

## Modeling the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng: The Role of Engagement, Brand Identity, and Communication Strategies in Lampang Province

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the causal relationships between consumer engagement, marketing communication, brand identity, and identity communication that influence the perceived quality of *Som Klieng*, a GI-certified fruit from Lampang Province. The objective is to understand how these variables shape consumer perceptions and highlight the role of integrated marketing communication in enhancing product value. A quantitative research approach is employed, utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), on data collected from 385 consumers across six regions in Thailand. A structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale measures the key constructs, and the analysis includes descriptive statistics, correlation, and path analysis.

The results reveal that consumer engagement has a significant influence on marketing communication ( $\beta = 0.681$ ) and brand identity ( $\beta = 0.590$ ), which in turn affect perceived quality ( $\beta = 0.456$  and  $\beta = 0.437$ , respectively). Brand identity also impacts identity communication ( $\beta = 0.594$ ), which plays a mediating role in enhancing perceived quality. However, consumer engagement does not directly affect identity communication. The proposed model exhibits a good fit, as indicated by statistical indicators, including  $\chi^2 = 5.696$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.696$ , GFI = 0.991, CFI = 0.996, and RMSEA = 0.139, demonstrating acceptable model adequacy.

This research contributes to increasing consumer awareness of the cultural and geographical uniqueness of *Som Klieng*. The findings suggest that farmers and related stakeholders should foster experiential engagement strategies and co-create marketing efforts to strengthen product identity, expand consumer bases, and support sustainable agro-tourism. These strategies not only enhance brand perception but also promote grassroots economic development and the long-term value of local GI products.

**Keywords:** geographical indication; *Som Klieng* Lampang; perceived quality of *Som Klieng*

## Introduction

Changes in food consumption behavior today require producers to create and deliver products that meet the evolving needs of consumers. In the food production process, it is crucial that producers deeply understand these needs. Agricultural business development, being the foundation of Thailand's food industry, has increasingly played a significant role in responding to such demands, especially at the local level. The registration of Geographical Indications (GI) is one important mechanism that helps add value to local identity products by allowing consumers to recognize unique characteristics and perceived quality tied to the place of origin. In 2024, Som Klieng Lampang was officially registered as a national GI product, highlighting its distinctive identity through a unique cultivation area and sweet-sour taste with a fragrant aroma. This has made Som Klieng a signature fruit of Lampang Province, grown only in eight subdistricts, five in Thoen District (Mae Thot, Mae Pa, Lom Rad, Thoen Buri, and Mae Wa) and three in Mae Phrik District (Mae Pu, Phra Bat Wang Tuang, and Mae Phrik).

In 2022, 700 farming households were registered, with a plantation area of 897 rai and an annual yield of 816 tons, making it the most significant production source of Som Klieng in Thailand. The yearly "Thoen Som Klieng Festival," held in September (Department of Intellectual Property, 2024), reflects the cultural value and uniqueness of the product and its geographic connection. This presents a significant opportunity to differentiate products and enhance perceived quality in both domestic and international markets. Som Klieng from Lampang was officially granted Geographical Indication (GI) certification in 2022 and received formal registration in 2024, marking the initial phase of creating public awareness about its GI status (Department of Intellectual Property, 2024).

However, this emerging recognition underscores a critical limitation: GI certification alone does not guarantee market success. Consumers may not prioritize GI status over other value attributes of the product. As such, the key question remains: how can farmer groups and local entrepreneurs capitalize on the benefits of GI status? This question represents a significant research gap. Effective marketing communication strategies are crucial for enhancing the perceived quality of a product. Maintaining a competitive position and differentiation from substitute products remains a critical challenge for local stakeholders, particularly as contemporary consumers are increasingly influenced by product quality, brand identity, and persuasive marketing communications (Satunuwat & Chartsrisumpun, 2025).

Recent research by Quayson et al. (2024) has found that consumer engagement and marketing communication have a positive influence on brand loyalty and perceived product quality. They also emphasized that identity communication, such as storytelling and the transmission of cultural values, can significantly enhance brand identity and product distinctiveness. Highlighting Som Klieng's strong connection to the Lampang region is therefore a powerful tool for building value in the minds of consumers. Although considerable research has been conducted on consumer perception and engagement, a research gap remains regarding GI products, especially Som Klieng Lampang, which presents a unique case with potential applications to other GI products in Thailand.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationships between four key variables — consumer engagement, marketing communication, brand identity, and identity communication — and how they influence the perceived quality of Som Klieng. The findings are expected to inform the development of effective marketing strategies for GI products, both locally and globally. Moreover, this research has policy implications. As Thailand seeks to elevate GI products in the global market, the study will support government agencies and entrepreneurs in designing policy and action plans that align with modern consumer needs. In the digital age, where consumer behavior is rapidly changing and increasingly complex (Handoyo, 2024), this study not only contributes academic knowledge but also responds to the practical demands of business and society amid dynamic market conditions.

## Research Objectives

1. To analyze the causal relationship pathways among consumer engagement, marketing communication, brand identity, and identity communication that influence the perceived quality of Som Klieng from Lampang Province.
2. To evaluate the model fit of the proposed causal relationship model affecting the perceived quality of Som Klieng from Lampang Province.

## Literature Review

### 1. Consumer Engagement

Consumer Engagement (CE) happens when customers build emotional and behavioral connections with a brand, reflecting their attitudes toward it. According to Gu and Duan (2024), CE

is a “moment of truth” that is revealed through experiences, buying behavior, consumption, and brand interactions across various platforms. Moreover, Atsawamongkonpan et al. (2024) stated that in the digital era, consumers engage with brands through social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok. These platforms foster closer relationships between brands and consumers, enabling brands to respond swiftly to customer needs. Encouraging consumer participation through likes, shares, or comments allows brands to tailor their messages more effectively to target audiences. Such interactions are not only transactional but also reflective of deeper psychological and emotional involvement, which significantly contributes to marketing strategy development. This supports Hypothesis 1, which posits that Consumer Engagement (CE) has a direct positive effect on Marketing Communication (MC). Supporting studies include Liu et al. (2024), Gu and Duan (2024), and Atsawamongkonpan et al. (2024).

While existing research provides robust insights into the role of CE in digital marketing, most studies have focused on commercial or service brands, with limited exploration in the context of geographically indicated (GI) agricultural products. There is a lack of research examining the subsequent impact of CE on brand identity and identity communication, especially regarding how local product identity and cultural narratives are co-created with consumers in such contexts. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how CE not only fosters marketing communication but also contributes to shaping brand identity and communicating unique cultural values to consumers. Moreover, Consumer Engagement plays a critical role in enhancing Identity Communication. Atsawamongkonpan et al. (2024) explained that Identity Communication helps express a brand's values and uniqueness. Consumers who are highly engaged often become co-creators and brand ambassadors, helping to communicate the brand's identity to others through consistent and sincere online interactions. This communication process supports strong Identity Communication and long-term brand development. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 suggests that Consumer Engagement (CE) has a direct positive effect on Brand Identity (BI), as found in Namphone et al. (2023). This relationship becomes especially significant when considering the role of authenticity and local cultural resonance in consumer-brand narratives, where engagement fosters identity reinforcement.

Many studies also confirm that Consumer Engagement directly supports Brand Identity building. Researchers such as Atsawamongkonpan et al. (2024), Jarernnate (2021), and Wikhanesuan (2023) suggest that regular and meaningful interactions with consumers can create a strong and memorable brand image. Engaged consumers often absorb and reflect brand values and ideas through their behavior and word of mouth, helping to make Brand Identity clearer and

more distinct from competitors. This supports Hypothesis 3: Consumer Engagement has a direct positive effect on Identity Communication. In community-based agricultural products, such engagement may translate into storytelling, local tourism, and user-generated content, amplifying identity communication beyond traditional media.

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of consumer brand engagement and brand identity, this study adopts a multidimensional view of CE that not only drives marketing communication but also underpins the formation of brand identity and the communication of identity. These conceptual foundations provide the basis for the research hypotheses tested herein, contributing to filling the current knowledge gap regarding the role of CE in enhancing perceived product quality through brand-related mechanisms.

## **2. Marketing Communication**

Marketing Communication (MC) plays a crucial role in fostering connections and understanding between a brand and its consumers. Especially in the digital era, diverse communication channels allow organizations to reach target groups accurately and at a low cost. Therefore, digital platforms such as social media have become key tools for creating close relationships with customers. According to Bawazir et al. (2024), marketing communication strategies involve four steps: (1) creating awareness among consumers, (2) offering product variety, (3) engaging the community through various channels, and (4) encouraging repeat purchases. Good communication not only helps raise awareness but also drives consumer engagement, including inquiries, product trials, and purchase decisions. Hence, marketing communication is important in creating brand awareness and encouraging Consumer Engagement, which supports effective Identity Communication. This leads to Hypothesis 4: Marketing Communication (MC) has a direct, positive effect on Identity Communication (IC), as supported by Bawazir et al. (2024) and Ronnaphop (2022).

However, despite the acknowledged importance of marketing communication in fostering consumer engagement and identity, existing studies primarily focus on general consumer goods or large-scale brands, with limited empirical evidence on their impact within the context of agricultural products with geographical indications (GIs), such as Som Klieng oranges. This reveals a critical gap in understanding how tailored marketing communication strategies can enhance perceived quality and consumer loyalty in niche agribusiness markets.

In addition, Marketing Communication significantly affects consumers' perceived quality of agricultural products, such as Som Klieng oranges. Ajisola et al. (2021) noted that Perceived

Quality does not rely only on the product's actual attributes, but also on how information is communicated. Presenting details about freshness, origin, production standards, or benefits through proper marketing channels can build trust and add value to consumers' minds. Especially when using visual storytelling or credible sources, brand trust can be strengthened. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is proposed: Marketing Communication (MC) has a direct positive effect on the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (PQ), supported by Angeline (2023).

However, there remains limited research examining the mechanisms through which marketing communication enhances perceived quality, particularly for GI-certified agricultural products that rely heavily on origin-based value and cultural identity for differentiation. This study, therefore, applies relevant communication and branding theories to explore how marketing communication can be strategically leveraged to enhance perceived quality and competitive advantage for Som Klieng, thereby filling the knowledge gap regarding marketing communication strategies for GI-certified agricultural products.

### **3. Brand Identity**

Brand Identity (BI) is a key factor that differentiates a brand and helps it stand out in the market. This includes design, color, and logo, which allow consumers to recognize and identify the brand. In today's competitive market, a clear and consistent brand identity aligned with product value can enhance competitiveness and create positive consumer memories (Willis, 2024). When a company builds a strong brand identity, customers are more likely to identify and distinguish it from its competitors. With effective marketing communication strategies and consistent messages, identity communication (IC) is strengthened, which can improve sales management and increase brand revenue (Bawazir et al., 2024; Balmer & Podnar, 2021). Prior studies suggest a systematic link where brand identity serves as a foundation for identity communication, which in turn shapes consumer perception and product value. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is proposed: Brand Identity (BI) has a direct positive effect on Identity Communication (IC).

Additionally, brand identity plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' perception of product quality. The way consumers perceive product quality depends on how well the brand identity is communicated. Without a strong brand identity, it becomes difficult for consumers to recognize or remember the brand. A strong identity can significantly impact the sales of a company's products and services. When consumers can identify a specific brand, they often form psychological relationships with it and start to like or advocate for it (Pantano et al., 2021). Brand identity is closely linked to perceived product quality because it helps build trust and credibility. In the

context of agricultural products such as Som Klieng, a strong and credible brand identity can lead consumers to perceive the product as high quality, fresh, and reliable. Consistent identity communication, such as through packaging, marketing campaigns, and customer experience, has been shown to improve perceived product quality (Nguyen, 2020; Kotchaporn et al., 2025). The literature also suggests that a well-communicated brand identity fosters perceived quality, particularly when reinforced through consistent marketing touchpoints, thereby supporting the theoretical framework in which brand identity indirectly enhances brand performance through perceived quality. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is proposed: Brand Identity (BI) has a direct positive effect on the Perceived Quality (PQ) of Som Klieng.

However, most existing studies have focused on industrial or commercial brands. In contrast, research on how brand identity influences perceived quality in the context of Geographical Indication (GI) agricultural products remains limited. Particularly, the case of Som Klieng, a local fruit with unique cultural and geographic characteristics, has not been thoroughly examined. This gap underscores the importance of understanding how brand identity affects consumer perception of quality in local agricultural branding. In this study, the concept of brand identity is adopted as a core construct influencing both identity communication and perceived quality. These constructs are integrated into the proposed model and tested via hypotheses H5 and H7 to explore how branding mechanisms affect consumer perception in the context of a GI-certified agricultural product.

#### **4. Identity Communication**

Identity Communication (IC) plays a vital role in shaping consumers' perceptions of product quality. As Kotchaporn et al. (2025) explained, identity communication refers to the way a brand conveys its core values, narrative, and emotional connections to consumers. This approach helps create a strong and lasting impression. When identity communication is consistent, appealing, and aligned with the brand's values, it can enhance the Perceived Quality (PQ) of the product. For instance, brands that effectively communicate their identity often influence consumers' quality judgments by reinforcing emotional and experiential connections, which directly affect how quality is perceived.

In the context of agricultural products such as Som Klieng, identity communication becomes a key factor in determining how consumers assess product quality. When a brand's identity communication builds trust, consumers are more likely to associate higher quality with the product that aligns with that communicated identity. According to Lee and Lee (2020), agricultural



products are often perceived as higher in quality when identity communication emphasizes features like sustainability, freshness, and local cultivation. This aligns with the growing consumer demand for transparency and authenticity, especially in GI-certified products, where cultural heritage and geographic origin are integral to perceived value. By clearly defining and communicating the brand's identity, producers and farmers can improve consumer perceptions of product quality.

However, despite these insights, limited empirical research exists that explores identity communication specifically in the context of Geographical Indication (GI) agricultural products. While previous studies have examined identity communication in general branding, few have investigated its role in enhancing perceived quality among consumers of local or traditional products, such as Som Klieng. This creates a knowledge gap that this study aims to address. Thus, Hypothesis 8 proposes that Identity Communication (IC) positively influences the Perceived Quality (PQ) of Som Klieng, supported by Kotchaporn et al. (2025). This hypothesis contributes to a deeper understanding of how effective identity communication can serve as a strategic tool in agricultural branding, thereby elevating product differentiation and consumer trust.

### **5. Perceived Quality of Som Klieng**

Perceived quality refers to the consumer's perception of the visible attributes of a product. The perceived quality of a product can be influenced by several factors, including marketing, brand communication, emotional connections, and previous experiences with the product (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). These elements play a critical role in consumers' purchasing decisions. Factors such as the appropriate size, good taste, attractive packaging, reliability, and emotional impressions formed through marketing communication, including advertising or social media information, also contribute to perceived quality.

Moreover, consumers' expectations about a product can shape their perception of its quality. Prior experiences or associations with the brand or producer often influence these expectations. Therefore, studying the perceived quality of Som Klieng oranges involves not only the physical characteristics of the product but also the communication strategies that influence consumer expectations and purchasing decisions (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The perceived quality construct thus integrates both tangible product attributes and intangible brand-related factors that collectively form consumer judgments. While previous research has examined perceived quality broadly, there is a notable gap regarding how perceived quality is explicitly shaped in the context of GI-certified agricultural products such as Som Klieng. This study seeks to



address this gap by investigating the combined effects of marketing communication, brand identity, and consumer engagement on the perceived quality of Som Klieng. The conceptual framework presented in this study, as illustrated in Figure 1, provides a structured approach to analyzing the relationships among key variables influencing the perceived quality of Som Klieng in Lampang Province.

### Conceptual Framework

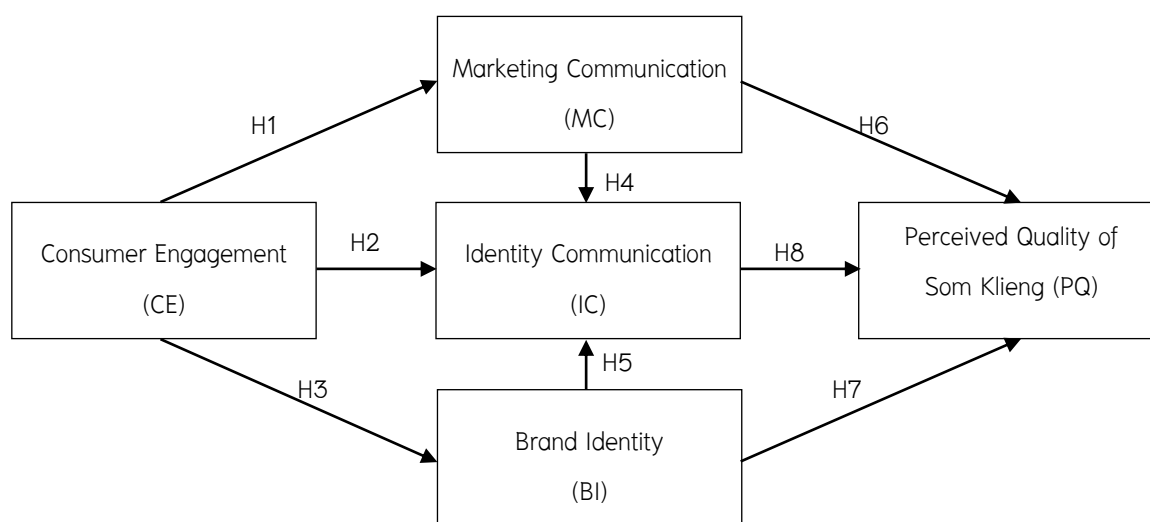


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework

### Research Methodology

#### 1. Population and Sample

This research is a quantitative study. The population consists of consumers of Som Klieng in Thailand, with a focus on the perceived quality of Som Klieng from Lampang Province. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, resulting in approximately 385 respondents. A stratified random sampling method was employed, based on six regions: Northern, Northeastern, Central, Eastern, Western, and Southern Thailand. Sample proportions were allocated according to the population size in each region to ensure representativeness. Samples were then randomly selected within each region from individuals who had consumed Som Klieng at least once. Data collection was conducted through online questionnaires distributed to the target group via social media platforms, various consumer groups, and agricultural product consumer communities, using a "Willingness to Participate

Sampling” method. Additionally, a screening process was implemented to ensure that respondents were at least 18 years old and had consumed Som Klieng at least once.

## **2. Instruments**

Structured questionnaires were used as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was developed based on relevant concepts, theories, and literature aligned with the research objectives. It was divided into three distinct sections. The first section gathered demographic data from respondents, including variables such as gender, age, purchasing location of Som Klieng, prior exposure to information about Som Klieng or stories related to local communities cultivating it, and awareness that Som Klieng is recognized as a geographical indication (GI) product of Lampang Province.

The second and third sections focused on five core variables across a total of 21 items. These variables included: Consumer Engagement (4 items), adapted from Atsawamongkonpan et al. (2024); Marketing Communication (5 items), based on the work of Deemek and Prommai (2024); Brand Identity (4 items), developed from Willis (2024); Identity Communication (3 items), derived from Lee and Lee (2020); and Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (5 items), adapted from Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001).

A 5 –point Likert scale was applied to measure the perceived importance of each item, ranging from “very low importance” to “very high importance.” To ensure content validity, the questionnaire underwent evaluation by three experts in the field. Item–objective congruence (IOC) scores ranged from 0.60 to 1.00, which aligns with the standard thresholds recommended by Wade (2006). Reliability testing was conducted using a pilot sample of 30 respondents who were not included in the main study. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients were calculated for each scale, yielding values above the threshold of 0.70. These results indicate that the questionnaire demonstrates high internal consistency and reliability, aligning with the criteria established by Hair et al. (2010). Thus, the instrument is deemed robust and suitable for collecting accurate and reliable data for this study

## **3. Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected using online questionnaires and face–to–face surveys at fruit markets, including Talad Thai Market, as well as national trade fairs. The data collection period lasted approximately one month, from February to March 2025. A total of 385 completed and valid questionnaires were obtained, meeting the target sample size.

Descriptive statistics were applied to examine the basic characteristics of the sample group. Frequency distributions and percentages were calculated to provide an overall picture of the respondents' demographic profiles, including variables such as gender, age, place of purchase of Som Klieng, experience in receiving information about Som Klieng or stories related to the local community cultivating Som Klieng, and the perceived recognition of Som Klieng as a geographical indication product of Lampang Province. Additionally, basic statistical measures, such as the mean and standard deviation, were calculated for each variable to summarize the central tendency and variability of the data. Correlation coefficients were also analyzed to explore relationships between variables and describe the underlying characteristics of the data.

To address the research objectives and test the hypotheses, inferential statistics were employed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This advanced statistical technique was applied to analyze both direct and indirect relationships among the key constructs: consumer engagement (CE), marketing communication (MC), brand identity (BI), identity communication (IC), and Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (PQ). Before conducting the SEM analysis, the basic assumptions of the model were examined, including normality of data distribution, independence of observations, and absence of multicollinearity to ensure the reliability and appropriateness of the interpretation. SEM provided a robust framework for evaluating the hypothesized relationships and assessing the overall fit of the proposed model.

The model fit was rigorously evaluated using multiple statistical criteria, as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). These criteria included: (1) the Chi-square value relative to degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df$ ), which should not exceed 2; (2) the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), both of which should exceed 0.95; (3) the Root Mean Square Residual (RMR), which should be less than 0.05; and (4) the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), which should also be less than 0.05. These criteria indicate the model's adequacy, as Hair et al. (2010), and confirm the reliability of the findings.

## Research Result

The basic survey found that among 385 general consumers of Som Klieng in Thailand, the majority were female, totaling 280 people (72.70%). The largest age group was between 31 and 40 years old, with 178 people (46.20%). The most common place to purchase Som Klieng was roadside fruit shops, with 185 people (48.10%), followed by convenience stores, with 95 people (24.70%). Regarding awareness of the Som Klieng growing areas, 199 people (51.70%) were

aware, which is close to the number who were not aware, 186 people (48.30%). Most consumers were unaware that Som Klieng is a geographical indication product of Lampang Province, with 195 people (50.60%) uninformed, and 190 people (49.40%) informed.

The analysis of consumer opinions on Consumer Engagement, Marketing Communication, Brand Identity, Identity Communication, and Perceived Quality of Som Klieng showed that most respondents rated Identity Communication at a high level (mean = 3.75), followed by Brand Identity (mean = 3.66), Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (mean = 3.65), and Marketing Communication (mean = 3.64). Consumer Engagement was rated at a moderate level (mean = 2.80). The coefficient correlation analysis between variables is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Correlation Matrix

| Variable                             | CE       | MC      | BI      | IC      | PQ    |
|--------------------------------------|----------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Consumer Engagement (CE)             | 1.000    |         |         |         |       |
| Marketing Communication (MC)         | 0.680**  | 1.000   |         |         |       |
| Brand Identity (BI)                  | 0.626**  | 0.805** | 1.000   |         |       |
| Identity Communication (IC)          | 0.569**  | 0.811** | 0.838** | 1.000   |       |
| Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (PQ) | 0.625**  | 0.741*  | 0.854** | 0.850** | 1.000 |
| Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )                   | 2.80     | 3.64    | 3.66    | 3.75    | 3.65  |
| Standard deviation                   | 1.170    | 0.972   | 1.003   | 0.995   | 0.983 |
| Conclusion                           | moderate | high    | high    | high    | high  |

\*\* Statistically significant at the .01 level ( $p < .01$ )

The results of the causal relationship path analysis demonstrated that the proposed model exhibited a strong alignment with the empirical data, as supported by the statistical values and model fit indices that satisfied all the predefined criteria. Specifically, the Chi-square value was 5.696 with 1 degree of freedom (df), yielding a p-value of 0.017. The ratio of Chi-square to degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df$ ) was 1.696, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 2.00, indicating a good model fit. Additionally, the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) was 0.991, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.90, while the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) reached 0.996, surpassing the 0.90 benchmark. Furthermore, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.139, which is above the preferred threshold of 0.08 but still falls below the 0.15 cut-off, suggesting that the model fits the data reasonably well. These findings confirm that the

model demonstrated a strong fit to the data, with most of the fit indices meeting or exceeding the required thresholds. Further details regarding the model are illustrated in Figure 2.

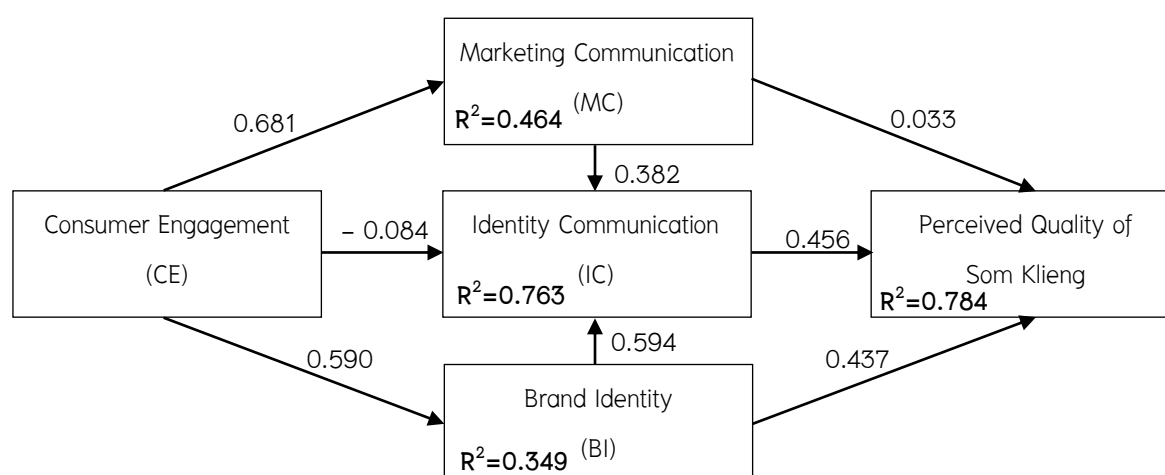


Figure 2 Results of Final Model

Table 2 Effects for the Model Perceived Quality of Som Klieng in Lampang Province.

| Effect variable                      | R <sup>2</sup> | Effect | Cause variable |         |         |         |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|--------|----------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                      |                |        | CE             | MC      | BI      | IC      |
| Marketing Communication (MC)         | 0.464          | DE     | 0.681**        | –       | –       | –       |
|                                      |                | IE     | –              | –       | –       | –       |
|                                      |                | TE     | 0.681**        | –       | –       | –       |
| Brand Identity (BI)                  | 0.349          | DE     | 0.590**        | –       | –       | –       |
|                                      |                | IE     | –              | –       | –       | –       |
|                                      |                | TE     | 0.590**        | –       | –       | –       |
| Identity Communication (IC)          | 0.763          | DE     | – 0.084        | 0.382** | 0.594** | –       |
|                                      |                | IE     | 0.610**        | –       | –       | –       |
|                                      |                | TE     | 0.526**        | 0.382** | 0.594** | –       |
| Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (PQ) | 0.784          | DE     | –              | 0.033   | 0.437** | 0.456** |
|                                      |                | IE     | 0.541**        | 0.174** | 0.271** | –       |
|                                      |                | TE     | 0.541**        | 0.207** | 0.708** | 0.456** |

Notes: DE = Direct effect, IE = Indirect effect, TE = Total effect ( $\beta$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ )

Table 2 presents the results of the path coefficient analysis examining the causal relationships among Consumer Engagement (CE), Marketing Communication (MC), Brand Identity (BI), Identity Communication (IC), and the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng from Lampang Province

(PQ), specifically for consumers who have prior experience in consuming Som Klieng in Thailand. The findings indicate that Consumer Engagement has a significant positive direct effect on Marketing Communication (DE = 0.681) and Brand Identity (DE = 0.590). Additionally, Brand Identity has a positive direct effect on Identity Communication (DE = 0.594) and on the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng from Lampang (DE = 0.456). Similarly, Identity Communication has a positive influence on the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng from Lampang (DE = 0.437). Marketing Communication also shows a positive direct effect on Identity Communication (DE = 0.382). However, Marketing Communication does not have a significant direct effect on the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (DE = 0.033), and Consumer Engagement has a non-significant adverse direct effect on Identity Communication (DE = -0.084).

The analysis also revealed indirect effects: Consumer Engagement indirectly influences Identity Communication (IE = 0.610) and the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (IE = 0.541). Moreover, Brand Identity indirectly affects the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (IE = 0.271), and Marketing Communication has an indirect effect on Perceived Quality (IE = 0.174). All reported path coefficients were statistically significant, providing strong support for the proposed hypotheses. Further details on these relationships are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing. Hypothesis 1 states that Consumer Engagement (CE) has a positive direct effect on Marketing Communication (MC), with a path coefficient of 0.681 ( $t\text{-stat} = 14.476$ ,  $p < .01$ ), showing strong statistical support. Hypothesis 2 suggests that Consumer Engagement (CE) has a direct positive effect on Brand Identity (BI), with a path coefficient of 0.590 ( $t\text{-stat} = 11.379$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as supported by the analysis. Hypothesis 3 posits that Consumer Engagement (CE) has a positive direct effect on Identity Communication (IC), but the findings do not support this hypothesis.

**Table 3** Hypothesis Testing Results

| Hypotheses    | coefficient ( $\beta$ ) | t-stat  | S.E.  | p-value | Results   |
|---------------|-------------------------|---------|-------|---------|-----------|
| H1: CE --> MC | 0.681                   | 14.476  | 0.040 | ***     | Supported |
| H2: CE --> BI | 0.590                   | 11.379  | 0.045 | ***     | Supported |
| H3: CE --> IC | - 0.084                 | - 1.955 | 0.037 | 0.051   | Rejected  |
| H4: MC --> IC | 0.382                   | 6.693   | 0.058 | ***     | Supported |
| H5: BI --> IC | 0.594                   | 11.472  | 0.052 | ***     | Supported |
| H6: MC --> PQ | 0.033                   | 0.623   | 0.052 | 0.533   | Rejected  |
| H7: BI --> PQ | 0.437                   | 7.224   | 0.058 | ***     | Supported |
| H8: IC --> PQ | 0.456                   | 7.495   | 0.059 | ***     | Supported |

Hypothesis 4 states that Marketing Communication (MC) has a positive direct effect on Identity Communication (IC), with a path coefficient of 0.382 ( $t$ -stat = 6.693,  $p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 5 proposes that Brand Identity (BI) has a positive direct effect on Identity Communication (IC), with a path coefficient of 0.594 ( $t$ -stat = 11.472,  $p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 6 suggests that Marketing Communication (MC) has a positive direct effect on the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (PQ); however, the research findings do not support this hypothesis. Hypothesis 7 indicates that Brand Identity (BI) has a positive direct effect on the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (PQ), with a path coefficient of 0.437 ( $t$ -stat = 7.224,  $p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 8 reveals that Identity Communication (IC) positively affects the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng (PQ), with a path coefficient of 0.456 ( $t$ -stat = 7.495,  $p < .01$ ).

## Discussion

The findings of this study address Objective 1, which is to analyze the causal pathways among consumer engagement, marketing communication, brand identity, and identity communication that influence the perceived quality of Som Klieng from Lampang Province. They also fulfill Objective 2, which is to assess the goodness-of-fit of the causal model affecting perceived quality. The researchers seek to identify approaches to enhance the perceived quality of Lampang's Som Klieng, which has been registered as a Geographical Indication (GI) product. The findings aim to inform efforts by local farmers, government agencies, and the business sector in promoting consumer awareness of the unique characteristics of the growing area and the identity of the producing communities. This foundation plays a crucial role in driving the local economy and supporting community-based tourism initiatives.



Several factors, including consumer engagement, marketing communication, brand identity, and identity communication, influence the perceived quality of Som Klieng oranges from Lampang province. This study employed path analysis to examine both the direct and indirect causal relationships between these variables and the perceived quality of Som Klieng. The results revealed that consumer engagement had the most significant influence on marketing communication, while brand identity had a substantial impact on identity communication. Although marketing communication had the least influence on identity communication compared to other variables,

it still played a meaningful role in shaping the perceived quality of Som Klieng.

However, some relationships were found to be non-significant. For instance, consumer engagement did not influence identity communication, and marketing communication had no significant effect on the perceived quality of Som Klieng. These findings suggest that additional factors may be necessary to reinforce or moderate these relationships.

This study emphasizes the significance of consumer engagement, marketing communication, brand identity, and identity communication in enhancing the perceived quality of Som Klieng, a Geographical Indication (GI) product. Each factor contributes uniquely to building consumer perception, which can support local farmers in adapting their strategies in response to changing technologies. Further discussions, along with theoretical and practical recommendations, are presented in the following section.

Consumer engagement has a direct positive influence on marketing communication, consistent with Hypothesis 1. This can be explained by consumers' active behaviors such as seeking information, sharing opinions, staying alert, and spreading experiences through social media. These actions help social networks rapidly perceive and respond (Liu et al., 2024). Such behaviors reflect different levels of engagement, from consuming content to participating in content and even creating new content (Gu & Duan, 2024). This study supports the findings of Atsawamongkonpan et al. (2024), emphasizing the importance of building consumer engagement to enhance the effectiveness of marketing communication, particularly in an era dominated by social media and artificial intelligence, which fosters real-time and interactive marketing. The use of digital media, such as reviews, experience sharing, and the use of visual symbols or emojis, enhances consumer interaction and word-of-mouth, particularly among Gen Z, who tend to engage in interactive and creative communication.

Similarly, Mutalp et al. (2022) found that businesses are striving to foster consumer engagement and increase profitability through modern and creative approaches such as digital marketing, email marketing, social media marketing, and mobile marketing, which help facilitate better access to consumers. Consumer engagement serves as a key mechanism for enhancing marketing communication, especially in terms of consumer awareness, purchase decisions, and brand loyalty, particularly when integrated with technology and modern marketing strategies.

Consumer engagement has a direct positive influence on brand identity, supporting Hypothesis 2. This relationship is evident in the case of Som Klieng growers in Lampang Province, who act as entrepreneurs, playing a vital role in creating consumer engagement. Their involvement leads to the development of a unique identity for Som Klieng from this region. This engagement enables consumers to form a connection with the product and its origin, leading to stronger brand recognition and recall. When consumers can share their opinions or experiences about a product, a more profound brand attachment occurs, which broadens and enriches the brand identity. This aligns with the idea of Zhang and Li (2022), who suggest that building brand identity should emphasize the product's true strengths and unique qualities as the core content for identity communication with the target audience.

Similar to the findings of Namphone et al. (2023), creating a strong brand identity and adding value to products through distinct differences from competitors clearly influences consumer engagement and perception. This, in turn, leads to wider recognition and acceptance of the community, which helps increase local income. Applying creativity to build this added value also has a positive impact on the economy, society, and environment, serving as a foundation for sustainable community growth.

Therefore, consumer engagement acts as a key mechanism driving the creation of brand identity and added product value within the community, emphasizing distinctive differences from competitors. This clearly affects consumers' perceived quality, leading to increased brand recognition and acceptance on a broader scale. As a result, the community can generate more income and has potential for quality development in economic, social, and environmental aspects. However, consumer engagement did not have a direct positive impact on identity communication, which contradicts hypothesis 3. This can be explained by the fact that, although farmers invite consumers and tourists to participate in activities like cultivation and experiencing community life to deepen understanding of local identity and the perceived quality of Som Klieng from Lampang,

this has not yet resulted in visitors forming strong recognition or emotional connections with Som Klieng Lampang (Panthong, T., personal communication, March 29, 2025).

This aligns with Jarernnate's (2021) concept, which emphasizes the interaction between senders and receivers. When consumers participate sufficiently in activities, relationships, and understanding of the product and community identity develop. Furthermore, local groups driving identity-based tourism activities serve as an important mechanism to communicate the area's identity through a creative economy, connecting local wisdom and creating social and economic value.

Moreover, the research by Wikhanesuan (2023) emphasizes the importance of providing tourists with direct experiences through experiential learning tourism, particularly by engaging them in the authentic lifestyle of the community, rather than through staged exhibitions or artificial scenarios. For example, tourists can join activities in gardens with local farmers who maintain a simple way of life, or stay in homestays that offer opportunities to learn the community's traditional farming methods. This approach helps enhance understanding of local identity through effective communication of identity. Therefore, this research suggests that creating a product identity understanding by encouraging consumer engagement becomes a key mechanism for building deep relationships between consumers, products, and the community. This issue deserves further consideration in the context of developing local agricultural products and identity communication in the future.

Marketing communication has a direct positive influence on identity communication, which aligns with Hypothesis 4. This relationship can be explained by the fact that the farmers growing Som Klieng in Lampang province present a clear brand identity through marketing communication tools such as the brand name, logo, slogan, and communication content. These efforts help consumers clearly perceive and remember the brand's distinctiveness. This aligns with Bawazir et al. (2024), who emphasize that establishing a strong brand identity is crucial for fostering consumer trust and loyalty towards the product.

Similarly, the findings from Ronnaphop (2022) reveal that identity communication with consumers becomes more effective when the content clearly reflects the product's identity. Presenting content related to the product's identity before consumers' purchase decisions helps create clear perceptions and leads to confidence in the product. Therefore, such communication should be prioritized and applied in marketing communication processes to attract consumers through engaging and accessible content. Hence, this research suggests that marketing

communication emphasizing a clear and consistent brand identity is a crucial strategy for building long-term consumer relationships and gaining a competitive advantage.

Brand identity has a direct positive influence on identity communication, which aligns with Hypothesis 5. This relationship suggests that a clearly defined brand identity enables consumers to recognize the brand's uniqueness and distinctiveness through effective communication processes. This leads to building trust and creating sustainable relationships with consumers. These findings support the concept by Bawazir et al. (2024), who stated that brand names, logos, and slogans are key elements for effectively conveying identity to target audiences. This is also supported by Balmer and Podnar (2021), who emphasized the role of product brands and corporate brands in guiding identity communication. Therefore, the design and communication of brand identity should be carried out systematically, encompassing everything from in-depth data analysis and unique symbol design to creating an image that aligns with business goals, thereby achieving distinctiveness and enhancing perceived quality from the consumer's perspective.

Marketing communication does not have a direct positive influence on the perceived quality of Som Klieng, which contradicts Hypothesis 6. This finding is consistent with Ajisola et al. (2021), who noted that consumers prioritize freshness, identity, and specific product characteristics over general marketing messages, particularly for organic or certified agricultural products. These intrinsic qualities significantly shape perceived quality and influence purchasing decisions. Therefore, farmers growing Som Klieng in Lampang province emphasize building a unique product identity—such as specific local origins, distinct characteristics, and differentiated production standards—using identity-focused communication rather than broad marketing strategies that fail to create consumer engagement.

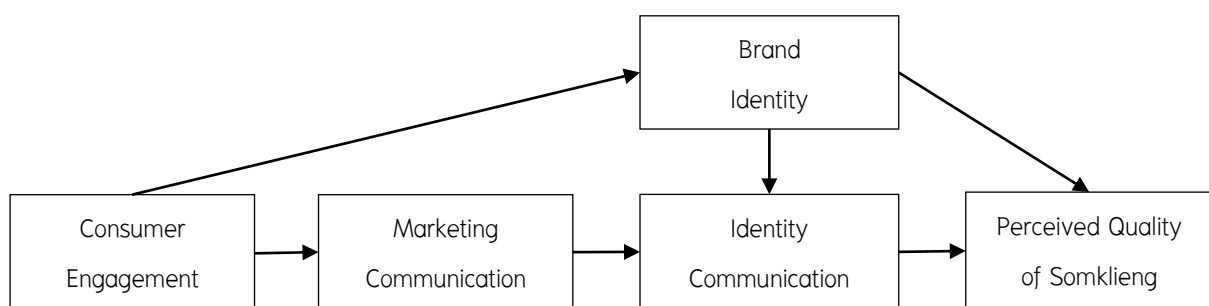
Brand Identity has a direct, positive influence on identity communication and Perceived Quality of Som Klieng, which aligns with Hypothesis 7. This reflects that when a brand effectively communicates its identity through appropriate content, channels, and messengers that match the target audience, it helps build consumer confidence and enhances their perception of the product's quality. This finding is consistent with the study by Kotchaporn et al. (2025), which stated that a brand identity that clearly reflects the personality and feelings of consumers affects their purchase intention and perceived product value. Similarly, Nguyen (2020) argued that brand image and identity directly influence consumer confidence and perceived product quality. Therefore, for Som Klieng, building a strong brand identity and effective communication are crucial factors that

enhance perceived quality and stimulate purchase intention, especially in overcoming challenges related to product credibility and consumer loyalty.

Identity Communication has a direct positive effect on the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng, supporting Hypothesis 8. This highlights the importance of emphasizing local identity in an era where consumers seek cultural value alongside product quality. The research shows that when consumers recognize the history, origin, and stories related to Som Klieng, they evaluate its quality, particularly in terms of product uniqueness. This finding aligns with Lee and Lee (2020), who stated that brand communication through cultural identity can elevate the perceived quality of agricultural products, especially when emphasizing attributes such as freshness and local production, which concretely impact quality perception. Moreover, Kotchaporn et al. (2025) emphasized that communicating unique product characteristics through identity communication helps consumers understand the product's specific value, directly affecting quality perception, purchase decisions, and brand loyalty. Therefore, the role of identity communication is to enhance the perceived value of local agricultural products, particularly in a quality-competitive market that emphasizes differentiation and the cultural significance of products.

### New Knowledge from Research

This study highlights the significant roles of Brand Identity and Identity Communication in creating value and a positive image of the product from the consumer's perspective. Meanwhile, Consumer Engagement acts as a key driver that enhances the brand's communication process, primarily through marketing channels and the expression of brand identity, as illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3** Causal Relationship Model of Factors Affecting the Perceived Quality of Som Klieng from Lampang Province.

From Figure 3, which presents new knowledge derived from the research highlighting the importance of Brand Identity and Identity Communication for entrepreneurs and farmers cultivating Som Klieng or GI-certified agricultural products, aiming to build quality perception of Som Klieng, with Consumer Engagement and Marketing Communication as key elements, the following academic and practical applications are proposed:

### **Theoretical Contributions**

This study advances branding theory in the context of GI agricultural products by positioning Identity Communication as a mediating mechanism between brand inputs and perceived quality. It extends the application of customer-based brand equity and symbolic interactionism to low-involvement, culture-based products. Consumer Engagement is also redefined as a proactive driver of branding impact, rather than a passive outcome.

### **Practical Implications**

Local producers can enhance the perceived quality of their products by aligning packaging and messaging with the regional identity. Marketers should utilize interactive communication tools to increase consumer engagement and trust. Policymakers are encouraged to support GI branding initiatives that integrate local heritage, sustainability, and community storytelling into marketing strategies.

## **Conclusion**

Som Klieng, a native fruit from Lampang, is registered with a Geographical Indication (GI) and is known for its sweet-sour taste and unique fragrance. However, obtaining GI status alone does not guarantee market success without strategic communication and marketing aligned with modern consumer behavior. This research investigates the causal relationship between consumer engagement, marketing communication, brand identity, and identity communication that affect the perceived quality of Som Klieng, aiming to provide a strategic direction to enhance consumer awareness and value of GI products.

This research aims to enhance consumer awareness of the value of Som Klieng, a GI-certified local fruit. It provides empirical evidence of how consumer engagement, marketing communication, brand identity, and identity communication influence perceived quality. The findings offer valuable insights for farmers, government agencies, and agribusinesses by promoting consumer awareness of the unique origins and identities of local producers, which is essential for grassroots economic development and community-based tourism.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Som Klieng farmer groups and growers in Lampang build stronger relationships and engagement with consumers through experience-based activities. This enhances brand perception and recognition of product quality. Collaborative marketing and public relations campaigns with the public and private sectors should be developed to expand the consumer base and promote agricultural tourism in Som Klieng cultivation areas, adding value to the product and supporting a sustainable community economy.

## Suggestions

To promote consumer engagement and strengthen the brand identity of Som Klieng, the farmers' group in Lampang province can apply the following suggestions:

### **Recommendations for Entrepreneurs:**

1. The farmer group should collaborate with both the government and private sectors to organize continuous engagement activities, as they have regularly done before, such as workshops, tasting sessions, product trials, or storytelling about Som Klieng that highlights its cultural values and local wisdom. This will help create an emotional connection with consumers and build stronger relationships.

2. Use digital media, such as social media platforms, online reviews, and experience sharing, combined with designing a clear brand identity, such as a distinctive name, logo, and slogan, to enhance consumer awareness and engagement. This approach is efficient for Generation Z consumers, who prefer interactive and creative communication across various platforms.

### **Academic Recommendations:**

Further research on consumer communication behavior through digital media is recommended to assess the impact of engagement across different channels on brand identity formation and purchasing decisions. Additionally, developing effective marketing communication models to attract consumers in the digital age is necessary.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

1. Future research should consider factors such as consumer beliefs, community loyalty, or cultural values that may influence the perceived quality of Som Klieng more significantly than communication factors alone.

2. A comparison of marketing communication strategies between GI-certified and non-GI products is recommended to build consumer awareness and trust better.



3. Although consumer engagement does not directly impact identity communication in the case of Som Klieng, further studies should explore factors that might enable engagement to strengthen the relationship between consumers and the product, especially for agricultural products with unique characteristics.

4. Based on the findings, marketing communication does not directly affect the perceived quality of Som Klieng; therefore, additional research should investigate how marketing communication can enhance consumer understanding and perception of product quality and brand identity in agricultural products.

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