Introduction.

Phutorn, the Thai term for upcountry or provincial regions, accounts for over 80% of Thailand’s population, yet it’s often relegated to a secondary market status by many brands. This oversight can be traced back to a prevailing trend in marketing: a generalised approach that presumes one communication strategy can cater to a whole market.

Yet, with the ascendancy of technology and the evident decline of traditional media like TV, online platforms are now predominant. This shift grants consumers greater agency in choosing their content. Given these changes, it’s crucial for brands to re-evaluate a uniform communication strategy if they wish to authentically connect with their audience.

Consider the standard definition of a target audience for haircare: Females, aged 18-35, residing in both Bangkok and upcountry areas, with long hair and issues of split ends. Such individuals are broadly categorised as "consumers." This blanket label tends to obscure the rich cultural intricacies that influence personal desires and consumption patterns.

As brands aspire to expand their geographical footprint and market penetration, there’s a compelling argument to move beyond mere consumer insights, placing a stronger emphasis on a deeper comprehension of genuine human desires.

Merely branding an audience as "consumers" often results in an undue focus on short-term sales, overshadowing the significance of nurturing long-term brand relationships that align with human aspirations. The tendency to view Phutorn (or the upcountry) merely as a secondary market leads many to overlook its unique characteristics, preferences, and desires. Falling into this trap, brands may end up relying on generic content or messaging, mistakenly believing that merely incorporating local music or showcasing local celebrities is adequate. Such a simplistic viewpoint can skew strategic planning and overlook the richness and potential of the Phutorn market.
Isaan.

With over 20 million residents in Isaan and those who migrate to Bangkok or other large cities in Thailand, Isaan's population surpasses that of neighbouring countries like Laos and Cambodia. Its diverse culture, beliefs, and language make it unique. Viewing Isaan as just another part of Thailand is a marketing oversight. They aren’t just consumers; they're a distinct group with unique desires that justify a tailored marketing and communication strategy.

For effective branding in Isaan, consider it as you would an independent country. Recognise its distinctiveness and approach it with a bespoke strategy.

Human Desires Insight vs. Consumer Needs Insights:
The Mind Journey of Communication.

In standard brand communication, there's a pronounced emphasis on addressing immediate consumer needs. This approach implies that once a potential customer has shown interest in a category, the brand's primary objective is to persuade the consumer to choose its product. There's an inherent assumption that catering to these needs will automatically fulfil underlying desires, regardless of how diverse individual desires might be.

For instance, all women with long hair might share the need to address split ends, but their reasons or desires motivating this need can vary.

In an increasingly competitive market, distinct differentiation becomes crucial. With numerous brands vying for attention, mere product benefits will no longer suffice. Emotional and value-based benefits play an increasingly pivotal role in fostering long-term brand loyalty. This is why tapping into human desires, rather than just addressing consumer needs, is so essential in communication strategy. It dictates how one brand can set itself apart from the rest.

Various models exist that delve into human desires, with Maslow's hierarchy of needs being among the most renowned. However, does Maslow's model resonate with Thai culture? In Thailand, connection and belonging are paramount, foundational even. Surprisingly, the apex of Maslow's pyramid - self-actualisation - is often sought after, even when basic security or physiological needs aren't met. It's still the intrinsic need for survival that primarily drives Thais. Hugh Mackay's "What makes us tick? The 10 desires that drive all human beings", seems to align more aptly. It helps provide a deeper route to understand Isaan's unique human desires.
For instance, the concept of "my place" in Bangkok might translate to a cherished coffee shop or a private bedroom. In contrast, in Isaan, the individualistic "my" often gives way to a communal "our". The Isaan community thrives on shared experiences. Activities like the ‘Moh Lum’ mobile concerts, which celebrate their language and culture, offers spaces where they can dance, drink, and express themselves. Isaan's cultural fabric isn't solely woven from Buddhist threads but is also interwoven with various spiritual beliefs. This amalgamation gives rise to monthly festivities like the ’Bung Fai' (firework rockets) that usher in the rainy season. Yet, the overarching theme always leans towards joy and celebration. Despite life's hardships, Isaan continually seeks moments of joy, epitomised in the word "Muan Kuk," which encompasses the essence of fun and laughter.

These insights, deeply rooted in understanding human desires, pave the way for more impactful communication tailored for the Isaan community. Several campaigns have aimed to encapsulate the spirit of Isaan, with notable examples like the Tawan Crispy Baked Snack's YouTube video titled “Tawan: Always Part of a Great Day” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pf95je0boY].

This video beautifully narrates the Spiritual Bai Sri ceremony led by Moh Kwan, a witch doctor. Intriguingly, the story touches upon all 10 core human desires:

**Place**: Emphasised by the local language and the Bai Sri tradition.

**Thought**: Represented through spiritual prayers.

**Sobriety**: Manifested in the solemnity of the ceremony.

**Love**: Highlighted by a couple's role in the ceremony.

**Belief**: Celebrated through the New Year traditions.

**Control and Reward**: Expressed in the prayers seeking good fortune.

**Belonging**: Illustrated by the large congregation of people coming together.

**Usefulness**: Seen in the gifts exchanged during the ceremony.

**Connection**: Embodied by the brand’s signature design, sound and taste.

The entire narrative is artfully conveyed with a touch of joy and playfulness. It aligns perfectly with Isaan's unique perspective that every aspect of life can be embraced with a sense of fun and celebration.

In conclusion, Isaan is not just another consumer segment; it's a vibrant tapestry of unique desires, traditions, and cultural depths. Brands attuned to this richness stand not only to forge deeper bonds but also to unlock a market teeming with potential.

It's high time to bring Isaan to the forefront and celebrate its unique identity.

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