

Digital tooling with soft power to drive the smart silver economy under the aged society of Thailand

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Abstract: “Thailand 4.0” is the current national strategic plan driven by digital technology and innovation; “Silver Economy” is one among the urgent flagship to serve the urgent needs of aged society with its approximately 20-30 percent of Thai population. Besides, around 60 percent of the elderly proven being under the poverty line. Most of the urgent demands is economics opportunities, digital skills, and health care, respectively. Objectives are 1) the current situation of elderly towards “Silver Economy” embedded with “Soft Power”; 2) the digital literacy & competency skills of elderly towards “Silver Economy” embedded with “Soft Power”; and 3) the recommendation to support the elderly towards “Silver Economy” embedded with “Soft Power”. Mix research methods were used 1) Quantitative research by e-survey among the 100 elderlies across the country who involved with Silver Economy and Soft Power. Qualitative research by in-depth-interview and Focus Group Discussion among 15 key informants from the elderly and all stakeholders. Results found 1) most of the elderly have a very good attitude, high demands to run their Silver Economy activities especially with their own Soft Power; 2) most of the elderly gain fundamental digital literacy & competency. More digital top skills are needed to run their Silver Economy activities i.e., creative digital marketing skills, AI in digital PR, digital storytelling, and local tourism, etc. and 3) Recommendations for more tangible collaborations among all the relevant stakeholders from policy to the practical agencies. Friendly and effective portal for all kinds of collaborations among the stakeholders and the elderly themselves.

Keywords: *Aged society of Thailand, Digital tooling, Soft power, Smart silver economy.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Silver Economy, Digital Toolings, Soft Power:

(1) Silver Economy: A Roadmap to the Digital World Success case of the DIHDSE: the The Digital Silver Economy as the "one-stop shop" through which companies and other public or private entities can access the information, services, and facilities they need to successfully address their digital transformation processes aimed at incentivizing services more efficient for the citizenship over 50 years of age. It is a non-profit structure. Located at Zamora, Spain with its high Silver potential, in addition to the large number of people of age (Zamora is the most aging province in Spain as a whole). The DIHDSE, led by the Diputación de Zamora in collaboration with the industry, research and finance organization to promote Zamora's recognition as a reference province in the specialization of services and industry for the elderly not only in Spain but also internationally and thus strengthen the future socio-economic development of the region and globally. Anyhow, still some pending perception that that elderly people and digital technology do not mix well. However, rising life expectancy, delaying retirement age, and active aging are redefining this demographic and their role in an increasingly digitalized society. The elderly will interface both direct and indirect with all kinds of companies and demand services adapted to their needs and to their way of using technology. In 2060, one in three Europeans will be over the age of 65, according to The Silver Economy, a report produced by Oxford Economics, the European Commission, and Technopolis. Spending by people over 50 will grow 5% annually, reaching 5.7 billion euros in 2025, which will represent 32% of EU GDP and 38% of

employment (<https://european-digital-innovation-hubs.ec.europa.eu/edih-catalogue/digital-silver-economy-dihdse>).

(2) Digital Toolings in Silver Economy : the AgeTechWorld: In 2011, baby boomers began turning 65, and they have been the first generation of older adults to experience the technological revolution. “They tend to use digital services, but it is important to understand how they use them,” says Opinno UX Project Manager Laura García. She says, aspects as basic as typing must be front of mind, and she adds that there are three strategies that will characterize silver economy products:

- Development of touch screens: Allowing you to change the size of the letters and icons on virtual keyboards, making them more accessible.
- Implementation of voice-activated technology: This offers easier interaction with the device, as it facilitates complex tasks such as preparing a shopping list or lowering the blinds in the case of people with reduced mobility.
- Hybrid experience options: Provide alternatives so that users are not blocked in some steps, such as entering the card number to make a purchase. In this case, it is always good to include options such as phone calls and assistance (<https://opinno.com/insight/silver-economy-a-window-to-the-future-of-the-digit/>)

(3) Silver Economy in Thailand: Thai government has been creating all kinds of supporting the independency of all the elderly of the country. With its evolution from OTOP (One Tambon One Products) till Soft Power currently. The governemtn has created a significant opportunity for investment in multiple business sectors and levels. Grassroot economy, Community base economy collabotated with other types of economies all over Thailand to support all kinds of the new group of population in Thailand which expected to be around 30 percent of the country or called “a super-aged society by 2030”, meaning that 30 percent of the population will be 60 years or older. This growing population of seniors is living longer and consuming more, creating myriad business opportunities not only in the healthcare sector, but also in others business i.e. the digital technology serivces, security, entertainment, tourism, real estate and housing, financial and even education sectors. “Silver economy” then under one of the flagship economy policies of Thailand under the new movement of all “New Economies” i.e. Green economy, BCG economy, etc. under the SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) framework. Besides Thailand, other countires in ASEAN also has witnessed a significant increase in health expenditures. For instance, healthcare expenditures in Thailand accounted for 3.71 percent of GDP in 2016¹ and that percentage is expected to increase in the coming years. The amount of money spent by, and on, aging Thais is predicted to increase at an even faster rate than the population ages because of new technologies, the costs of treating chronic illnesses and conditions, and the Universal Health Coverage scheme.

Thailand Board of Investment (BOI) offers a number of tax incentives and non-tax incentives to support elderly-related products and services. The following activities are eligible for three to eight year corporate income along with these supportive tax incentives, the BOI also offers nontax incentives such as permission to own land, 100 percent foreign-owned companies, visas, work permits and more – efficient services facilitated by the BOI’s One-Stop Service Center. The combination of the Thai government’s policies, investment promotion incentives, efficient tax (CIT) exemption: manufacturing businesses, including medical devices or parts, parts for electronic control and measurement instruments for medical/scientific devices, food and drugs, including medical food, food supplements, active pharmaceutical ingredients, targeted medicines as well as conventional and traditional medicines. In addition, manufacture of embedded software, high value added software and digital services such as medical technology also enjoy the same level of incentive. In the service industry, investors of hospitals, specialty medical centers, transportation services for patients, doctors or medical equipment can receive three to five years of CIT exemption privilege. However, health rehabilitation centers can qualify for non-tax incentives, but they do not receive CIT exemption. connectivity, and the rapidly growing demand of aging populations in Thailand and Asia has set the foundation for businesses looking to profit from strong growth in the silver economy (Thailand Investment Review, 2019).

(4) Soft Power: Soft power has become one of the most important concepts and practices in public diplomacy in the early 21st century. From the Global North, like the United States, to the Global South,

including China and Korea, many countries have advanced their popular cultures and leveraged cultural content to enhance their national images. Hollywood movies in the United States and various popular cultures in Korea are some of the significant examples connected to soft power and public diplomacy in these countries. In recent years, digital technologies, such as smartphones, social media, and over-the-top (OTT) platforms, have become some of the most significant tools and components of public diplomacy. As people heavily rely on various digital platforms, digital soft power—the utilization of digital technologies, including social media, in actualizing public diplomacy—has become one of the major strategies in public diplomacy.

“Soft power of any country rests primarily on three resources: the attractiveness of its culture, its political values when it lives up to them at home and abroad, and its foreign policies when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority”.

Soft power in Thailand is the power of creativity to build the Thai economy is one among the current flagship policy of Thailand. The government promotes creative economy blended with Soft Power developed from intangible heritage, knowledge, intellectual property, expertise, and creativity; linked to culture and society, and technology and innovation for the further development of the production of goods and services. National pilot of Five Thai Soft Power since 2022 are 5 Fs: Food, Festival, Fashion, Fighting, and Film. Currently, Soft power has become an important tool in supporting all kinds of Creative Economy of Thailand including the Silver Economy under Thai Ageing society now.

(5) Digital Tooling as Success Factor of “Soft Power”: One of the success combinations between Soft Power and digital technologies is South Korea. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) actively and strategically uses various social media platforms. MOFA has a Korean culture Facebook page, a public diplomacy YouTube portal, a Twitter account, and a public diplomacy website portal—all in Korean. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Public Diplomacy and Cultural Affairs Bureau has been operating numerous social media channels by the name of “KOREAZ: All about Korea from A to Z.” KOREAZ delineates, “(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Digitalization is a particular spheres and society with its ongoing processes in a contemporary society including infiltrating the system of international relations, changes not only the principles of international communications, but also its tools. However, digitalization of economy, business processes, social institutions, society and humans remain priority issues. Digitalization is adapting the tools of “soft power” to the modern system of international relations, so one of the important tools and factors in the growth of “soft power” becomes digital inclusion of all generations in each country. The development of digital tooling with “soft power” of Thailand as well as other countries is very urgent demands.

Digitalization as one of the key processes and tooling that can help balance all development of the country to be the inclusive development. The importance of the impact of digitalization on “soft power” can be seen in the measuring and instrumental dimension. Thus, different “soft power” rankings give priority to indicators that assess the level of development of digital and information technologies, preparedness of infrastructure, public and private sectors to implement these technologies which can positively affect the growth of “soft power” in each country (Olga Fredovna Rusakova, 2020).

2. Overview Policy Relevant with Digital Contexts and the Elderly Entrepreneurs in Thailand

Digital literacy and competency among the increasing aged group found only 63.10% while there is an increasing realization that digital connectivity can help reduce social isolation among aged people, facilitate their access to online public services, and enhance their productivity in any Silver economy activity under the current flagship policy “Silver Economy”. Because, according to the United Nations (2021), approximately 34% of the aged people live in poverty, many of them live under the poverty line with less than 5-6 US\$ a day even of their monthly support by the government around 20 US\$ per person while under the high cost of living and inflation. Anyhow, the statistics from the Office of the

National Digital Economy and Society Commission (2022), in Thailand there are 86.90% men and 85.90% women Internet users, with a gap of only 1%.

The government has been anticipating this shift since the late 1980s and has been addressing the changes through comprehensive plans and strategies. The main strategy is the drive of “the 2nd National Aging Plan on the Elderly (2002–2021)” with several policies and programs for seniors that support wellness, financial security, and active involvement in society and the economy. Numerous supporting measures have been enacted, such as the promotion of employment and income for the elderly through tax incentives for hiring older workers. Extension of the retirement age for civil servants is being considered as well. In addition, the government is also focusing on innovation and digital technology for healthcare, including medical services, long-term care, and all kinds of economic dimension under the Creative & Silver economy with Soft Power. Some of the key agencies are;

(2.1) Ministry of Digital Economy and Society with a budget of more than 1.99 billion baht to train new graduates who may not have basic digital skills or do not meet the market needs (approximately 50,000 people for 3 months). The project will provide 10,000 Baht per month for project participants. Participants can choose at least 2 of the 4 training courses: 1) Online Content Creation, 2) Big Data Management, 3) Online Marketing, and 4) Online Commerce. After the training, job matching is done so that entrepreneurs can find people with skills that match their needs. It is expected that this job matching will be done under the platform “Thais have jobs”. Success indicators of the project include 5,000 graduates who were able to progress into becoming digital entrepreneurs, and another 15,000 who were employed in digital business groups of workers replaced by technology or in excess capacity.

(2.2) DEPA Digital Manpower Fund to support the digital skill development, both upskilling and reskilling, through “DEPA Digital Manpower fund.” It is granted to individuals, youths, students, unemployed, government officials, government agencies, public and private institutes. The measure focuses on improving people’s digital skills in high demand such as cybersecurity, programming, data analytics, coding, and cloud computing, etc. through both offline and online learning scheme.

(2.3) Office of the National Digital Economy and Society Commission support the Digital Economy and Society Development Funds to finance digital development including the implementations and projects related to digital technology education for youth, the elderly and the workforce.

(2.4) CCDKM (The Research Center of Communication and Development Knowledge Management) under the umbrella of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), has been committed to increasing the social and economic impact by ICT (information and communication technologies) or digital tooling since 2006 till currently targets at all the grassroots and all the marginalized communities in Thailand and the ASEAN region. One among the popular empowering activities are for among the groups of SME, the MSME (Micro SME), the Start Ups, and others. Women entrepreneurs are one among the top beneficial groups (Intaratat, K. 2024).

3. Overview of Digital Competency of Thai People

Digital competency is a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes with regards to the use of digital devices, digital technology in their daily life and earn a living to perform tasks, solve problems, communicate, manage information, collaborate, as well as to create and share content effectively, appropriately, securely, critically, creatively, independently and ethically (Kamolrat applied from Anders Skov, 2016)

Digital competency is all the essential skills and knowledge that professionals have to effectively use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in their work environment. Examples include IT literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, information literacy, internet literacy, etc. The ICT and its relevant services sector has the most demand for Thailand’s emerging jobs. The Emerging Jobs analysis from both LinkedIn 2020 Emerging Jobs Report Thailand and The Future of Jobs Report 2020 state the alignment of top emerging role in Data Analysts, Data Scientists, Digital Marketing Specialist, Software and application developer are top emerging jobs across industries in Thailand

To support digital competency development among all Thai people, the government set up the “Strategic 20-Year National Digital Economy Masterplan” as well as all relevant massive policies

including the “Digital Economy and Society Development Plan (2017 - 2036)”, a strategy dedicating to develop human capital towards the digital age by equipping all Thai people especially all groups of workers including the aged elderly with appropriate digital competency both of knowledge and skills in preparation for a life and career in the digital age and meet all the market demand under the digital era and the 4th Industry Revolution (Kamolrat Intaratat, 2020).

3.1. The Digital Competency of the Thai Elderly

The elderly should be able to access digital technology and benefit from it. Therefore, it is necessary to educate the elderly choosing the right kind of digital technology to their quality of life, and protect themselves from cyber threats. Results found respectively among the Thai elderly’s competency with six important components: 1) use of mobile operating systems, 2) data file management, 3) cloud data management, 4) use of support applications, 5) use of applications for communication, and 6) use of technology for security (Chanyawudhiwan, G., & Mingsiritham, K. 2022). Along with the study of Diteeyont, W., Ku, H. Y, 2021 found the overall Thai elderly had an intermediate level of Internet literacy. Most of the elderly had solid knowledge and skills in using digital tools and applying strategies to obtain information from reliable resources online. They could also communicate and protect their personal information on online platforms.

4. Research Methodology

Mixed-research Method using quantitative and qualitative techniques has been used to collect data from 150 aged entrepreneurs together with focus group discussion among 15 key informants from all relevant stakeholders: the government workers, the aged entrepreneurs, the private & industrial workers, the digital competency expertise, the elderly expertise, and the community leaders.

5. Findings

Three main results reflected the objectives of the study accordingly:

Demography of the 150 elderly entrepreneurs who run their silver economy activities. Majority of them are mid-50s to 70s years old. Bangkok and the outskirt of Bangkok are the top number of respondents. Majority of them gain upper and lower secondary school. Most of them reported as being the informal workers. Their most monthly income is 10,000 Thai Baht (below the minimum wage) follow by within the 10,000 to 20,000 Baht range.

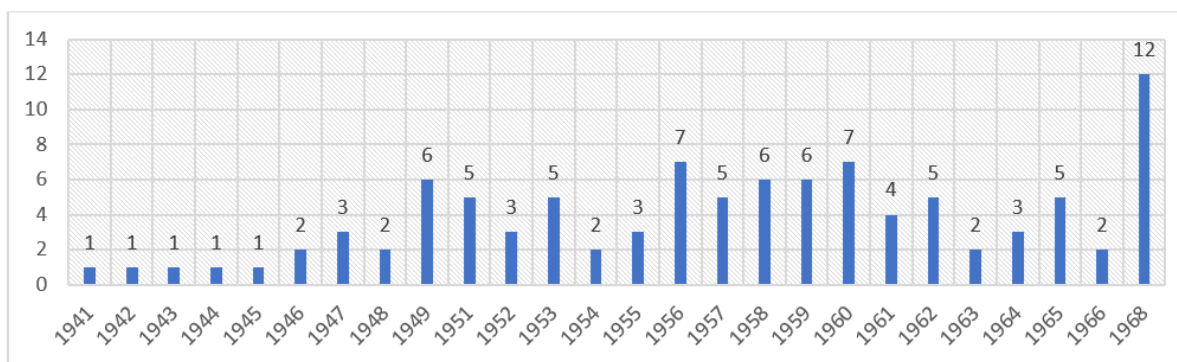


Figure 1.
The elderly entrepreneurs.

The majority of the elderly entrepreneurs comprises women, who constitute a significant portion of the participants.

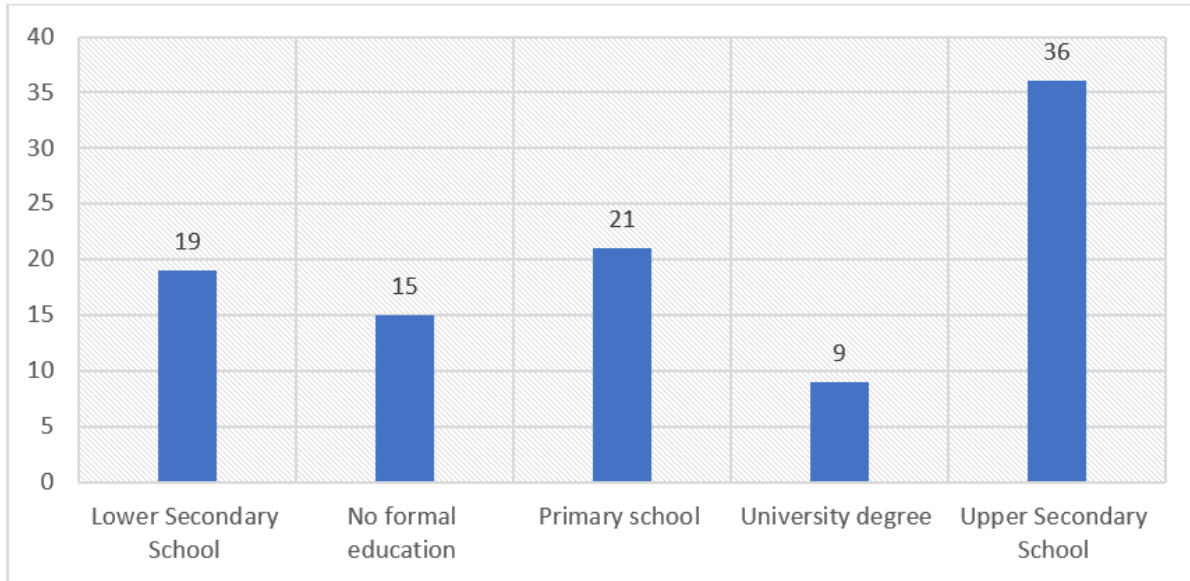


Figure 2.
Educational background of the elderly entrepreneurs.

The majority of the elderly entrepreneurs are currently employed, primarily engaged in part-time informal work.

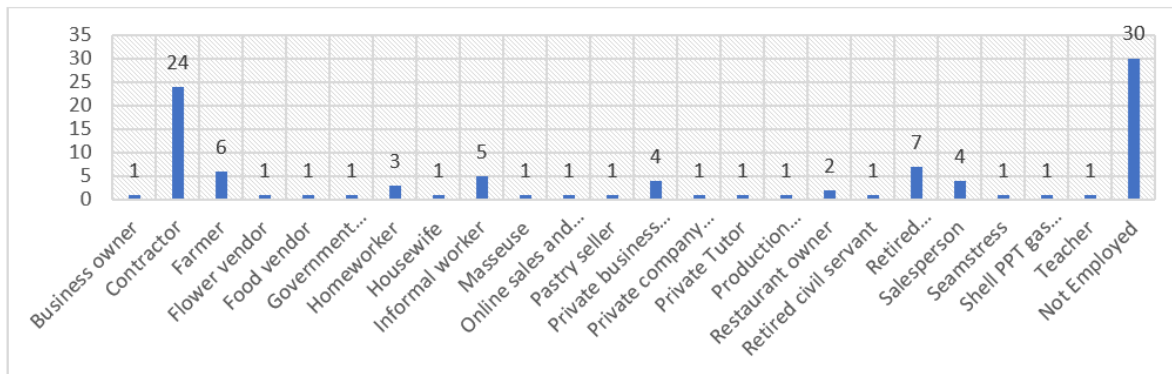


Figure 3.
Silver economy activities of the elderly entrepreneurs.

A significant number of the elderly entrepreneurs reported earning within the 10,000-20,000 Thai Baht range, as well as in the 20,000-30,000 Thai Baht bracket, both of which are above the minimum wage. However, a substantial portion also reported earning less than 10,000 Thai Baht per month, which falls below the minimum wage.

5.1. Digital Readiness & Competency of the Elderly Entrepreneurs

The elderly entrepreneurs provided insights on their attitude and skills in using digital devices for accessing the Internet, e-services, their preferred communication channels, platforms, and information sources.

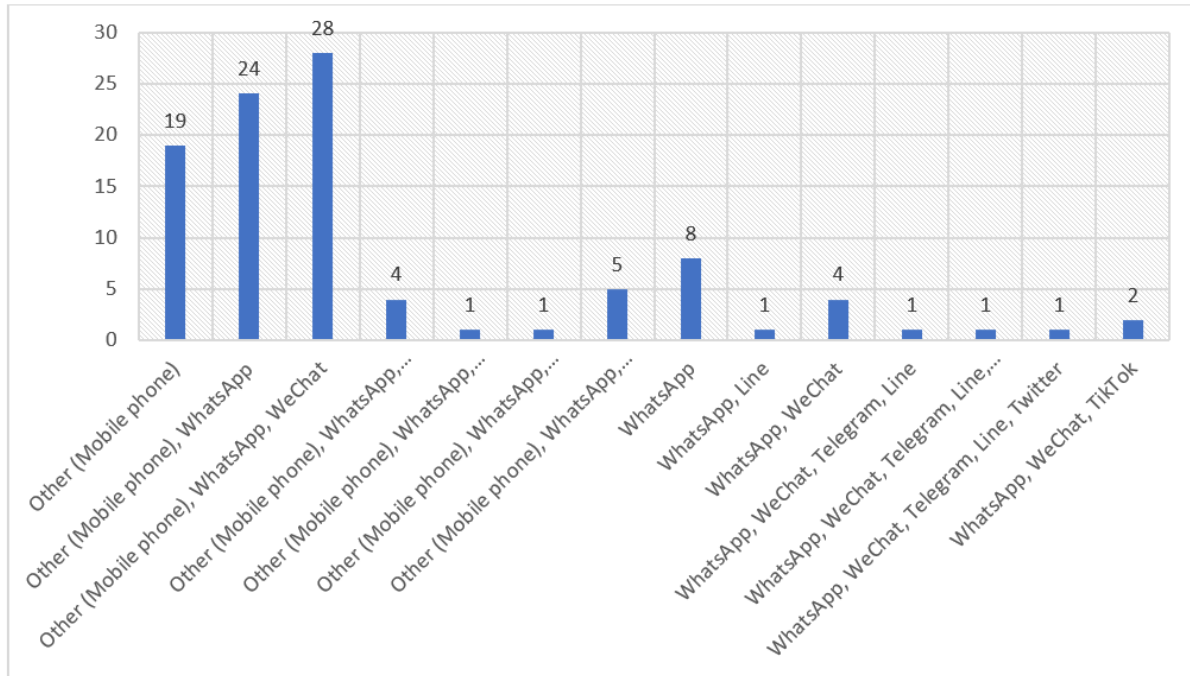


Figure 4.
Digital devices used by the elderly entrepreneurs.

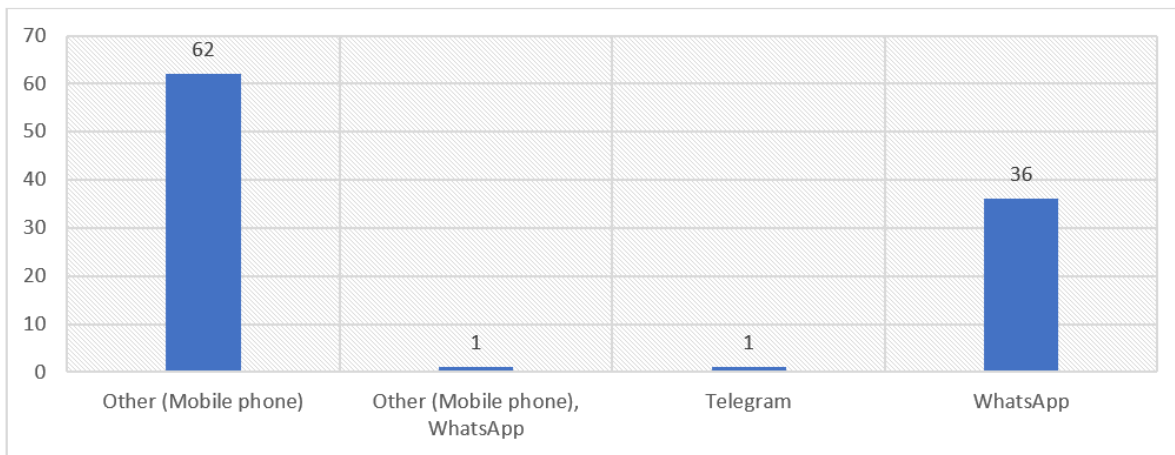


Figure 5.
Digital devices used for online access relevant to their silver economy's activities among the elderly entrepreneurs.

5.2. Recommendations to Use Digital Tooling with Soft Power to Drive Smart Silver Economy under the Aged Society of Thailand

As positive results earlier of this research, Thai government has implemented various urgent initiatives, policies, and regulations to support silver economy with all relevant sectors especially the active elderly, the elderly entrepreneurs as well as their families and their communities relevant to silver economy's activities. Main recommendations are respectively;

(1) Key agency must be urgently settled to be the tangible portal of Silver Economy of the country. Key policy flagship must be leaded by the tangible host which found to be the most important factor to drive all successful mechanism of the silver economy with soft power among the elderly entrepreneurs.

Currently, CEA (Creative Economy Agency, Public Organization) found being the key agency to lead and play all important roles to make successful silver economy truly happen under the missions of silver economy, Thailand. CEA must assist and facilitate all friendly and creative ecosystem of Thai's silver economy. CEA must act as the silver economy hub to lead, to direct, to facilitate, to communicate then to support all kinds of silver economy with soft power among all sectors and targeted groups. CEA has to collaborate with all sectors i.e., the private sectors, the communities, and the local government agencies in arranging all kinds of the creative silver economy at all levels. Some examples of CEA move with creative & silver economy engagement are;

(1.1) Thailand Creative District Network or TCDN: A platform to build a system for provincial area development via creativity and design work, which helps add value to the existing assets, improve quality of life, and revitalize the old neighborhood with creative & silver economy engagement.

(1.2) UNESCO Creative Cities Network or UCCN: An international city development platform that facilitates the strategic exchange of art and cultures, creativity, information, experiences, personnel, projects, and activities with other cities in the network across the world. On the international scale, it is also advantageous for city public relations in terms of commerce, investment, and tourism with creative & silver economy engagement.

(1.3) A Platform to Demonstrate Thai Creative People's Potentials and Creative Businesses: Design Week is considered a cultural product that boosts the local economy and generates revenue from tourism with creative & silver economy engagement

(CEA, 2021.<https://www.cea.or.th/en/single-softpower/cea-soft-power>).

5.3. Incentives for all Kinds of Collaborations Among all Relevant Sectors

Supportive and agile collaboration among government sector, private sector, local sectors and the elderly themselves to help development silver economy with Soft Power among the elderly in all key demands by all kinds of appropriated digital toolings.

6. Conclusions

Silver economy driven by all this group calls "the elderly entrepreneurs" is a must to be urgently support and empowered. So, main recommendation gains from this research is the most urgent fixed in all government policy gaps to help the elderly entrepreneurs as well as other beneficiaries groups to access and gain more digital competency skills and knowledge relevant to their silver economy by Soft Power. Main mechanism is to closer government sector, private sector, and the local sectors' collaboration more kinds of supportive incentives aims to help expanding and scaling up more empowering activities such as training, sharing, and collaborating among all the elderly entrepreneurs in silver economy across the country and industries. Deepen community, school, private sectors and industry links by driving tangible portal for all kinds of inter-sectoral mechanism for silver economy i.e. empowerment activities, resources sharing, regular consultation for internship, apprenticeship, on-site training, employment, market outlet and other schemes with equity, quality and sustainable practices.

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