

Network for Learning about Herbs through Websites

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Abstract. Nowadays, many Thais and foreigners are more and more interested in alternative medicine. People from all over the world have started to consider Thai herbs as an alternative medical treatment. As a result, Thai herbs have become acceptable and popular, especially in Thailand where Thai herbs have been used for over a thousand years. Thai herbal medicine has been passed on from generation to generation. Since the popularity of learning about Thai herbs is increasing, an online network was established so that people can learn about Thai herbs more easily. The objectives of this research study were to examine the demands of Thai people for media, approaches and website criteria for learning about Thai herbs, as well as an online social networking format, to develop an online social network model, and to study how to create an online social network model for learning about Thai herbs. A set of 900 questionnaires was distributed to the participants. The statistical data analysis indicators used were the frequency distribution including percentage, mean, standard deviation, and the t-test to compare the demands of students and working people. The analysis on how to create an online social network model was done based on relevant documents and theories.

Keywords: Thai Herbs, Network for Learning Herbs Through Websites, Websites

1. Introduction

Western culture has had a great impact on people's way of life, particularly on their health and diet. Many people live such a hasty life to catch up with the ever-changing technology that they are concerned less about their own health. When they are ill, they go to the hospital or clinic to get a quick treatment. With such conveniences, people tend to hold on to the idea that the doctor can always fix their ailments. They overlook the fact that there is traditional wisdom available that can strengthen their health and prevent illness. The new alternative approach to medical treatment, which is now popular among Thais and foreigners, takes an active role to protect oneself from diseases by changing your diet and eating habits. With this change of attitude, Thai herbs have become acceptable and popular for self-care treatment [1]. Knowledge of Thai herbal medicines and their development has been passed on from generation to generation for over a thousand years and becoming valued as local wisdom. However, it has mostly been distributed in the form of printed materials, such as textbooks. It is not widespread among youngsters who show low interest in print media. They prefer multimedia, as it can react with the users much better. It was found that people could learn and memorize content only 20% from reading, 30% from listening, 50% from both reading and listening, and 80% from reading, listening, and doing [2]. Web-based instruction is a teaching approach that applies multimedia programs and takes the advantage of the Internet's features. The main factor that leads to active learning is the creation of a learning network. As the key to the resolution of all kinds of problems where everyone participates and cooperates, or what is called a civil society, the collaboration of people in the civil society is an important tool to drive the power of wisdom, experience, and money to achieve the goal of developing Thai society to be a desirable one.

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2. Objectives

- To study the demands of Thai people for media, approaches, and website criteria for learning about Thai herbs.
- To study the format of online social networking and the development of an online social network model.

3. Results

This research was divided into two parts: 1. The study of the demands of Thai people regarding their learning about Thai herbs, and 2. The study of the online social networking format. To collect the data of the first part, the researchers distributed 900 copies of the questionnaire to the sample groups, who were interested in Thai herbs, both inside and outside Bangkok in the northern, northeastern, central, and southern regions. The data of the second part was gathered from relevant documents and theories.

3.1 The demands for learning media and approaches

Table 1: Mean of the Demands for Media and Approaches of Learning about Herbs

The Demands for Media and Approaches of Learning About Herbs	Mean	SD.	Ranking
• Field trip	3.53	0.78	4
• Electronic media resource, such as lessons on herbs	3.62	0.68	3
• VDO or DVD for reinforcing the learners' understanding of the subject	3.32	0.67	5
• Training with herb experts	3.11	0.72	6
• Self-study with advice from experts	4.19	1.00	2
• Learning network about herbs	4.40	0.82	1

Table 1 shows that the highest demand was for learning network about herbs, followed by self-study with advice from experts, and electronic media resource, respectively. The lowest demand was for training with herb experts.

3.2 The ranking of criteria for a good herb website

Table 2: Comparison between the Ranking of Criteria for a Good Herb Website by Students and Working People using t-test

The Ranking of Criteria	Mean	SD.	Sample Groups	Mean	SD.	t-test
• Content and information	4.25	0.56	Students	4.37	0.49	7.44*
			Working People	4.10	0.61	
• Information linking	4.05	0.5	Students	4.11	0.44	4.25*
			Working People	3.97	0.55	
• Modernity	4.00	0.5	Students	4.04	0.47	2.59*
			Working People	3.95	0.53	
• Reliability	4.06	0.44	Students	4.11	0.42	4.58*
			Working People	3.98	0.46	
• Accessibility	4.24	0.41	Students	4.28	0.38	3.41*
			Working People	4.18	0.45	
• Presentation	3.60	0.42	Students	3.58	0.38	-1.98
			Working People	3.64	0.47	
• Website design	3.90	0.32	Students	3.91	0.3	1.12
			Working People	3.89	0.34	

* $P < 0.05$

Table 2 shows the comparison between the ranking of criteria for a good herb website by students and working people using the t-test. There was a statistically significant difference between the two sample groups with respect to the content and information, the information linking, the modernity, the reliability, and the accessibility. It was found that students showed more interest in these criteria with a statistically significant difference, while there was no statistically significant difference in the other criteria.

3.3 The Study of Online Social Networking Format

3.3.1 Online Social Network

The online social networking website has been developed into many formats. However, the main feature includes visible personal information showing a link to a list of friends who use the same system. The personal information page is clearly distinguished so that an individual can fill out their own status [3]. After connecting to the online social network, each individual is required to provide the information, such as age, address, interest, and other personal information. Many websites allow the users to display their personal photographs on the web page. Some websites may allow the users to add multimedia content or modify the page that shows their personal information. For example, Facebook has created a lot of applications for the users to add to their personal information page [4]. The users on the same network can also support each other. This becomes a helping behavior in various forms, such as sharing information, comforting, rescuing, and helping [5]. A research study on such behavior in a virtual community showed that it was a sharing of information and creating of the topic that people in the community are interested in, which in turn causes a continuing interaction among online group members. It is an important tool to trigger people to participate, and respond by posting on the website their willingness to help, and share their ideas in response to the original posts [6], [7], [8], and [9].

3.3.2 Model for Creating a Network

A network is the connection of groups of individuals or organizations who are voluntary to exchange information and join activities. They are under an organized structure within the network with freedom and equality based on respect, trust, and generosity. Some academics in the field have proposed some guidelines for creating a network, as shown in Table 3. [10], [11], [12], [13], [14], and [15].

Table 3: Guidelines for Creating a Network

No	Starkey	Jon Warner	Kanitha Kanchanarangseenon	Seri Pongpit	Kriangsak Charoenwongsak	Prapahn Chuangpusri
1	Understanding about objectives	Learning	Inviting organizations and interested persons	Drafting clear objectives	Mutual viewpoint perception	Surveying groups and organizations
2	Defining the objectives	Investment	Determining the objectives of the network	State the goal and objectives	Mutual visions	Promoting the information
3	Setting up the main group of network	Nurturing	Organizing a leader of the network	Arranging operation plan	Mutual benefits	Arranging knowledge exchange process
4	Building the feeling of partnership and ownership	Keep	Feeling of ownership and bond	Determining basic rules and regulations	Mutual participation	Creating civil society forum to select a representative
5	Giving supporting in term of resources management		Planning for seeking and providing resources	Determine the processes of decision making	Mutual support	Preparing relevant supports
6	Encouraging the link between networks		Making the network legitimate	Preparing communication plan among members	Mutual Reliance	Preparing each step to make it interesting
7	Following up and evaluating the activities		Supporting the connection between networks	Select organizational structure	Exchanging Interaction	
8	Arranging training to refresh the knowledge		Following up and evaluating	Getting financial support for the operation		

From the above information and theories, a learning format can be created into a model called “OBJECT,” which includes the following components.

OBJECT Model

- **O**bjective: The objectives are set up in order to organize a group that shares the same goals and purposes.
- **B**rainstorm: The members in the network virtually meet to talk, inquire, bond, and build relationship within the network.
- **J**ust to Learn: This component involves learning about people and contents within the network to stimulate knowledge sharing within the network.
- **E**nvironment and Controlling: This component involves controlling of the network to encourage its continuity and sustainability according to each particular context.
- **C**ooperative: This component involves helping each other on the network and strengthening the relationship of the members in the network.
- **T**esting and Evaluation: This component involves the evaluation of learning according to the pre-determined objectives.

Relations among OBJECT

Based on the above model, the components are related as shown in the following seven dimensions:

- Dimension 1 OT The objectives must be assessable.
- Dimension 2 BJ The brainstorming must be based on sharing of knowledge within the group.
- Dimension 3 CE Help must be in correspondence with the network controlling.
- Dimension 4 BC Ideas from the brainstorming must be derived by the help within the group.
- Dimension 5 JE Mutual learning needs to be under the context of network controlling within the group.
- Dimension 6 BOC The brainstorming activity requires cooperation within the group so that it will not be deviated from the objectives determined by the group
- Dimension 7 JTE Learning and controlling must be assessable.

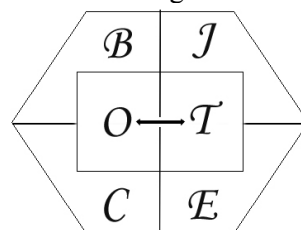


Fig. 1: “OBJECT Model”

4. Discussion

The research study revealed that people needed media and approaches for learning about herbs by creating a network through an online system. They started from chatting about the topic of interest between 2 or more individuals. Then, they received and exchanged information and ideas until it became a learning source [8]. Regarding the self-study approach with advice from the herb experts, learners had a hands-on experience which enhanced their memorization and improved their potential to the fullest. It is necessary to apply a student-centered approach in which the learners take responsibility and participate in their own learning to push themselves under the guidance of the instructors [16]. As for the training by experts, it was a good and efficient approach, but it was not practical due to the low number of experts in the field, particularly the medical field. In terms of the demands for herb website criteria, it was evident that the content was the first priority as it was very important to the learning of herbs. As a result, the contents to be put on the website should be accurate and complete. The contact information on the website, such as map and e-mail address must also be clearly visible so that users can contact the website easily. Furthermore, the information on the website must be regularly updated to keep up with the changing world. The most attractive content is the one that is newly created and not the same as other websites. It is more likely for the users to visit such website

instead of the ones that have linked content from another website. This is because when the users find out the real source, they will not come back to the same link again. The hyperlink to get access to the information on the website must be designed to be intuitive and easy to use. Graphics can be used together with text for clear presentation. It is also necessary to have a consistent format and order of the hyperlink on the web page. For example, it should appear at the same location on every page of the website [17]. Social networks reflect the users' behaviors in helping each other, exchanging ideas and sharing information on the topic they shared interest with. This creates a continuous interaction among the online members, which triggers more participation and responses (posting) to show that the members are willing to help and share their ideas with the person who left the original post. The nature of the helping behaviors in the online community can be divided into two categories: information sharing and knowledge contribution [18].

5. References

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