tiktok and selling on online platforms. incorporating additional elements at each stage of the value chain, such as product innovation driven by consumer demand and intellectual property. Various free upskill courses are also offered by other organizations to strengthen Thai entrepreneurs' digital capabilities.

Grooming Thai craft producers would not be full efficient if there is no well-suited e-commerce platform for Thai craft products. As the research in this study found that artisan and craft products are not widely available on global e-commerce platforms such as Shopee or Lazada, as their offerings do not align with those of those e-commerce platforms that prioritize mass and affordable products. But ICONCRAFT, which ICONSIAM organized to collect contemporary handicrafts from more than 800 Thai artists across the country, is planning to grow its retail business by utilizing international e-commerce platforms such as Weibo and Taobao for the Chinese market (using a livestreaming approach) and Shopee International Platform and LAZgoGlobal for the markets in Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia. This presents an additional opportunity for craft producers to leverage their influence over the large retailers and grow international market without having to undertake the responsibility themselves. If not, there is a single e-commerce site dedicated to selling handcrafted goods called Etsy, but Thai artisans still use it very infrequently, according to the interviewees, who cited shipment problems and complicated payment processes as reasons.

According to the ideas from the interview, two out of six would suggest to have Thai craft e-commerce platform which specifically for Thai craft products facilitated by the government which actually it currently has one. SACIT shop has

established to be a marketplace for Thai craft products, although it is currently only available in Thailand and the products are not yet available on a large scale. As a result, there is no need to create a completely new Thai craft e-commerce platform since we already have one, and the Ministry of Commerce, which is entirely responsible for promoting Thai business, supports it. The government-backed platform's credibility will encourage buyers to purchase products from unknown sellers.

Therefore, the main recommendation is to develop nation's craft e-commerce platform for local and international customers that also could solve current sellers' pain points and serve boarder audience. As mentioned, the platform could be new established e-commerce platform or the existing one initiated by SACIT which could leverage on government's network and power to accelerate the platform. For a Thai craft e-commerce platform to function as a successful global player, effective marketing plays a pivotal role in representing the entire nation. Craft e-commerce would not be in the same position as mass-produced goods or even industrial handicrafts. Instead of going up against low-cost, high-volume producers directly, the platform ought to identify and sell niche markets. It is primarily the platform's duties to drive traffic from both buyers and sellers in order to reach and raise awareness in foreign markets, showcase Thai craft products with artist's skill, and facilitate online sales. Given that it is exclusively for Thai handicrafts, educational materials are essential for foreign buyers to encourage an understand the significance and rich heritage of Thai culture as it appears through the product. Soft power in the country, targeted countries' media and influencers could be leveraged to raise buyer awareness. However, the platform also needs to make sure there are a good number of sellers active and products available on the platform. On seller side, it should be on country's level providing incentives to sellers both in terms of financial and operation. One inherent challenge in online sales is the inability for customers to physically touch the products. Leveraging Augmented Reality (AR) presents a potential solution by offering a virtual experience that conveys the physicality of craft objects. Additionally, video features can contribute to building engagement and trust in the brand and its products. Videos can serve as a medium for presenting intricate product details and narrating the compelling stories behind the brands, enhancing the overall customer experience. After the purchasing phase, shipping presents another difficulty. Ordering online would be

expensive and deterrent if one had to ship separate packages from several overseas retailers. The platform could facilitate by providing order consolidation service so that the parcels from different shops on the platform can be shipped together at once with various shipping methods, offering cost saving and logistical ease.

Backend systems hold significance from the seller's perspective as well. If the platform were designed to be able to plug in any Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) for those who already use one for their business, the inventory management issue would be resolved because they would only need one system to run effectively. While operating software may not be used by small sellers, the platform may offer it for using in both online and offline activities to ensure the smooth operation of small craft stores. In addition to order statistics and performance, the system ought to support artisan producers by integrating cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Alongside the customer journey in the e-commerce platform, the power of AI/ML could be leveraged. From raising awareness and encouraging interaction through the analysis of the best ways for interacting with the target audience, to the point of consideration where personalized product recommendations are made based on the interests and previous behaviors of the customer in order to highlight relevant products, cross-sell, and upsell. Chatbots are also useful for solving language barriers and giving consumers a positive, real-time response. When it comes to purchase and customer retention, artificial intelligence (AI) can be used to forecast consumer behavior and leverage customer data to engage and retain customers. Additionally, it could assist sellers in pricing and demand forecasting so they can effectively position and schedule their production. Likewise to Amazon, it uses AI for a variety of purposes, including ensuring genuine customer reviews, which are essential for assisting other customers worldwide in making purchasing decisions. Fake reviews have the potential to misrepresent the quality of the product and affect the reputation of Amazon and sellers. Amazon prioritizes maintaining a reliable shopping experience as a result.

Finally, up to this point, Thai craft retailers looking at expanding their customer base would find the e-commerce platform ideal. However, the business models, products, and services offered by Thai craft producers vary widely. The nation's craft e-commerce platform could be fully optimized by encompassing the entire

ecosystem in order to be utilized. In addition to selling to retail customers worldwide, the platform might customize features for corporate or customized orders and include a convenient chat box that would facilitate easy communication and ordering between the two parties. Especially for home decoration and furniture, the market in high-end segment is growing. Another significant opportunity to close the gap is raw material. Not only the finished products, but raw material like cotton, papyrus, and other Thai natural material could be sold online through the e-commerce platform for both Thai and international craft producers. This would enable the Thai craft e-commerce platform to draw in all relevant parties to work together and support Thai craft producers for opportunities that might have gone unnoticed. It could also act as a launching pad for a bigger and more competitive online market in the global arena.



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