

ERIA Research Report FY2024, No. 31

Branding Strategy in Lao PDR

Prepared by

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Branding Strategy in Lao PDR

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List of Abbreviations

Civil Procedures Law	Law on Civil Procedures (Amended Version) No. 13/NA, dated 4 July 2012
Cybercrime Law	Law on Prevention and Combating Cyber Crime No. 61/NA, dated 15 July 2015
Data Protection Law	Law on Electronic Data Protection No. 25/NA, dated 12 May 2017
Decision on GI	Decision on Geographical Indication No. 0440/MOIC, dated 30 March 2023
Decree on E-Commerce	Decree on Electronic Commerce No. 296/GOV, dated 12 April 2021
DIP	Department of Intellectual Property
DOIC	Department of Industry and Commerce
DX	Digital transformation
E-Signature Law	Law on Electronic Signature No. 59/NA, dated 12 December 2018
E-Transaction Law	Law on Electronic Transactions (Amended) No. 31/NA, dated 29 December 2022
GI	Geographical Indication
Handicraft Law	Industrial Property under the Law on Intellectual Property (Amended Version) No. 50/NA, dated 20 November 2023
Industrial Property	Law on Handicraft No. 02/NA, dated 25 July 2008
Industry and Handicrafts Development Plan 2021-2025	Industry and Handicrafts Development Plan 2021-2025, issued by the MOIC
IP	Intellectual property
IPAS	Industrial Property Administrator System
IPIO	Intellectual Property Inspection Organization

IPPO	Intellectual Property Protection Organization
IP Law	Law on Intellectual Property (Amended Version) No. 50/NA, dated 20 November 2023
LNCCI	Lao National Chamber of Commerce & Industry
MOIC	Ministry of Industry and Commerce
MSME	Micro, small, or medium enterprise
MSME Development Plan 2021-2025	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Plan 2021-2025
MSME Promotion Law	Law on the Promotion of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (Amended) No. 16/NA, dated 7 July 2022
ODOP	One District One Product
Payment System Law	Law on Payment System (Amended) No. 45/NA, dated 20 November 2023
Penal Code	Penal Code No. 26 /NA, dated 17 May 2017
PO on Fees and Service Fees	Presidential Ordinance on Fees and Service Fees No. 002/PO, dated 17 June 2021
Recommendation on the Implementation of the Data Protection Law	Recommendation on the Implementation of the Law on Electronic Data Protection No. 2126/MPT, dated 8 August 2018
Trademark Law	Decision on Trademark No. 0436/MOIC, dated 30 March 2023
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Background and Objectives

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the traditional retail infrastructure remains quiescent and delayed compared to its Southeast Asian neighbours (Visapra, 2024). However, with the expansion of power distribution and the advent of technology, consumers in Lao PDR are becoming increasingly familiar with goods and products from various brands that are imported and sold throughout the country.

Online shopping has become a growing trend in Lao PDR despite a limited e-commerce presence. This trend has been primarily driven by social media platforms and innovative cross-border shopping tools, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Visapra, 2024). Recognising the surging trend in online shopping in the country, the government has designated the strengthening of e-commerce as a key strategic development goal for the period 2016–2025. The focus is on promoting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to drive economic growth (Lapuekou, 2023), and a new decree has been introduced to support e-commerce specifically, i.e. the Decree on Electronic Commerce No. 296/GOV, dated 12 April 2021 (**Decree on E-Commerce**), and the Suggestion on the Acknowledgement and Approval on the E-Commerce Operation No. 0479/IC, dated 5 April 2023, etc.

Alongside the consumption of foreign-branded goods through online platforms, Lao-branded goods, both locally well-known brands and new brands, have started expanding their markets to broader consumers through online marketing. Consumers in Lao PDR are now more familiar with and selective about the various brands available in the market. Recognising the need to promote local products, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (**MOIC**) officially launched the Lao National Handicraft Branding programme, which is expected to play a pivotal role in promoting the distinctive cultural heritage of Lao PDR by providing a significant uplift to local artisans and handicraft producers on the global stage. The programme is financially supported in part by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (U.S. Embassy in Laos, 2024). The Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (**LNCCI**) also created the launching pad for the 'Lao Brand', aiming to identify potential profitable Lao niche products that are well-suited for the domestic market and possibly international markets. Several products, for instance tea, rice, coffee, silk-based clothing, and tourism, particularly eco-tourism, were considered and assessed to determine how to develop their international appeal to the fullest extent. These products will be marketed under the 'Lao Brand', featuring and reinforcing the uniqueness of Lao culture with a credible, sustainable, and ethical appeal to consumers in Asia, Europe, and elsewhere in advanced economies (UNDP, n.d.).

Whilst the government is making efforts to enhance Lao branding using the uniqueness of Lao PDR, enterprises and individuals are also taking steps to actively develop their own branding. Chapter 3 of this report provides further into branding in Lao PDR, showing how consumers distinguish and select goods and services for their consumption in the country.

This Branding Strategy Project aims to (1) present the state of branding in Lao PDR, (2) introduce the related intellectual property (IP) legal basis concerning branding in Lao PDR, and (3) contribute to the promotion of branding across ASEAN as a whole by sharing the knowledge gained with other ASEAN countries. Additionally, it aims to provide an overview of the current branding activities in Lao PDR.

2. Outline of the Survey

This report offers three key components. Firstly, it outlines the current IP system for branding in Lao PDR from the perspective of current IP laws, covering trademarks and geographical indications (**GI**). This includes details on registration, statistical data, and other published materials. For items where sufficient information was not available from these sources, additional details were obtained through inquiries with the Department of Intellectual Property (**DIP**) of the MOIC.

Secondly, the report covers branding in Lao PDR, including its significance, benefits, methods, and potential areas for application in the country, such as agriculture, mining, power, and energy. Following this overview, the branding chapter examines the current state of digital transformation, fintech, startups, and traditional crafts in Lao PDR, as well as other areas with branding potential.

Lastly, to illustrate the current status of branding from the perspective of enterprises and entrepreneurs in Lao PDR, this report presents several interviews on the actual use of branding in selected enterprises, chosen in consultation with the DIP. These interviews were conducted as case studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the branding strategies in place.

Chapter 2

IP Systems for Branding in Lao PDR

1. Trademarks

1.1. General Information on Trademarks

(1) Background of trademarks

A. Definition

Pursuant to the Decision on Trademark No. 0436/MOIC dated 30 March 2023 (the **Trademark Law**), a trademark is defined as a symbol or a combination of symbols used with goods or services to distinguish the goods or services of individuals, legal entities, or organisations from those of others. The symbol may be a word, including a word pattern, signature, name of a person, numerical model, shape component, shape, drawing, photograph, 3D image, motion picture, product packaging, a combination or blend of several colours, or any combination of these symbols.

In this regard, other than trademarks, marks can be classified into the following types:

- 1) Service mark: A symbol or a combination of symbols used to distinguish the services of individuals, legal entities, or organisations from the symbols of others, which are the same as those symbols defined for trademarks.
- 2) Certification mark: A mark for which the owner has permitted individuals, legal entities, or organisations to use the mark with their goods or services in order to certify characteristics relating to the origin, raw materials, or production methods of the goods or methods of service supply, type, quality, safety, or other characteristics of the goods or services.
- 3) Collective mark: A mark that is endorsed by collective organisations, such as associations, unions, other social organisations, cooperatives, chambers of commerce and industry, or other collective organisations. A collective mark is a trademark that only members of the collective organisation can use to indicate that their goods or services are different from the goods or services of other people.

Furthermore, every single good or service being registered shall be classified into classes. Currently, Lao PDR follows the Nice Classification, an international classification of goods and services applied for the registration of marks issued by the World Intellectual Property Organization (**WIPO**).

B. Effectiveness

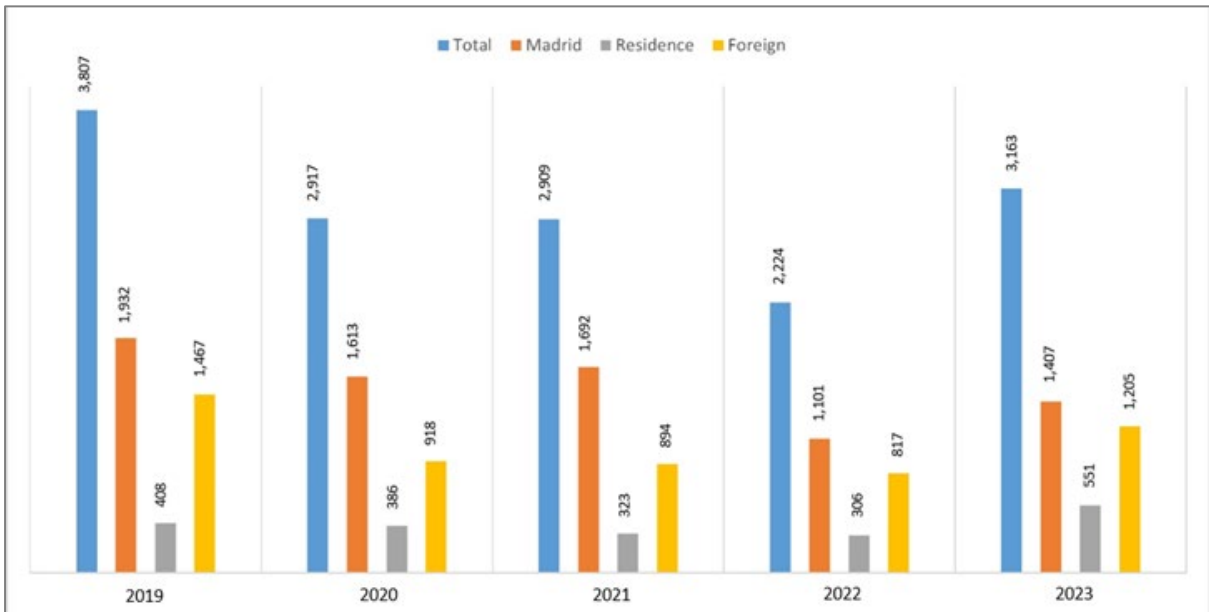
A trademark is an industrial property that is required to be registered with the DIP of the MOIC for it to be protected from infringements by any third party, whereof, the trademark owner will be entitled to exercise regulated rights regarding the trademark in accordance with Article 50 of the Law on Intellectual Property No. 50/NA dated 20 November 2023 (the **IP Law**). The term of trademark protection is 10 years from the date of filing the application for registration and can be renewed for 10 years per each renewal (Article 59 of the IP Law).

Upon registration, the trademark owner will be entitled to enforce its rights mainly to prevent a third party from infringement of trademark, and they will obtain the right to sue and the right to receive compensation from an infringer on any damage caused thereby, which is elaborated on below (penalty of trademark infringement).

(2) Number of applications

Lao PDR has been a member of the Madrid Protocol since December 2015 (effective from March 2016). Since then, IP applications in Lao PDR can be processed via the Madrid System, also known as the 'international trademark registration system'. According to MOIC statistics regarding trademark applications filed in Lao PDR, the total number of applications filed during 2019–2023 was relatively steady. The statistics on the Number of Trademark Application in Lao PDR, 2019-2023 as shown in Figure 2.1 classify applications into three types: (i) resident applications through the national system, (ii) foreign applications through the national system, and (iii) applications filed via the Madrid System.

Figure 2.1. Number of Trademark Applications in Lao PDR, 2019–2023



Source: Statistics provided by the DIP after submitting a request letter according to Response Letter No. 0202/DIP, dated 26 February 2024.

Whilst the total number of trademark application from 2019 to 2023 did not vary dramatically each year, the statistics show that most trademark applications were filed via the Madrid System rather than through the national system's traditional method, even during the COVID-19 period (around 2020–2022). This suggests that trademark applications in Lao PDR were mostly filed via the international trademark application system, except in 2022 and 2023, when domestic trademark applications gained in popularity. Therefore, to determine which trademark application system will become the main channel for future trademark application in Lao PDR, statistics from after 2023 should be considered.

(3) Ratio of domestic applications to international applications

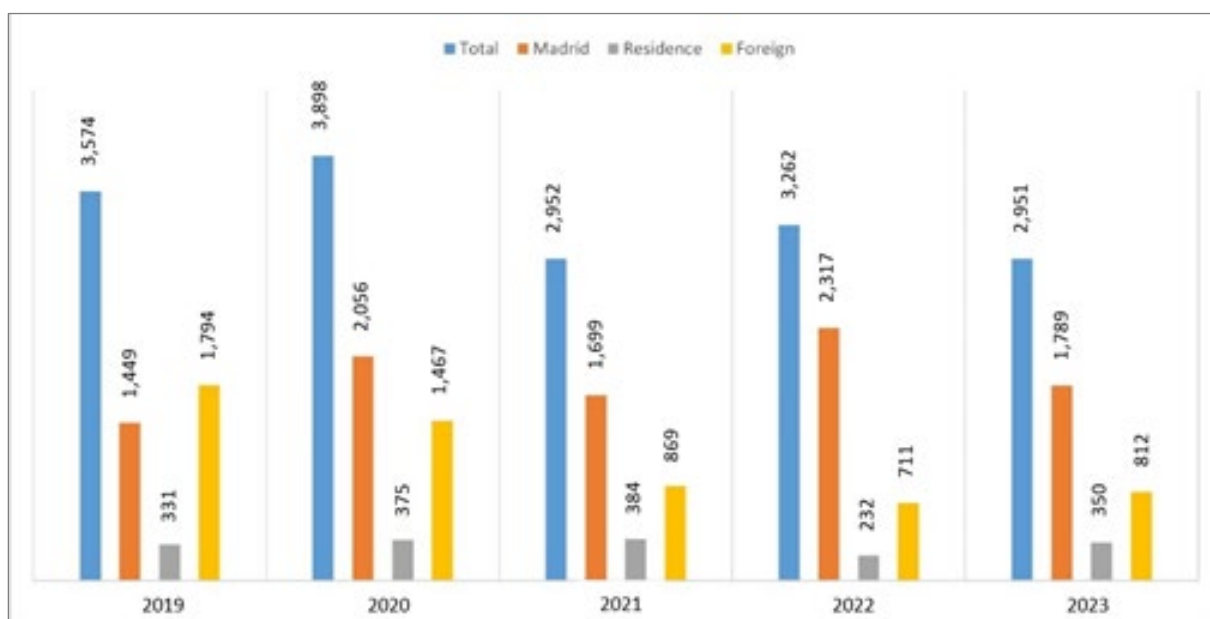
The percentage of domestic trademark applications (including resident and foreign applications) filed in Lao PDR from 2019 to 2023 ranges from 41.84% to 55.52% of the total trademark applications. The ratio of domestic trademark applications to international trademark applications via the Madrid System can be considered nearly equal, at around 50-50. Notably, in 2022 and 2023, there was an increase in domestic trademark applications, with 2022 marking the first year (within the 2019–2023 period) where the number of domestic trademark applications surpassed the number of international trademark applications. This suggests a gradual increase in domestic trademark applications, which may be attributed to a rise in business establishments directly within Lao PDR. However, information on the specific types of businesses that currently dominate trademark registrations in Lao PDR is not disclosed publicly.

(4) Examination pendency

Based on current practices for reviewing trademark applications for registration approval, the time typically required from the date of application to the date of registration and certificate issuance is approximately 12–18 months, with no stipulated time limit mandated for processing. Trademark registration statistics in Lao PDR from 2019 to 2023 are shown in Figure 2.2, indicating that in 2023, a total of 2,951 trademarks were successfully registered. The highest number of trademark registrations occurred in 2020, with 3,898 cases.

Notably, the available statistics do not fully reflect the percentage of trademarks successfully registered compared to the number of applications at the same point in time, as trademark applications may have been filed in different years. However, the data indicate a rise in registered trademarks via the international trademark registration system (Madrid System) in recent years compared to 2019.

Figure 2.2. Trademark Registrations in Lao PDR, 2019–2023



Source: Statistics provided by the DIP after submitting a request letter according to Response Letter No. 0202/DIP, dated 26 February 2024.

1.2. Outline of the Trademark System

(1) Characteristics of the trademark system

A. Submission of declaration of use

Trademark registration does not require the submission of a declaration of use prior to the application date. However, the document to be submitted for trademark registration must include a description of the goods to which the trademark will be applied or the services in connection with which it will be used. If the application relates to a collective trademark

or certification mark, this must be indicated, and the application should include a description of the intended use and protections for the mark (Article 33 of the IP Law and Article 7 of the Trademark Law).

Notwithstanding the above, if a trademark is not used for a consecutive period of five years or is only used in a token manner or without good faith by the owner, any individual, legal entity, or organization may request that the MOIC cancel or revoke the registration of the non-used trademark. Additionally, a trademark is considered used only if it is applied to or in connection with the goods or services for which it is registered, either by the owner or by another person authorised by the owner and under the owner's control (Article 65 of the IP Law).

B. Non-traditional trademarks

A trademark is defined as a symbol or a combination of symbols used with goods or services to distinguish the goods or services of individuals, legal entities, and organisations from the symbols of others. Only certain types of symbols are recognised for registration under the Trademark Law. Non-traditional trademarks, such as sounds, tastes, scents, or textures are not eligible to be registered for protection unless they are visible symbols.

C. Priority review system

The DIP examines the fulfillment of requirements for trademark registration as specified under the IP Law before issuing a trademark registration certificate. Once approved, the registration is entered into the registry and published in the official industrial property gazette (Article 44 of the IP Law).

D. Execution authority over IP

Under the Trademark Law, trademark applications and general complaints (e.g. third-party opposition to a trademark registration application and petitions from trademark applicants) can be filed with the DIP for consideration regarding trademark registration and related claims (Article 16, Article 28, and Article 38 of the Trademark Law). The primary authority of the DIP is to review and approve trademark-related matters, such as registration, renewal, and amendment.

Regarding enforcement, the People's Court¹ has jurisdiction over all violations of IP rights, including trademarks. Individuals, legal entities, or organisations that violate the IP Law may be subject to education, warnings, disciplinary penalties, fines, compensation in lieu of civil damages incurred, or criminal punishment in accordance with the law.

Under the IP Law, the authorities responsible for enforcing IP protection and inspection

¹ Pursuant to Article 2 of the Law on the People's Court (Amended) No. 22/NA dated 10 May 2017, the People's Court is 'the judicial organ that has role to adjudicate the cases. In Lao PDR, only the People's Courts are authorized to strictly adjudicate cases in accordance with the principle, respect and compliance with the laws.'

are (i) the Intellectual Property Protection Organization (IPPO) and (ii) Intellectual Property Inspection Organization (IPIO). Under Article 129 of the IP Law, IPPO is under the MOIC and consists of the MOIC, the Provincial Industry and Commerce Department, and the District Industry and Commerce Office, with their authorities specified under Article 130 to Article 132 of the IP Law. The IPIO comprises an internal inspection organisation (the IPPO) and an external inspection organisation, with inspection matters and procedures outlined in Article 135 and Article 136 of the IP Law.

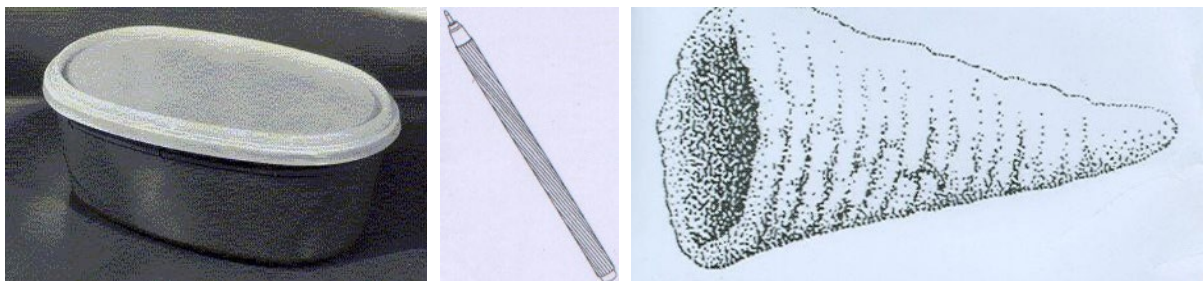
E. Trademark protection coverage

1) Non-traditional trademarks

Non-traditional trademarks recognised under trademark law are currently limited to 3D images, motion pictures, shape components, and their combinations.

A symbol may include a word, word pattern, signature, name of a person, numerical model, shape component, shape, drawing, photograph, 3D image, motion picture, product packaging, or a combination or blend of several colours, as well as any combination of the symbols mentioned. In this regard, non-traditional trademarks recognised under the Trademark Law are limited to 3D images, motion pictures, shape components, and their combinations.

Figure 2.3. Examples of Non-traditional Trademarks and Their Shapes Registered in Lao PDR's IP Database



From left to right: 'oval tub shape', 'ball pen in 3D shape', and 'bugle shape'

Source: DIP Website Database.

Figure 2.4. Example of a Non-traditional Trademark Hologram Registered in Lao PDR's IP Database



1997 MasterCard Globe hologram design

Source: DIP Website Database.

2) Trademarks in relation to branding

Aside from trademarks as defined above, including non-traditional trademarks, there are also three types of marks that are eligible for registration in the trademark system: service marks, collective marks, and certification marks.

a) *Service mark*

A service mark is a symbol, or a combination of symbols, used to distinguish the services of individuals, legal entities, or organisations from those of others. These symbols are the same as those defined for trademarks (Article 5 of the Trademark Law).

Figure 2.5. Examples of Service Marks Registered in Lao PDR's IP Database



From left to right: 'Mekong International Travel', 'Isuzu Leasing', and 'Alipay logo'

Source: DIP Website Database.

b) *Collective mark*

A collective mark is a mark endorsed by collective organisations such as associations, unions, other social organisations, cooperatives, chambers of commerce and industry, or other collective organisations. A collective mark is a trademark that only members of the collective organisation can use to indicate that their goods or services are distinct from

those of other people (Article 5 of the Trademark Law).

As such, a collective mark can be used only within a limited scope and within an authorised organisation, which is entitled to determine the internal rules for its usage and the goods or services to be registered for protection.

Figure 2.6. Examples of Collective Marks Registered in Lao PDR's IP Database



From left to right: 'World Athletics', 'World Ethno Games', 'Mark consisting of a device and the words WORLD SCHOOL'.

Source: DIP Website Database.

c) Certification mark

A certification mark is a mark that the owner has permitted individuals, legal entities, or organisations to use with their goods or services to certify the characteristics related to the origin, raw materials, production methods, service supply methods, type, quality, safety, or other characteristics of the goods or services (Article 5 of the Trademark Law).

Figure 2.7. Examples of Certification Marks Registered in Lao PDR's IP Database



From left to right: 'Halal Lao' and 'Dao Namayod'

Source: DIP Website Database.

(2) Items to be included in the application

The trademark registration application must be submitted in the Lao language. The information to be included in the application form (as determined by the DIP) for trademark registration is as follows:

- a) Name, address, and telephone number of the applicant (natural person, legal entity, or organisation);
- b) Name, address, and telephone number of the representative;
- c) Details of the trademark, including sample, pronunciation, and colours of the mark;
- d) Country where the trademark application was first filed (priority date); and
- e) Type of goods or services to which the trademark will apply.

In addition to the information required in the application form, the following supporting documents must be filed with the application:

- a) Power of Attorney, if an authorised representative is filing the application;
- b) Drawings, photographs, pictures, or samples of the mark to be registered;
- c) A list of the goods or services, including the goods or services that will be used with the mark. In the event that the application is a collective mark or a certification mark, the mark should be included in the application along with an explanation of its use, purpose, and protection;
- d) A copy of a certificate or certified document of priority date (if any); and
- e) Receipts for the official fees and service charges paid.

Any application and supporting documents submitted in English must be translated into Lao (except for the name and address of natural person, legal entity, organisation, and technical terms) within 90 days of submitting the application. These documents must be certified by a legalised translation company and provided to the DIP in electronic format. Failure to comply will result in the application not being considered, and it will be deemed that the applicant has waived their application right (Article 7 of the Trademark Law).

(3) Application and examination procedures

A. Application

An applicant may file the application and required documents by either (i) physically submitting the application at the Department of Industry and Commerce of the district/capital (**DOIC**) or (ii) using the electronic portal (currently via <https://dip.gov.la>) of the MOIC. In either case, the relevant officers will further process the application with the DIP internally. Under the Presidential Decree on Fees and Service Fees No. 002 dated 17 June 2021 (**PO on Fees and Service Fees**), the application fees for the initial application and renewal application are provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Application Fees for Initial Applications and Renewal Applications

Contents	Fee (KN)	Validation (Year)
Application for trademark registration	800,000/class	10
Application for renewal of trademark protection	800,000/class	10
Application for trademark registration via the Madrid System	800,000/class	10
Application for renewal of trademark protection via the Madrid System	800,000/class	10

Source: Author, using data extracted from the List of Fees and Service Charges for trademark registration under Presidential Decree on Fees and Service Charges No. 002 dated 17 June 2021.

In the event that an applicant resides in a foreign country and aims to register a trademark in Lao PDR, the applicant must have a legalised business premise or authorised representative in Lao PDR to carry out transactions regarding the trademark in Lao PDR.

B. Methodical review

After the application is received, the relevant officer of the DOIC is required by law (Article 8 of the Trademark Law) to comply with the following conditions:

- a) Provide the applicant with the application number, and date and issue a receipt for the fee and service charge if the application meets the minimum requirements stipulated;
- b) Submit the completed trademark registration application to the Department of Intellectual Property for further processing;
- c) In the event that the applicant intends to withdraw the application, or if the application is waived or rejected, the paid fees and service charges will not be refunded; and
- d) In the event that the last day of the priority date is an official holiday or a day when the Department of Industry and Commerce of the province/capital is closed to applications, the said period shall be extended until the next business day. If the priority date is specified in the application in accordance with Article 29 of the IP Law, the period to request a priority date for the trademark is 6 months from the date the priority date is granted.

Regarding the consideration of an application for trademark registration (Article 14 of the Trademark law), if multiple applications are submitted at the same time for the same or a similar mark applied to the same or similar goods, the application with the earliest priority date will be considered for registration first. If an application with a later priority date is reviewed first and meets the requirements for registration, the relevant officer must suspend consideration of that application until the application with the first priority date is reviewed.

For marks that are identical or similar to a well-known mark or a geographic indication, such applications may be considered but must have a priority date earlier than the registration of the well-known mark or geographic indication in Lao PDR or any other country. Notably, the DIP is prohibited from providing legal advice or guidance on whether the trademark is in compliance with the Trademark Law and IP Law (Article 14 of the Trademark Law).

There are two stages of review during the trademark registration process – the pre-review and substantive review – as follows.

1) Pre-review

After the application is submitted to the DOIC, which is the designated channel for receiving applications, the DIP must complete a review of the application's accuracy and compliance within 60 days from the date the application is fully received (Article 15 of the Trademark Law). The relevant officer will mainly review the following:

- a) Type of the mark (Article 5);
- b) Application and supporting documents (Article 7);
- c) Procedure of application submission (Article 8);
- d) Minimum requirements and payment of fees (Article 9); and
- e) Requirement for the submitted sampling mark (Article 10).

The relevant officer is required to notify the applicant of any non-compliance regarding the minimum requirements, fee payment (Article 9), of the requirements for the submitted sample mark (Article 10). The applicant must amend or provide the additional supporting documents within 12 business days from the date of receiving the notification. If the applicant cannot comply, the application will not be considered, and it will be deemed that the applicant has waived their right to the application.

The DIP must publish the application in the Official Gazette of Registration of Intellectual Property within 15 days after completing the pre-review of the application.

Third parties may submit an opposition to the application within 60 days from the date of publication in the Official Gazette of Registration of Intellectual Property by submitting an application for opposition (form provided by the DIP) and service fees. In this case, the relevant officer will inform the applicant of the opposition by the third party, allowing the applicant to submit a rebuttal statement.

2) Substantive review

The DIP will conduct a substantive review using its internal database (IPAS), which is not publicly accessible, and international databases (such as WIPO Global Brand) to assess the trademark's compliance with the legal requirements (Article 17 of the Trademark Law).

In the event that there is non-compliance, the officer will issue a refusal letter to the applicant, requesting additional documents, information, or clarification. The applicant must respond by providing additional documents, clarification, information, or objection letter within 60 days from the date of refusal (Article 17 of the Trademark Law).

If the application and the trademark are in compliance with the Trademark Law and the IP Law, the DIP is required to issue the certificate of trademark registration and record the relevant information in its internal database (Article 23 of the Trademark Law).

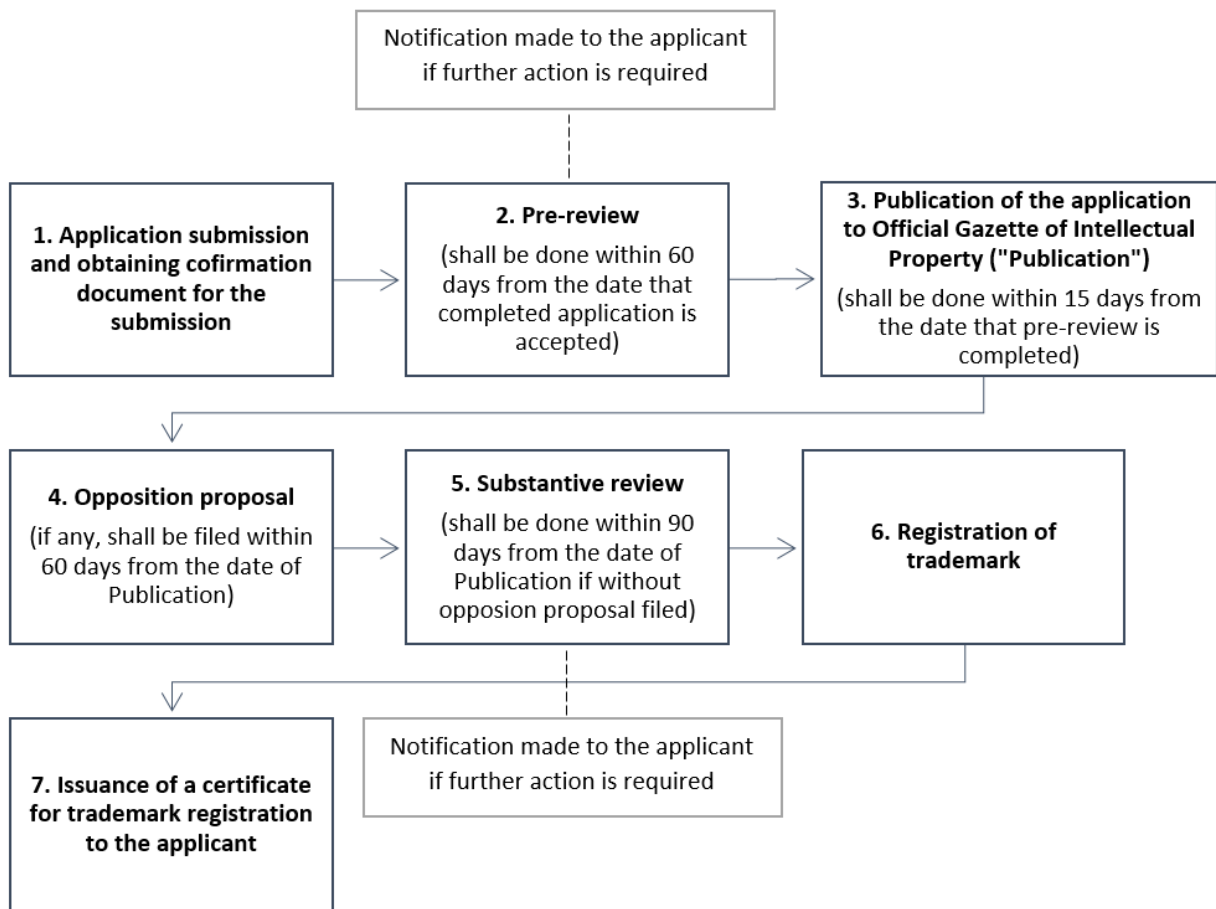
C. Certificate issuance

Once the application and substantive review of the trademark registration are completed, if the trademark meets the characteristics and qualifications required by law, the DIP will issue a certificate of trademark registration to the applicant, as specified under Article 23 of the Trademark Law. However, there is no specific timeline for issuance. In practice, the relevant officer typically takes approximately 12–18 months from the filing date of the trademark application to issue the certificate of trademark registration.

D. Flow of examination procedures under the current system

The examination procedures for trademark registration after the applicant file with the DOIC of the district/capital or via the electronic portal of the MOIC is set out in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8. Flow of Examination Procedures Regarding Trademark Registration



Source: Author, using data summarised from the trademark registration procedures under the Trademark Law.

Regarding application submission and obtaining a confirmation document, the DOIC of the district/capital will accept the application, assign a number and date of submission, and issue a receipt for the fee and service charge if the trademark registration application complies with the minimum requirements stipulated under Article 9 of the Trademark Law, which are mainly as follows:

- a) The category of the goods or services for which the trademark will be registered under the Nice Classification is indicated;
- b) Fee and service charges are paid; and
- c) The application is filed with a complete set of supporting documents as required under Article 7 of the Trademark Law.

(4) Examination of designated goods and/or services

Although Lao PDR is not a signatory to the Nice Agreement, which established a classification of goods and services for trademark registration, the Trademark Law of Lao PDR applies the classification of goods and services for trademark registration in accordance with the Nice Agreement.

Under Article 12 of the Trademark Law, applications for trademark registration, certification mark registration, and collective mark registration must specify the goods or services category code number and category name according to the international classification (Nice Classification), which may vary at the time of application.

(5) Examination of absolute grounds and relative grounds for refusal

Apart from the requirement that a mark possesses characteristics eligible for trademark registration (Article 16 of the IP Law), Article 23 of the IP Law specifies certain marks that are not eligible for registration. These can be classified into 18 characteristics as follows:

- a) A mark that causes confusion or does not distinguish the goods or services of the applicant from those of another individual, legal entity, or organisation;
- b) A mark lacking distinctive characteristics or consisting of signs or indications related to the kind, quality, quantity, intended purpose, value, place of origin, or time of production of the goods, or signs that have become customary in the current language or are widely used in trade practice in Lao PDR;
- c) A mark that is deceitful or misleading to the public;
- d) A mark consisting of or containing a sign that misleads the public regarding the origin, general or specific characteristics, manufacturing process, quantity of the goods and services, or suitability of the purpose for using the sign on the goods and services;
- e) A mark consisting of or containing national emblems, flags, customary signs, official signs, abbreviations, or full names of towns, municipalities, provinces, or capitals of Lao PDR or foreign countries without authorisation from the relevant governmental entity;
- f) A mark consisting of or containing emblems of international organisations, symbols created by international conventions, or official seals or symbols of state or international organisations without authorisation from the relevant state or international organisation;
- g) A mark containing the name, image, or likeness of a living person without authorisation;
- h) A mark containing images, customary signs, monuments, history, or names or images similar to those of national heroic persons or leaders, or images that defame or are in conflict with the good customs of the nation;

- i) A mark that is identical or similar to a trademark that has been registered for the same, similar, or related goods and services;
- j) A mark identical or similar to a well-known mark for the same, similar, or related goods or services;
- k) A mark that is identical or similar to the trade name of a business that provides the same, similar, or related goods and services;
- l) A mark likely to cause confusion regarding the source of the goods or services, or falsely indicating an association with a registered mark, well-known mark, or trade name;
- m) A mark containing or consisting of a GI that identifies a place other than the true origin of the products;
- n) A mark containing or consisting of a GI of goods that falsely represents to the public that the goods originate from another territory;
- o) A mark containing or consisting of a sign that creates derogation or falsely demonstrates a connection with a living person, deceased person, institution, or national symbol in a defamatory or discrediting manner.
- p) A mark likely to create confusion regarding the place of manufacture, industrial activity, or trade of a competitor;
- q) A mark that discredits the place of manufacture, industrial activity, or trade of a competitor; and
- r) A mark that affects national security, social order, or is contrary to culture or good morals.

However, the nature of the goods or services is not a ground for denying trademark registration.

Therefore, apart from considering compliance with the formal aspects of the application and the required characteristics of the trademark, if a trademark possesses characteristics that conflict with Article 23 of the IP Law, its registration will be refused.

(6) Opposition and cancellation

Under the Trademark Law, an opposing party is defined as a person who has the right or owns the right, or a third party (person, legal entity, or organisation) that proposes opposition to a trademark registration. In this regard, an opposition is a process of an opposing party filing a request to oppose the application of trademark registration that has been published in the Official Gazette of Registration of IP.

To oppose the registration of a trademark, an opposing party is entitled to file an opposing application with the DOIC of the district/capital or via the electronic portal within 60 days from the date a trademark registration application is published in the Official Gazette of

Registration of Intellectual Property (Article 16 of the Trademark Law). The DOIC of the district/capital will submit the opposition application to the Department of Intellectual Property for final consideration.

Regarding cancellation, a person who has the right or owns the right, or a third party, may file a request to cancel a trademark registration in full or in part. If the DIP determines that the issuance of a trademark registration certificate was made on the grounds of application information that was inaccurate or misleading, falsely claimed ownership, used concealment, or there was an act of violation² or non-compliance with the law, the DIP will cancel the trademark and notify the owner of trademark (applicant whose trademark is registered) for acknowledgment. The owner of the trademark is entitled to file a petition to the DIP or the People's Court for reconsideration (Article 28 of the Trademark Law).

(7) Caveat after registration

A. Declaration of use

Regarding trademark registration and renewal, there is no requirement under the law for the submission of a declaration of use in Lao PDR. Trademark protection is 10 years from the date that the application for registration is filed and is eligible to be renewed for 10 years each time. In this regard, the trademark owner is only required to pay the fees and the service charge in advance before each renewal (Article 65 of the IP Law).

Although a declaration of use is not required, it is worth noting that any person, legal entity, or organisation is entitled to propose to the MOIC the cancellation or invalidation of a trademark registration if it has not been used for five consecutive years, if the use is merely token use, or if such use is not in good faith by the owner. Although there is no explicit difference in Lao law between cancellation and invalidation, cancellation typically occurs when the process of trademark registration has not yet been completed but is found to be in conflict with the relevant laws, while invalidation occurs after the trademark is registered and its use is deemed to be in conflict with the relevant laws. The owner is entitled to declare the reason of non-use provided that force majeure is deemed as one of the reasonable grounds for non-use. If the MOIC orders the cancellation or invalidation of a trademark on the grounds of non-use, token use, or lack of good faith by the owner, the rights in the trademark will be terminated (Article 45 of the IP Law).

In addition, a trademark is considered as being used if it is used in connection with the goods or services that the trademark was registered for and by the owner or an authorised

² Pursuant to Article 472 of the Civil Code No. 55/NA, dated 6 December 2018, violation is an action or omission intentionally or negligently of any person which breach the laws and regulations, and such person shall be liable to compensate for the occurred damages, unless such damages occurred due to self-defence, the performance of lawful duties, or due to the wrongful act of the injured person.

person who is under the control and review of the owner. In practice, the trademark will be deemed under the control and review of the owner if (i) the trademark is used by the owner; (ii) certain rights on the trademark are granted to a third party by the trademark owner; or (iii) the trademark is assigned to a third party on a contractual basis, provided that the grant of rights or assignment is made in connection with the relevant laws.

B. Assignment of trademark rights

The owner of a trademark is entitled to enjoy the rights regarding the trademark as specified under Article 47 and Article 50 of the IP Law, which includes the assignment of the rights to another person by sale, exchange, lease, or delivery.

Under Article 30 of the Trademark Law, the owner of the trademark (applicant whose trademark is registered), certification mark, or collective mark is entitled to transfer their rights regarding the mark through written evidence (i.e. a written agreement), inheritance, or as a gift. In the event that an assignment is made in regard to a trademark, certification mark, or collective mark that has been registered, the assigner or the assignee shall submit a notification assignment in the designated form and pay the service fee to the DOIC of the district/capital or via the electronic portal for the notification to be subsequently submitted to the DIP.

The DIP is required to provide written acknowledgment of the assignment of the relevant rights to the assignee, record the assignment in the intellectual property system database, and publish the assignment in the Official Gazette of Registration of Intellectual Property. Notably, if the notification is made by the assignee, they should provide a copy of the acknowledgment document to the assignor.

The assignment of ownership of the assets of a legal entity also includes the assignment of a trademark of such legal entity, unless stated otherwise.

(8) Enforcement

A. Trademark infringement

1) Definition

Under Article 118 of the IP Law, trademark infringement is any act performed against the regulated rights of the industrial property owner and the trademark owner specified under Article 47 (regarding overall rights of the industrial property owner) and Article 50 (regarding rights of the trademark owner concerning preventive and protective measures) of the IP Law, without authorisation from the trademark owner.

2) Infringement of a trademark

Trademark infringement occurs when an act violates the regulated rights of the trademark owner, as stipulated under Article 47 of the IP Law (rights of the trademark owner) as follows:

- a) Gaining benefit from exploitation of the trademark;
- b) Assigning the rights, in full or in part, to another person by sale, exchange, lease, or delivery;
- c) Permitting other people to fully or partly exploit the trademark;
- d) Passing on or assigning ownership of the trademark to other people; and
- e) Taking legal action to protect the trademark from being infringed by other people.

Additionally, acts related to counterfeiting trademark goods are also considered trademark infringement (Article 122 of the IP Law). Counterfeit trademark goods are defined as any goods, including packaging, with a mark similar to the registered trademark without authorization from the trademark owner, or packaging that does not distinguish specific characteristics from the registered trademark. Thus, making, selling, offering for sale, advertising, marketing, exporting, or importing counterfeit trademark goods is deemed an infringement of the IP Law.

Article 118 of the IP Law also provides certain exceptions where an act is not considered a trademark infringement under the following conditions:

- a) The requested right is inapplicable, thereby lacking the qualifications for protection;
- b) The protective period or right has been expired or terminated; or
- c) The limitation regarding non-use of the trademark applies (Article 65 of the IP Law).

Therefore, only the trademark owner has the full right to act against unauthorised use of the registered trademark, and any act by another person without authorisation related to the trademark rights will be deemed infringement.

3) Infringement of a registered well-known trademark

A 'well-known trademark' is defined under the IP Law as 'a trademark, which is widely recognised by the relevant sector within the territory of Lao PDR, including where such knowledge is a result of the promotion of the trademark.'

There is no specific provision that mentions the infringement of a registered well-known trademark in Lao PDR. However, legal protection for a well-known trademark does not require registration, as implied by Article 50 of the IP Law. This means that infringement of a well-known trademark may occur regardless of whether it is registered or not.

Additionally, the registration of a trademark shall not be approved if the trademark is identical or similar to a well-known mark for the same, similar, or related goods or services, or if it would lead to the likelihood of confusion as to the source of the goods or services or falsely demonstrates an association with the well-known mark (Article 23 of the IP Law).

4) Infringement of an unregistered well-known trademark

As stated, a well-known trademark is protected to a certain extent even if it is unregistered under Article 50 of the IP Law. Also, trademark registration shall not be approved if the mark is identical or similar to a well-known mark for the same, similar, or related goods or services or would lead to a likelihood of confusion as to the source of the goods or services or falsely demonstrates an association with the well-known mark. Therefore, an unregistered well-known trademark will be considered infringed if the act is done against the rights of the well-known trademark's owner whose rights are the same as the regulated rights of the trademark owner specified under Article 50 of the IP Law.

5) Penalty of trademark infringement

Under Article 139 of the IP Law, the measures imposed against an infringer (whether an individual, legal entity, or organisation) include warnings, education, disciplinary penalties, fines, compensation for civil damages, or criminal punishment in accordance with the law. However, in practice, there is no clear distinction between warnings, disciplinary penalties, and fines imposed by the relevant authorities. Disciplinary penalties primarily involve recording the infringement in the DIP's internal records for future monitoring of potential violations by the same infringer.

With respect to fines, if a violation is committed intentionally or recklessly for a second time (and it is not a criminal offense), the wrongdoer is subject to a fine of 1% of the value of the damage caused. If a violation is committed intentionally or wilfully for a second time or on a regular basis, the penalty is 5% of the damage caused for each violation (Article 140 of the IP Law).

Regarding criminal punishment, Article 246 of the Penal Code No. 26/NA dated 17 May 2017 (the **Penal Code**) provides that a person who infringes intellectual property rights by counterfeiting, lying, fraud, or unfairly competing with the intellectual property of another person, thereby causing damage, may be subject to imprisonment for a term ranging 1–3 years, re-education without deprivation of liberty, and/or a fine ranging from KN5,000,000 to KN20,000,000.

B. Exercise procedures

1) Exercise of right by the trademark owner

One of the rights of the trademark owner is to protect their rights from infringement by another person, legal entity, or organisation. The trademark owner is entitled to exercise the right to file a lawsuit and seek compensation for damages caused by another person (Article 50 of the IP Law). Dispute resolution regarding trademark infringement may take six forms: reconciliation, mediation, administrative remedies, resolution through the Economic Dispute Resolution Center, filing a lawsuit with the People's Court, or

international dispute settlement (e.g. foreign or international arbitral awards).³

For mediation and reconciliation, the infringement claim can be filed with the MOIC by submitting the following documents:

- a) Application form for requesting dispute settlement resolution (in Lao only);
- b) A copy of the trademark registration certificate;
- c) A copy of the enterprise registration certificate;
- d) Letter of Power of Attorney (if filed by a representative);
- e) Sample of authentic and counterfeit goods; and
- f) Receipt of service fee payment.

The application form (item a) should mainly include the personal information of the applicant and representative (if any), the purpose of the request, and the request details.

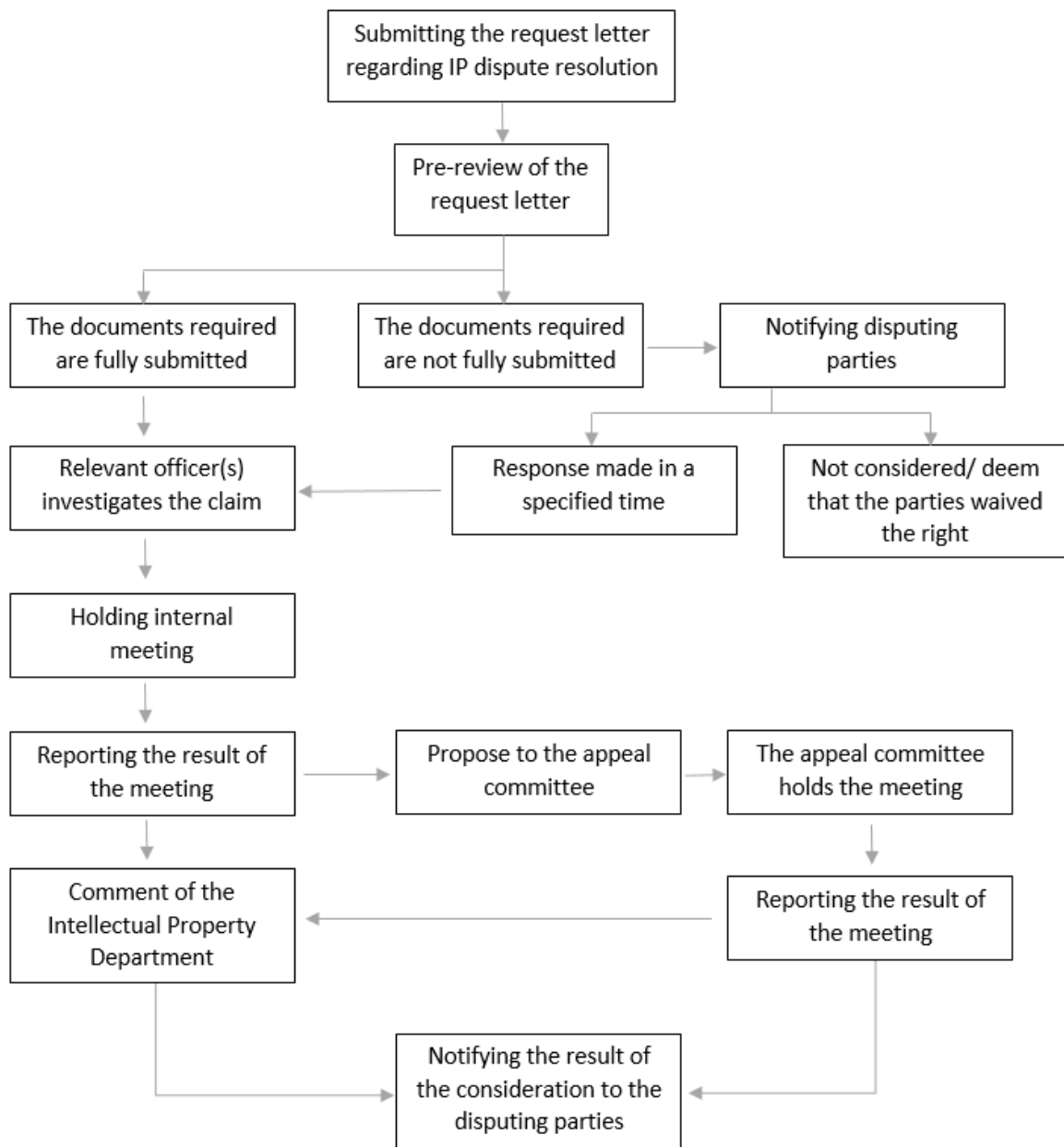
In Lao PDR, customs officers at the border are also entitled by duty to examine exported or imported goods and seize and quarantine goods that infringe a registered trademark (Article 137 of the IP Law).

2) Examination of application for dispute resolution upon trademark infringement

There is no substantive law mentioning the internal process regarding the examination of an application. However, in practice, after the application and supporting documents are lodged with the MOIC, the relevant officer will consider the application and notify the applicant of a meeting date between the applicant and the accused party, with the aim of resolving the trademark dispute pursuant to the request. The time required for examining the application and notifying the appointment date is approximately seven business days, although this may vary based on the workload of the relevant officer at that time.

³ Pursuant to Article 52 of the Law on the Resolution of Economic Disputes No. 51/NA, dated 22 June 2018, Lao PDR recognises and enforces an arbitration award from foreign or international arbitration that is certified by the Lao People's Court.

Figure 2.9. Internal Examination Proceedings for IP Dispute Resolution



Source: Webpage of the DIP under the MOIC. <https://dip.gov.la> (accessed 30 May 2024).

2. Geographical Indication

2.1. General Information on GI

(1) Background of GI

A geographical indication (GI) is an IP right that indicates a product as originating from a territory where a given quality, reputation, or other unique characteristic of the product – such as the raw materials or production methods – is linked to geographical provenance. GI products can increase commercialisation and promote trade at the international level. They can also have a significant impact at the local level by enhancing rural livelihoods

through income generation, investment promotion, creating local employment opportunities in the food, agriculture, and tourism sectors, and preventing rural exodus (FAO, 2021).

According to Article 2 of the Decision on GI, a GI is a symbol that signifies the geographical provenance of products in relation to a specific territory, region, or locality within a country, reflecting significance in quality, reputation, or other geographically associated characteristics of the products.

Mr. Chevala Vongthongchit, head of the Division of Geographical Indication under the DIP, stated that GI work in Lao PDR has been researched and analysed since 2014. Since 2016, GI initiatives have been implemented, as evidenced by organising GI Week in Vientiane to promote the origin, quality, and local wisdom found in food, agriculture, and handicraft products from provinces throughout the country (Laotian Times, 2016).

(2) Number of applications

As of the date of this report, seven Lao GI products have been registered with the DIP: Luang Prabang Silk, Houaphanh Silk, Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi (Kai Noi Rice), Houaphanh Khao Kai Noi (Kai Noi Rice), Komaen Tea, Paksong Tea, and Bolavan Coffee.

Through cooperation between the Government of Lao PDR and international organisations such as WIPO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi and Houaphanh Khao Kai Noi were successfully registered as GI products by the Khao Kai Noi Xiengkhaung Promotion Association and the Khao Kai Noi Houaphanh Promotion Association in 2018, although the Decision on GI had not yet been enacted. Khao Kai Noi from both geographical provenances was the first GI product of Lao PDR; however, Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi and Houaphanh Khao Kai Noi were separately registered as two GI products in 2020.

Additionally, silks from Houaphanh and Luang Prabang provinces, Komaen tea from Phongsaly province, and tea and coffee from Paksong of Champasak province were successfully registered and certified as GI of Lao PDR in 2020.

Currently, four Lao products – Xiengkhaung Silk (Xiengkhaung Province), Dak Cheung Ginseng (Sekong Province), Pakbeng Tea (Oudomxay Province), and Meuangbeng Cotton (Oudomxay Province) – are planned for GI registration with the DIP, with applications expected to be submitted by 2025, according to the Response Letter from DIP No. 0305/DIP, dated 21 March 2024.

Taking the foreign GI into consideration, there are three foreign GI products registered in Lao PDR. The first foreign GI is Champagne from France, registered with the DIP in 2019. In 2020, Scotch Whiskey from the United Kingdom was also registered, followed by Cognac from France in 2023. Based on research and interviews with the Division of Geographical Indication, no additional foreign GI are currently under consideration or registration.

(3) Examination pendency

According to an interview with Mr. Chevala, following the registration of seven GI in 2020, the Government of Lao PDR has consistently supported and encouraged all GI associations to register GI that indicate Lao PDR's geographical provenance. The quality of each GI is inspected annually to preserve the standards and specifications of GI products. Moreover, the DIP, especially the Division on Geographical Indication, plans to develop GI works and the registrations in Lao PDR according to the Development Plan of the Intellectual Property in Lao PDR until 2025 and the Vision to 2023, as provided in August 2022.

Additionally, Mr. Chevala stated that the Division on Geographical Indication has been working to educate producers and entrepreneurs about indigenous work. The Division has been encouraging them to register their GI products as valuable goods, disseminating information about these products, and raising consumer awareness of GI products by highlighting the characteristics of GI, such as the Khao Kai Noi, a well-known GI product, so they can be managed and standardised and for further certification.

The Division on Geographical Indication has also assisted in promoting indigenous work by organising events that showcase products registered as indigenous, setting up booths and advertising to highlight the features and qualities of GI products, and planning workshops and exhibitions for GI products so that buyers can learn about their background.

In addition to the above policies, the Division on Geographical Indication has promoted GI products in larger markets, for example by (1) posting on the website (currently via www.laoproduct.com.la) and increasing the value of GI products by exporting them to China and France, (2) organising connections with global markets, such as collaborating with global aid organisations like WIPO to plan advertising events, promoting different forms of coordination, and bringing goods to global exhibitions like Sakman and Little Chicken to showcase for distribution in France and work with global brands, and (3) promoting GI products increase demand and attract additional production by holding Intellectual Property Week and other events during the first quarter of each year.

Since 2020, no new GI have been registered in Lao PDR due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been a major obstacle to expanding GI work in Lao PDR. The most difficult aspect has been integrating local people and educating them to recognise and comprehend the GI concept clearly. Furthermore, as a GI is a collective intellectual product of the community, it must meet certain requirements, including having managed procedures and standards that are in line with the GI model.

Currently, the Division on Geographical Indication has implemented measures to ensure that all provinces in Lao PDR comply with the Development Plan of Intellectual Property until 2025. These measures include providing comprehensive information, collaborating with local officials to survey well-known products in each province, bringing these products to the attention of researchers, developing appropriate standards for indigenous products, and encouraging each province to promote at least one indigenous product.

Consequently, the four Lao products mentioned above are expected to be submitted for GI registration with the DIP by 2025.

2.2. Outline of GI

(1) Characteristics of the GI system

According to Articles 9 and 12 of the IP Law, GI is one of the types of industrial property that can be registered with the DIP.

Primarily, the applicant for GI registration at the DIP must be an association. Other individuals, legal entities, or organisations cannot submit a GI registration application unless they can verify that they meet special qualifications (Article 6 of the Decision on GI).

To register a GI, the DIP will issue a GI registration certificate to confirm that the GI has been registered with the DIP, record the registration in the DIP database, and publish it in the Lao Official Gazette. The applicant will then be recognised as the legitimate registered GI owner. There is no limited period for GI protection; protection begins from the application submission date.

Moreover, the DIP may, upon the request of the GI registration owner (i.e. the applicant), issue permission to use the Lao GI sign (Figure 2.10) to certify that the GI product is registered. Consequently, the GI registration owner is entitled to allow members to use and label their GI products with the Lao GI sign.

Figure 2.10. The Lao GI Sign



Source: MOIC.

In addition, the IP Law certifies the rights of the GI registration owner to protect its registered GI. Only producers operating their businesses within the geographical region specified for the GI are entitled to use the registered GI or the products to which the registered GI is related.

(2) Items to be included in the application form

In accordance with Article 35 of the IP Law and Article 7 of the Decision on GI, the application form for GI registration must be filed with the DIP, accompanied by a geographical report of the GI and other related documents, including a sample of the product and a receipt for the service fee payment for registration. The application can be submitted in Lao or English; however, if it is submitted in English, a certified Lao translation must also be submitted within 90 days. The Lao translation must be certified by a translation company registered and permitted under Lao PDR's legislation. An objection may be raised if the applicant does not comply with these requirements.

For clarity, the applicant can find and download the application form for GI registration on DIP's website (<https://online.dip.gov.la/efiling/>). The GI registration application form requires the applicant to fill in the following necessary information:

- a) Information of the applicant: full name, address, telephone number, facsimile number, and e-mail address;
- b) Information of the representative: full name, address, telephone number, facsimile number, and e-mail address;
- c) Name of the GI to be registered in Lao, English, and other languages (if any);
- d) Date, origin country, and registration number if the GI was registered in the origin country;
- e) Geographical area or region;
- f) Type of products covered by the GI; and
- g) Nice Classification of GI.

In addition to the application form for GI registration, the applicant must also submit the required supporting documents.

2.3. Application and Examination Procedures for GI Registration

(1) Applicant

According to Article 6 of the Decision on GI, the applicant for GI registration must be an association related to GI being applied for, such as the Paksong Tea Promotion Association or the Bolaven Coffee Promotion Association.

In cases where the individual, other legal entity, or organisation wishes to apply for GI registration, they may do so provided that they meet the below exceptional conditions:

- a) They are the only individual, legal entity or organisation interested in applying for GI registration; and
- b) The processing of the GI product is distinct from that of nearby areas, or the product's characteristics differ from those of products in nearby areas.

To facilitate the application process, the applicant can authorise one of the following to be its authorised person or legal representative through a power of attorney or a written appointment letter:

- a) A licensed attorney in Lao PDR;
- b) A service company permitted to provide IP registration services;
- c) An employee of the legal entity or organisation; or
- d) A Lao citizen.

For foreign GIs, the application must be submitted by a licensed attorney in Lao PDR or a service company permitted to offer IP registration services.

Currently, there are seven GI products registered with the DIP, and all applicants are associations registered under Lao PDR law.

(2) Application and required documents

According to Article 35 of the IP Law and Article 7 of the Decision on GI, an applicant who intends to register a GI must prepare and submit the following required documents:

- a) GI registration application form specified by the DIP;
- b) Image of the GI;
- c) Geographical report of the GI;
- d) Detail of products to which the GI applies and their product methodology;
- e) Report on the dominant qualities of the GI and relevant documentary evidence or a book of specifications;
- f) Receipts for service and official fee payments;
- g) Power of Attorney granting an authorised person or representative for submission;
- h) Copy of the ID card or passport of the authorised person or representative; and
- i) Documentary evidence of certified GI protection from the origin country if the GI is foreign and registered in its origin country.

Furthermore, Article 8 of the Decision on GI requires that the geographical report of the GI, product details, production methodology, report on the dominant qualities of the GI, and relevant documentary evidence must reflect the unique qualities of the GI, as follows:

- a) Name of the GI used for the tradename or the name that is well-known to the public;
- b) Description of the GI product, including its raw materials, the variety and/or source of raw materials used, and principal physical, chemical, microbiological, or organoleptic characteristics and taste (if applicable);

- c) Description of the geographical area, including a map and a report on the dominant qualities of the GI, with an explanation of the ecosystem characteristics (e.g. climate, soil, humidity, altitude) and relevant documentary evidence;
- d) Description of the quality, reputation, specifications, or other characteristic of the GI product and its geographical origin;
- e) Evidence demonstrating that the product originates from a delimited geographical area;
- f) Processing method and procedures to produce the GI product;
- g) Quality inspection method;
- h) Name and address of the inspection authority verifying specifications in compliance with product specifications;
- i) Product related to the GI and the production methodology; and
- j) Rules concerning the use and labelling of the Lao GI sign on the GI product.

It is noteworthy that a foreign GI applicant can register the GI in Lao PDR by submitting documentary evidence of certified GI protection from the country of origin.

As mentioned, the application can be submitted in Lao or English. However, if the application and the required documents for registration are not in Lao, a Lao translation of the application and the required documents certified by a lawfully registered translation company must be submitted together within 90 days of the submission date. Otherwise, the submitted application for GI registration shall be rejected. If the GI name is not in English, it must be translated into Lao according to its meaning and original pronunciation. The name and address of the applicant and terminology are exempted from being translated.

(3) Submission method

According to Article 9 of the Decision on GI, the applicant can submit the application form for GI registration and the supporting documents to the DIP through the following methods:

- a) Submit directly by hand to the DIP; and
- b) Submit via the electronic channel on the DIP's website (currently at <https://online.dip.gov.la/efiling/>). However, we found this electronic channel is currently under development.

In addition to submitting the required documents, payment of the service and official fees is also a requirement for the GI registration application. After receiving the submitted documents and payment of fees, the DIP will conduct an initial screening. If the relevant documents are complete, the DIP will issue to the applicant:

- a) A document certifying the date of receipt; and
- b) Receipts of the service and official fee payments.

If the applicant withdraws the application or if the application is rejected, the service and official fees will not be refunded.

(4) Methodical review

After submission, the DIP will review the submitted documents according to the following steps.

A. Initial examination

After issuing the document certifying the date of receipt, the DIP shall conduct an initial examination of the application and supporting documents to ensure they meet the required conditions content standards within 60 days of receipt date, in accordance with Article 38 of the IP Law and Article 12 of the Decision on GI. During the examination, the DIP will review the application and supporting documents to confirm (1) the condition of the GI product to be registered and certified, (2) the qualifications of the applicant, (3) the accuracy of the specification information in the application and supporting documents, and (4) correctness of payment for the service and official fees.

If the application and/or supporting documents are found to be incorrect or incomplete, the DIP must issue a written notice to the applicant within three business days of the examination. The applicant must then revise or amend the application and/or supporting documents in accordance with the DIP's notice and resubmit them within 12 business days from the notice date or the specified date in the notice. If the applicant does not comply within the specified timeframe, the DIP will notify the applicant via letter or electronic channel that they will no longer be considered and will be rejected.

Once the application and supporting documents fulfil all required conditions, the DIP shall publish the application in the Lao Official Gazette in relation to the IP registration.

B. Publication of the application

The DIP shall publish the application for GI registration in the Lao Official Gazette in relation to the IP registration within 15 days of the initial examination. The publication must include the following information:

- a) Name of the GI be registered;
- b) Number and date of the application;
- c) Name and address of the applicant;
- d) Products to which the GI will apply;
- e) Description of the quality, reputation, and specifications of the GI product;

- f) Description of the quality, reputation, and specifications of the GI product in relation to the geographical area; and
- g) Description of the geographical area and map of the GI product.

An individual, legal entity, or association that is not the applicant or a member of the association applying for GI registration may object to the GI application by submitting a written objection directly to the DIP or via the electronic channel within 60 days of the publication in the Lao Official Gazette.

C. Investigation of the application

After publication, the DIP, pursuant to Article 40 of the IP Law and Article 14 of the Decision on GI, shall investigate the GI application and supporting documents in accordance with the Industrial Property Administrator System (IPAS) of the DIP and the WIPO Global Design Database to verify (1) the condition of the GI product to be registered and certified, and (2) whether the GI is eligible for registration.

If the GI application fails the investigation stage, the DIP shall issue an initial written rejection with the appropriate reasons, to which the applicant is entitled to appeal. If the GI application passes the investigation, the registration for the GI shall proceed.

D. Condition of the GI product to be registered and certified

During the investigation stage, the GI product will be considered for registration and certification if it fulfils the following conditions:

- a) The indication identifies a product originating in a particular geographical country or territory, or a region or locality within that territory; and
- b) A given quality, reputation, or other specific characteristic of the product is essentially attributable to its geographical origin. Such a quality, reputation, or characteristic may be based on natural factors, including soil, air, water, ecological system conditions, or human factors, such as the skill, experience, and traditional production methods of the locality.

E. Non-registrable GI

During the investigation stage, in addition to the conditions above, the GI must not include any of the following characteristics; otherwise, it will be rejected:

- a) It is likely to mislead or confuse the public regarding its place of origin;
- b) The name has become the customary name of the product in Lao PDR;
- c) For products like rice, coffee, tea, or wine, the name is identical to the customary name of existing varieties in Lao PDR;
- d) It is the GI of another country where is not or is no longer protected, or has fallen into disuse in that country;

- e) It is identical to or similar to a protected trademark, and the use of the GI would lead to misunderstanding or confusion regarding the origin of the said product; or
- f) It is homonymous with a protected GI for rice, coffee, tea, or wine.

F. Amendment of the application

During the investigation stage, the applicant may amend or edit the GI application before registration, rejection, or the end of consideration process without additional fees. However, the following amendments are not permitted:

- a) Specifying a new GI product in the application;
- b) Amending the essential characteristics or specifications of the GI product;
- c) Amending the description of the quality, reputation, or other characteristics of the GI product or its geographical area;
- d) Editing the name or any part of the name of the GI product; or
- e) Any amendment affecting the defined geographical area of the GI product.

G. Appeal of the rejection

If the applicant receives an initial written rejection from the DIP at the investigation stage, they are entitled to appeal within 60 days from the date of the rejection. This appeal must be submitted with additional documents, evidence, information, or declarations to contest the rejection, according to Article 14 of the Decision on GI. An extension of another 30 days may be granted following the initial 60-day period. If the applicant does not appeal within this specified period, it will be deemed that they have forfeit their right to appeal.

If the appeal is deemed reasonable, the DIP may require the applicant to submit relevant additional documents, and the application will be reconsidered. If the is deemed unreasonable, the DIP shall issue a final rejection in writing, ending the consideration process.

(5) Registration and publication

A. Registration for GI

If the application passes the methodical review and the DIP consents to register the GI, the DIP shall proceed as follows:

- a) Issue a GI registration certificate to the applicant as the GI registration owner;
- b) Record the GI registration in the DIP database; and
- c) Publish the GI registration in the Lao Official Gazette in relation to the registration of the intellectual property.

The certificate, record, and publication of the GI registration will include:

- a) Name of the GI;
- b) Origin country;
- c) Type of product covered by the GI;
- d) Registration certificate number;
- e) Name and address of the applicant;
- f) Date of registration;
- g) Date of application; and
- h) Application number.

B. Publication of registration

Once the application is registered, the DIP will publish the GI registration in the Lao Official Gazette in relation to the registration of the IP on their website (currently <http://dip.gov.la/>) according to Article 44 of the IP Law and Article 17 of the Decision on GI. If any information is incorrect, the applicant is entitled to request the DIP to edit the information within 60 days of the date of publication with no fees required.

C. Registration for foreign GI

According to Article 25 of the IP Law, a foreign GI in Lao PDR shall be registered as long as the foreign GI is registered in accordance with the authority of the origin country of the foreign GI. The registration of foreign GI is not allowed if it is not or has ceased to be protected in its origin country or if it has fallen into disuse in that country. The application for registration of the foreign GI in Lao PDR can be made by an authorised person or legal representative as mentioned above.

It is noteworthy that under the IP Law and the Decision on GI, the processes – from the submission method to methodical review until the registration, including the application and required documents – for the registration of both Lao PDR GI and foreign GI under Lao PDR legislation are the same. For clarity, documentary evidence of GI protection from the origin country of a foreign GI is necessary.

(6) Amendment after registration

1) Editing information of the applicant or representative

Sixty days after the date of publication, the GI registration owner is entitled to edit the information of the applicant or representative, such as the name or address, by paying the official fee. The DIP must then publish the amendment in the Lao Official Gazette in relation to the registration of intellectual property and record it into the DIP database subject to Article 18 of the Decision on GI.

2) Amendment of the specification

After registration, the GI registration owner may request minor amendments to the description of quality, reputation, or specifications of the registered GI or amend minor errors in the application. This can be done either directly to the DIP or via the electronic channel on DIP's website (<https://online.dip.gov.la/efiling/>), in accordance with Article 20 of the GI Decision, with payment of the official fee required. However, only minor amendment will be approved. Changes to applicant or representative information, such as name, address, telephone number, facsimile number, and email address, are considered minor amendments.

If the amendment involves changes to the description of quality, reputation, or specifications of the registered GI that are deemed not minor, and if the DIP does not approve the amendment, the GI registration owner must follow the stages of the submission method, methodical review, and registration and publication.

Furthermore, a minor amendment must not include any of the following:

- a) Changes to the essential characteristics of the product;
- b) Changes affecting the correlation of the quality, reputation, or specifications of the GI product;
- c) Changes to the name or any part of the name of the GI product; or
- d) Changes affecting the defined geographical area.

If the amendment is approved, the DIP will publish the amendment in the Lao Official Gazette in relation to the registration of intellectual property and record it in the DIP database. However, if the error was made by the DIP, no official fee payment is required.

(7) Cancellation of the GI Registration

According to Article 21 of the Decision on GI, there are three scenarios under which GI registration may be cancelled:

- a) The DIP, at its discretion, decides to cancel the GI registration;
- b) A third party who is not the applicant or a member of the association applying for the GI registration files an opposition to the registration in the Lao language with the DIP. Under Article 44 of the IP Law, a third party may oppose both local GI and foreign GI by submitting an application and paying the service fee within five years of the registration's publication date to cancel or eradicate the GI registration.

The grounds for opposition against the GI registration will be accepted by the DIP if filed within this timeframe and may include the following:

- The GI does not meet the required characteristics and specifications;
- There has been no distribution of the GI product in the market for at least seven years from the date of publication in the Lao Official Gazette in relation to the registration of intellectual property;
- There is credible evidence proving that the GI registration owner is not the rightful owner; or
- In case of a foreign GI, it is no longer protected in its country of origin or has fallen into disuse there.

After receiving the opposition from the third party, the DIP shall notify the GI registration owner in writing, as per Article 21 of the Decision on GI. The applicant must then submit a counterstatement within 60 days of notification. Otherwise, it will be deemed that the applicant consents to and accepts the opposition to the GI registration. In this case, the DIP must cancel the GI registration and issue a cancellation letter to the GI registration owner.

After the DIP makes its decision, it shall notify the GI registration owner and the opposing part in writing with the appropriate reasons. The decision to cancel or revoke the GI registration shall be published in the Lao Official Gazette in relation to the registration of intellectual property and recorded into the DIP database.

- c) The People's Court of Lao PDR issues a final judgment to cancel the GI registration after a third party files a judicial action to the People's Court in accordance with the Law on Civil Procedures and other relevant laws.

In this scenario, the third party, as the plaintiff, must file a complaint requesting the cancellation of the GI registration along with supporting evidence to the People's Court within five years of the publication date of the registration of the related GI. The grounds for opposition against the GI registration are the same as those listed in scenario (b) above.

Upon receiving the complaint, the court shall assess whether the complaint and evidence are correct and complete. If there is a *prima facie* case, the court will accept the complaint for adjudication; otherwise, it will issue an order not to accept the complaint.

The court shall then deliver a summons to the GI registration owner, along with copies of the complaint, requiring them to respond. The GI registration owner, as the defendant, is required to submit a plea with supporting evidence within 15 days of the date of receipt of the summons. The GI registration owner is entitled to request an extension of this period or ask the court to record the plea at the hearing.

After the hearing and consideration of the evidence and testimony from both sides, the court shall issue a judgment, which will be read before the plaintiff and the defendant. If a party wishes to appeal the judgment, they must submit an appeal to the People's Court at the appellate level within 20 days of the judgment date; otherwise, the judgment of the People's Court at the first instance becomes final. The People's Court shall then deliver the final judgment to the DIP for implementation. Notably, there are currently no specific laws or regulations governing dispute proceedings in relation to GI.

If a final judgment is made to cancel the GI registration, the DIP must proceed with the cancellation, publish it in the Lao Official Gazette in relation to the registration of intellectual property, record it in the DIP database, and notify the plaintiff and the defendant in writing.

(8) Suspension for exploitation of the GI

Under Article 67 of the IP Law, if the GI registration owner fails to fulfil the requirements of the GI registration, an individual, legal entity, or organisation may bring an action to the MOIC to suspend the exploitation of the registered GI. The MOIC will then notify the GI registration owner to comply with the requirements within a specified period. If the GI registration owner fails to do so, the exploitation of the registered GI will be suspended.

(9) Rights of the GI registration owner

The GI registration owner has the rights to the registered GI under Articles 47 and 52 of the IP Law as follows:

- a) To prevent others from applying the GI to any products or trademarks, and to prevent others from selling, advertising, importing, or exporting products bearing such IG;
- b) To object to the use of the registered GI as described in (a) above, particularly for wines or spirits, even in translation or when accompanied by terms like 'type', 'style', 'imitation' or 'resemble';
- c) To protect the GI against another GI that, while literally true regarding the territory, region, or locality where the products are produced, falsely represents to the public that the products originate from a different territory;
- d) To protect the GI and its rights under legislation against infringements by others, including the right to initiate proceedings and the right to seek compensation for damages caused by others;
- e) To allow only producers operating within the specified geographical region for the GI to use the registered GI or the products to which the registered GI applies;

- f) To enjoy the benefits derived from the exploitation of the GI; and
- g) To permit others to exploit the GI.

The rights provided in item (a) and (b) above also apply to indications on products that are confusingly similar to the protected GI or that are homonymous with it.

Any action that is an infringement as described in items (a) or (b) above shall be considered an act of unfair competition, including any use in the designation or presentation of a product that implies it originates from a geographical area other than its true place of origin, misleading the public as to the product's geographical origin.

Any action breaching these rights without permission from the GI registration owner is an infringement of the registered GI.

(10) Control and inspection after registration

According to Article 30 of the Decision on GI, the specifications of the registered GI shall be controlled and inspected by the inspection authority for GI specification performance.

The inspection authority for GI specification performance is an authority permitted in Lao PDR or the foreign country to inspect and certify whether the operator and the production of the GI products comply with the description in the book of specifications. This authority can be established by the government or the private sector, provided it is responsible, neutral, and has a credible inspection system. The GI applicant is entitled to select an inspection authority for GI specification performance as appropriate.

Additionally, the inspection authority must provide an inspection report to the GI registration owner and the DIP by the end of the seasonal production cycle or calendar year. The report should be prepared in Lao; if it is in another language, a notarised translation into Lao is required.

If the operator does not comply with the description in the book of specifications, the inspection authority shall report to the DIP and the GI registration owner. The DIP will then request the GI registration owner and relevant persons to discuss and clarify the non-observance. If necessary, the DIP may invite experts to provide information and advice for consideration and decision-making.

(11) Obligations of the GI registration owner

According to Article 29 of the Decision on GI, the GI registration owner has the following obligations to the registered GI and its members:

- a) To monitor the use of the GI product's reputation in trade to guarantee the quality, market reputation, and specifications of its GI products, and notify the DIP if an error occurs;
- b) To ensure that the GI and any related IP rights are legally protected;

- c) To prepare information and advertisements to promote the GI specifications to consumers to increase market value;
- d) To manage, monitor, and inspect GI products to ensure qualification according to the book of specifications;
- e) To improve the performance of the GI registration owner, including the development of economic expertise, commercial strategy planning, analysis and publication of economic information on the GI products, and provision of advice to members;
- f) To apply protective measures to address risks or damage that may harm the image of GI products, thereby increasing their value;
- g) To protect the GI and the value of the GI products, preserve the ecological balance of the defined geographical area, and collect information and statistics on the value chain of its GI products;
- h) To take measures against members who do not implement the book of specifications, such as providing advice, issuing warnings, or cancelling the right to use the GI for their products, and to notify the DIP of these actions; and
- i) To notify the DIP of any breaches of GI regulations by members or third parties.

(12) Service fees and official fees

Under the PO on Fees and Service Fees, the following service fees and official fees apply to the GI registration process:

- a) Official fees related to GI registration are as follows:
 - Application for GI registration: KN800,000 per GI
 - Issuance of the GI registration certificate: KN400,000 per GI
- b) Official fee for GI administrative dispute resolution: KN400,000 per petition
- c) Service fees related to the GI are as follows:
 - Application form for GI registration: KN20,000 per form
 - Initial examination of the application: KN200,000 per application
 - Investigation of the application: KN800,000 per application
 - Consulting on GI registration: KN50,000 per application
 - Opposition to GI registration: KN200,000 per application
 - Amendment or editing of the GI registration certificate: KN100,000 per application
 - Editing the address of the GI registration owner or the representative: KN400,000 per application

- Editing the name of the GI registration owner or the representative: KN400,000 per application
 - Proceeding to void the GI registration certificate: KN100,000 per application
 - Cancellation of the registered GI by the GI registration owner: KN200,000 per application
 - Cancellation of the registered GI by a third party: KN400,000 per application
 - GI search: KN100,000 per application
 - Certifying the submission of the application or GI registration: KN100,000 per application
 - Issuance of a copy of the GI registration certificate: KN100,000 per application
- d) Service fees in relation to publication of the GI registration are as follows:
- Research and investigation: KN50,000 per GI
 - Amendment and codification: KN15,000 per GI
 - Publication: KN50,000 per GI
 - Promulgation and publicity: KN85,000 per GI
- e) Service fee for reconsideration at the appeal stage of rejection: KN50,000 per application
- f) Service fee for the application form on GI administrative dispute resolution: KN20,000 per form
- g) Service fee related to GI administrative dispute resolution: KN300,000 per petition. However, it is likely that the actual expenses incurred during the dispute resolution process are imposed.

Protection term and assignment

The GI registration is valid indefinitely from the date of filing of the application with the DIP, unless it is cancelled in accordance with the IP Law or the Decision on GI. Only member of the association of the registered GI are entitled to use or exploit the registered GI.

Additionally, the IP Law does not permit the assignment or transfer of the registered GI to others.

Infringement and fines

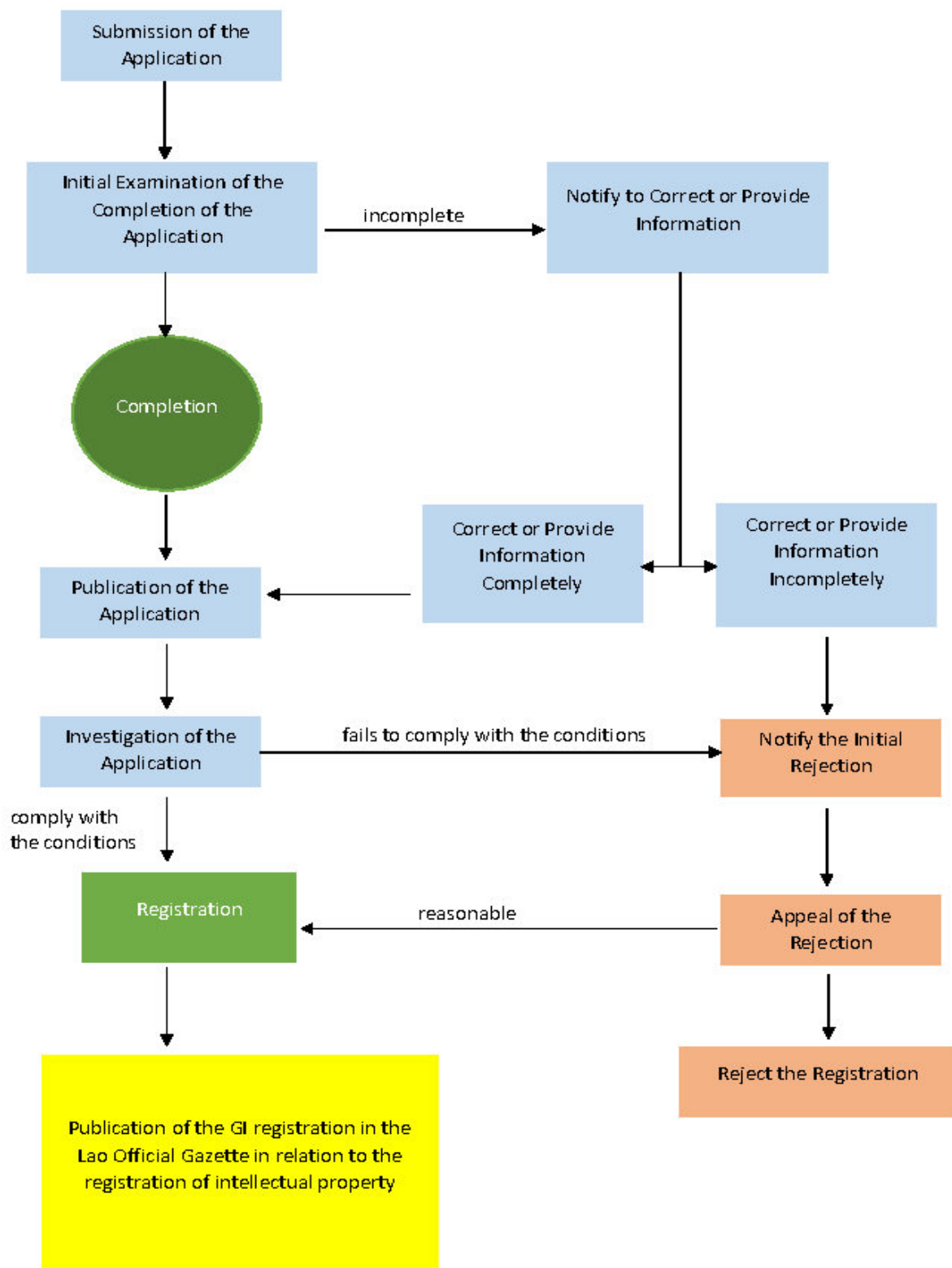
Article 246 of the Penal Code specifies the offense of IP infringement. Any person who infringes another person's intellectual property rights or forges, frauds, or unfairly competes with those rights, and as a result causes damage to another, shall be subject to imprisonment for a period of one to three years or re-education without deprivation of liberty. In addition, a fine ranging from KN5,000,000 to KN20,000,000 shall be imposed. For infringement of a registered GI, Article 118 of the IP Law provides that any action breaching the rights under Articles 47 and 52 of the IP Law (see (9) Rights of the GI Registration Owner) without permission from the GI registration owner constitutes an infringement of the registered GI.

Furthermore, under the PO on Fees and Service Fees, any person who infringes the rights to the GI shall be fined under the following conditions

- A second intentional or negligent infringement that is not a criminal offense shall be fined 1% of the damage value; or
- A second intentional or habitual infringement shall be fined 5% of the damage value.

Flow of GI registration

Figure 2.11. Flow of GI Registration



Source: DIP Website Database (<https://dip.gov.la/>).

2.4. The Lao GI sign

(1) Application of the Lao GI sign

The Lao GI sign (Figure 2.2.2) was created and is monitored by the DIP to certify that a GI product is registered. With a permission to use the Lao GI sign, the GI registration owner can apply the sign to their GI products as mentioned above.

Currently, there is no specific application form for the Lao GI sign specified by the DIP. The GI registration owner may prepare a request letter in a formal template. Additionally, no official permission is required to use the Lao GI sign.

(2) Use of the Lao GI sign

As stated above, the GI registration owner is entitled to allow and permit members to use and label the Lao GI sign on their GI products. However, the GI registration owner is obligated under Article 25 of the Decision on GI to stipulate rules concerning the use and labelling of the Lao GI sign on GI products, governing members' use of the sign.

A member who obtains permission from the GI registration owner to use the Lao GI sign must label the sign on the relevant GI products. The label 'protected GI' or an abbreviation on the relevant GI products is also acceptable.

If a member who has obtained permission from the GI registration owner to use the Lao GI sign does not comply with the Decision on GI or the rules concerning the use and labelling of the Lao GI sign on GI products, the DIP shall require the GI registration owner to elucidate or provide relevant information or evidence. Finally, the DIP may order sentence measures on the GI registration owner (Article 27 of the Decision on GI), for example:

- a) Cancelling the permission to use the Lao GI sign, requiring the GI registration owner to immediately cease using it; or
- b) Cancelling the registration of the related GI, resulting in the cancellation of the GI registration owner's right to use the Lao GI sign.

(3) Term and protection of the Lao GI sign

Subject to Article 28 of the Decision on GI, the permission to use the Lao GI sign is granted for one year and can be renewed annually following the DIP's inspection of the implementation of the conditions for using the sign. If there is a breach of these conditions, the DIP may cancel or decline to renew the permission. The DIP may also advertise a list of GI registration owners holding permission to use the Lao GI sign.

Chapter 3

Branding

1. Significance of Branding

1.1. Definition of 'brand' and 'branding'

A 'brand' represents the personality of a company, product, or service and the connection between a company and its audience. It encapsulates a company's core values and purpose (Davis, 2009). A brand encompasses both tangible and intangible elements and can be applied to many aspects, including a person, a business, or a country. In other words, many companies use their brand to communicate their vision to audiences as the brand signifies the company's reasoning and perspective. There are many ways an audience may encounter a brand, such as through seeing or hearing or through physical experiences with the brand and the general feeling of a company (Davis, 2009).

The term 'branding' is often used to define a process for creating the unique identity of a business that is used to communicate with its consumers and differentiate it from its competitors (Andrivet, 2024). Developing branding is not only about creating visual identity, such as logos, designs, songs, or social media captions; it also includes the overall process of making a product or service, which can come from the product's story and research and development process until the final product has been made and delivered to customers. The branding process can assist a business in identifying the company's position in the market, its direction, and the vision of the business. After branding is established, it is important to form a brand strategy to define the brand areas, such as potential customers or the value of the brand. A powerful brand strategy is a vital part of the business and overall marketing (Davis, 2009).

1.2. Benefits of branding

In recent years, especially in the age of social media where new brands are available all the times, branding is essential for businesses to attract customers and stand out. The benefits of branding can be summarised as follows (Jones, 2021).

(1) Branding helps more people recognise the business

The most important function of branding is to create the unique identity of a business so that it is recognisable. The company will use this identity to communicate with customers so that they know what the business is about. This can be extended to the story behind the business or its vision. Through this function, customers can distinguish between the products and services in the market and gradually come to recognise the brand. An attractive brand logo or other visible elements can help to capture customers' attraction, which is beneficial for the business' growth.

(2) Branding influences customers' purchasing decisions

The branding of products and services is an important factor that customers take into account when making a purchase. In recent years, branding strongly influences customers. Research conducted by Razorfish and VICE Media Group in the United States between May and June 2021 clearly demonstrated that a brand's values can influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Razorfish, 2021). As part of the research, 41% of the respondents stated that they focused more on a brand's purpose rather than innovations or discounts when making a purchasing decision.

(3) Branding can assist business advertising and marketing

Advertising and marketing are essential tools for businesses to maximise their profits. Branding is the most important aspect for representing the business when carrying out advertising and marketing and for ensuring a consistent brand image. Without strong branding, a marketing campaign can lose its focus, adversely affecting the efficiency of the advertising.

(4) Branding increases loyal customers

As mentioned, there is a connection between a brand's value and customers' choices. Customers tend to make purchasing decisions based on the purpose of the brand and emotional connections they have created with the brand, especially focusing on the trust gained with the brand. One of the main goals of many businesses is not only to increase sales but also to make customers come back and use their brand again. Thus, it is challenging for businesses to establish and provide a sense of reliability to customers to gain long-term loyalty.

If a brand is strong because of a high degree of loyalty from its customers, its future sales tend to be stable. A well-known brand is a barrier to competitors in the market because it becomes a reference in the market (Kapferer, 2008).

(5) Branding can motivate employees

A strong brand not only provides business identity but also builds the reputation of a business, including in terms of the workplace. When employees realise their business' value through its branding, they will feel more that they are a part of the business. This can motivate employees to work and deliver better work because of the connection between the company and themselves. In addition, businesses with a good brand reputation tend to influence employees to have pride in the work of the company, which obviously affects their work performance and ultimately the organisation's management.

1.3. Methods of branding

(1) Types of branding

There are nine types of branding that many businesses use to build their reputation (Boucher, 2023).

A. Corporate branding

Corporate branding focuses on the image and the success of a company as a whole. It is associated with several parts of the company, including products, services, brand positioning, and partnerships with other brands, etc. It helps the brand build a long-term relationship with customers regardless of the product or service the company launches, so that customers will have an emotional connection with the brand.

B. Product branding

Product branding is a way to create an outstanding identity for a product to attract consumers and be distinguishable from other brands in the market. It is a common type of branding and can be seen everywhere. The main focus of product branding is to ensure that people can recognise the brand based on its products. A common example of product branding is Coca-Cola, as people around the world can recognise their red cans as their brand.

C. Service branding

Service branding is for those business providing services instead of products. These can include consulting companies, airlines, hotels, banks, etc. A challenge for service branding is that the service is invisible to customers when they decide to make a purchase or, in some cases, the service results do not happen immediately, and it takes some time for customers to obtain the outcome of that service. In addition, the service branding's success is heavily based on customer satisfaction. Trustworthiness is key for service branding. Consequently, it is important to build long-term trust with customers and ensure that the business' reputation is always positive.

D. Retail branding

Retail branding is used by many retailers. It is a strategy applied to retail space. Rather than focusing on a specific brand, retail branding aims to market the overall retailer, such as a department store offering various brands and services for customers. Retail branding can apply to the atmosphere of the physical store, including music, displays, signage, and any other elements that reflect the identity of the brand. It is undeniable that digital transformation has changed customers' behaviour significantly. Thus, in cases where a brand has both physical and online stores, the brand image for both must be synchronised so that the retail branding can build a strong perception of the store in customers' minds.

E. Personal branding

This type of branding focuses on individuals and mainly relies on a person's performance, instead of a product or company. Customers pay attention to the brand's owner as an individual because of who they are. Most personal branding is used by famous influencers, celebrities, politicians, and other well-known persons.

F. Cultural and geographical branding

This type of branding emphasises the geographical area of a product or service to attract

customers' attention. The main focus of cultural and geographical branding is the exclusivity of that product or service that is available in that specific place. The geographical and cultural elements can build a strong emotional connection between the seller-buyer or service provider-service receiver.

Common industries where this type of branding is widely available are hotels, tourist attractions, and cities. Having this branding bring customers from many places around the world to come to the specific geographical location to experience the culture and can also help the business increase the value of its products or services.

An example of famous company using this strategy is McDonalds. They have different campaigns in each country depending on the culture and special foods of each area, which can attract consumers to purchase their products in various locations.

G. Co-branding

This type of branding is used when two or more brands share similar values and create a partnership to collaborate together to offer a product or service. The co-branding can be either a completely new brand identity or a combination of the involved brands' identities. The purpose of the co-branding is mainly to reach new target groups and let each brand reach the customers of the other brand. It is a useful strategy for many businesses wanting to increase their customer base and market share at a relatively low cost.

H. Online branding

Online branding, sometimes called internet branding, is a key component of digital marketing that involves using the internet or social media channels to promote a business. It can be a combination of various online content, e.g. through websites, blogs, or online advertising, to present the business' identity and products/services. The main goal of using online branding is to improve the business' digital positioning, which can help the business build its online presence and reach a larger audience. Since the digitalisation trend has become very popular in recent years, online branding has become an essential marketing tool for businesses.

I. Offline branding

Offline branding encompasses all marketing materials that are not digital or carried out via the internet. This includes physical interactions, such as billboards, printed advertisements, local event sponsorship, and newspapers, etc. Due to the rise in the digitalisation trend, offline branding in many sectors has become less important. However, it is still an effective way to reach a brand's target groups because it can be very targeted to the audience's location and interest. Thus, many businesses nowadays still benefit from using offline branding.

(2) Brand strategy

A brand strategy is a framework for determining how a business can communicate and present itself to customers so that it can stand out against its competitions. The presentation of the brand encompasses not just the visual elements of the brand, such as

its name, logo, slogan, or colour, but is all about its personality, philosophy, values, and customer experience (Coursera, 2023).

There are four key points for business owners when building a brand strategy (The Branded Agency, 2024).

A. Consumer analysis

Understanding the consumers is an essential part of a brand strategy and is the foundation of brand development. Business owners should be able to understand and address customers' needs, goals, and pain points, etc. in order to define how to communicate the core values of the brand to consumers.

Having a clear target group of consumers can optimise business strategy in many aspects; it can help determine product pricing, as well as the platforms and content most suitable for the business' target audience. Consequently, this can more effectively attract consumers to purchase the products, ultimately leading to a higher return for the business.

B. Competitive analysis

To become an outstanding brand in the market, it is important to identify the business' competitors and understand their strengths and weaknesses. This analysis can help the brand owner determine the brand positioning in the market and develop a brand strategy to achieve success.

C. Defining a brand's essence

A brand's essences refers to the values of the brand, including its vision, purpose, mission, and core values. Brand owners must define what makes their brand unique to establish its authenticity and genuineness.

D. Defining a brand's visual identity

Creating a strong visual identity enhances overall brand recognition. The visual identity should include consistent elements that reflect the brand's theme, such as the logo, slogan, colour scheme. Additionally, the brand's visual identity should convey the brand's positioning or values, such as presenting it as a luxury or eco-friendly brand.

2. Potential Areas for Branding

2.1. Current Status of Characteristic Industries in Lao PDR

Lao PDR's economy has been mainly based on natural resources such as hydropower and mining, whilst the agriculture sector is the predominant source of income and employment for the majority of the population (IFAD, 2018). Natural resources account for 45% of the country's wealth. In this section, the three main three industries of agriculture, mining, and power and energy will be discussed.

(1) Agriculture

Lao PDR has abundant arable land, and with its low population density, the land is well-suited for agricultural production. Agriculture is not only the primary source of livelihood

in Lao PDR but also plays an important role in the country's economy. In 2023, the agriculture sector contributed 21% to the country's GDP (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2024). Rice is the major crop and a vital source of food security in the country, with rice fields covering 72% of the country's agricultural land area (IFAD, 2018) and approximately 3.8 million tonnes of rice produced annually (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2023; 2024). Other major crops include maize, cassava, bananas, and coffee, which are grown for both subsistence and commercial purposes.

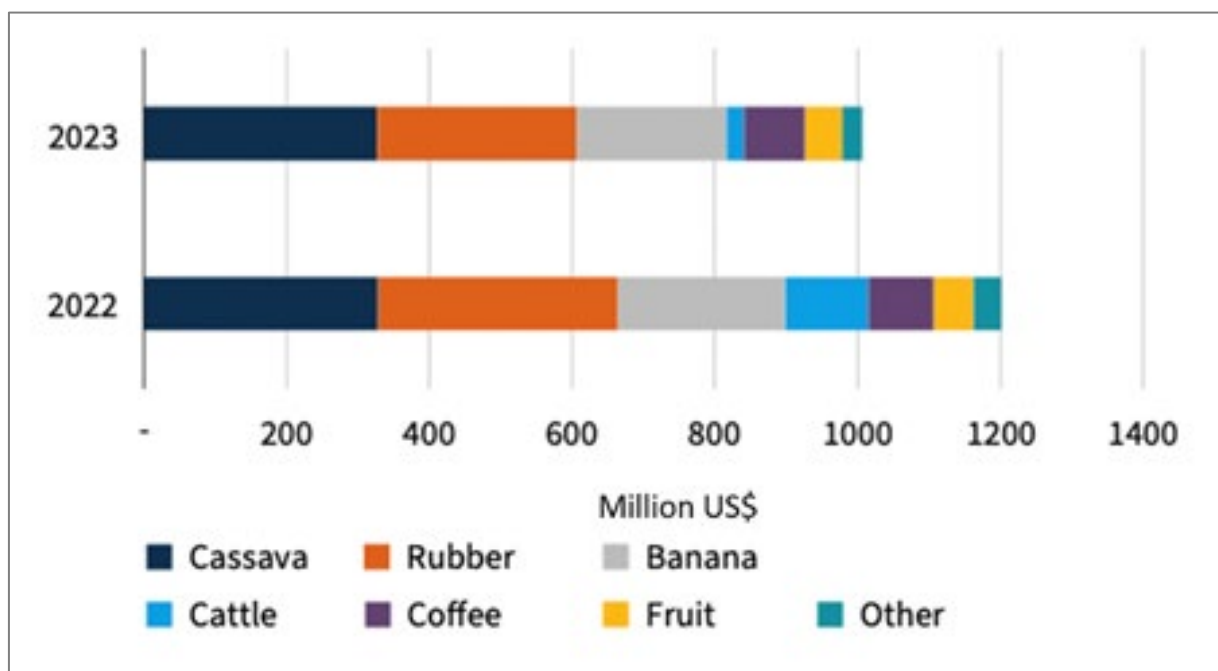
The major plains for rice production are located in the Vientiane Plain, Bolikhamxay Plain, Xebangfai Plain, Xebanghieng Plain, Xedone Plain, Champasak Plain, and Attapeu plain. In contrast, areas for food crops and other industrial crops production are chosen based on the unique characteristics of each region. For example, the Bolaven Plateau in Champasak, Salavan, and Sekong is a prime area for vegetable production to supply major cities. Meanwhile, areas such as Sayaboury, Salavan, Champasak, Savannakhet, and Bolikhamxay are key regions for growing cassava to supply cassava starch factories and for export to Thailand and Viet Nam (National Assembly of Lao PDR, 2021).

In the past, most agricultural production in Lao PDR consisted of small-scale production or family-based operations that heavily relied on traditional techniques and natural resources. Additionally, agricultural production is dominated by smallholders, the majority of whom are low-income with low productivity (World Bank, 2022a).

Since 2013, many small-scale farms have transitioned from subsistence rice cultivation to commercial production, including cassava and coffee. Cross-border contract farming arrangements with Thai and Vietnamese traders have increased (World Bank, 2022a).

In terms of exports, Lao PDR has significant potential to expand its agricultural and food exports, which could help reduce poverty in the country. Notably, the opening of Lao PDR-China railway in December 2021, connecting Lao PDR with China's borders, could boost Lao agricultural exports to China. Transportation costs between Kunming in China and Vientiane could be reduced by 40%–50% (World Bank, 2022a). Agriculture accounts for more than one-fifth of Lao exports, with primary destinations being neighbouring countries, particularly China, Thailand, and Viet Nam (World Bank, 2022a). Figure 3.1 illustrates a comparison of the values and types of exported agricultural products in 2022 and 2023.

Figure 3.1. Comparison of the Values and Types of Exported Agricultural Products, 2022 and 2023



Source: World Bank (2024).

The recent agriculture export trends in the past few years are as follows (World Bank, 2022a).

- **Bananas:** Accounted for 19% of total agricultural exports in 2020. The increase in banana exports is due to growing production by large plantations operated by Chinese investors in the northern and central regions.
- **Cassava:** Accounted for 16% of total agricultural exports in 2020. Most of cassava production comes from smallholders through contract farming, with the majority of cassava exported to Thailand.
- **Coffee:** Accounted for 7% of total agricultural exports in 2020. Primary coffee plantations are located in the Bolaven Plateau in the southern region. The main destinations for unroasted coffee beans are Viet Nam, Thailand, and Japan.
- **Rice:** As a staple for food security in the country, Lao PDR government imposes stock balancing at the provincial level before allowing export. Rice accounted for 4% of total agricultural exports in 2020, with Viet Nam and China as the main export destinations.
- **Fruits (excluding bananas):** Primarily exported to China.

In recent years, GI schemes have been developed and have had a significant impact on the agricultural sector, including generating more income and creating local employment opportunities. The following are examples of products that have obtained GI registrations and became well-known agricultural products of Lao PDR:

- **Khao Kai Noi** (literally translated as 'little chicken'): A variety of glutinous rice grown only in special environments in Houaphanh Province and Xiengkhaung Province. This rice is well known for its unique taste and aroma, and is closely connected to its geographic region of production, making it a famous crop in these provinces. The name 'Khao Kai Noi' originates from the shape of the grain, which is small and round, similar to rice for feeding chickens. Based on colour and other characteristics, Khao Kai Noi has been categorised into four main varieties, each with additional descriptors in the name to indicate its specific characteristics: Khao Kai Noi Lai (with longitudinal red and yellow alternating stripes), Khao Kai Noi Leuang (with yellow glumes), Khao Kai Noi Deng (with red glumes), Khao Kai Noi Dam (black).
- **Bolaven Coffee**: Bolaven Coffee comes from the Bolaven Plateau in the southern part of Lao PDR. It has gained regional and international recognition for its unique taste and smell, attributed to the volcanic Bolaven soil. GI registration has made Bolaven Coffee more exportable and recognisable to international consumers, resulting in increased income for local producers.

The Government of Lao PDR has aimed to develop and modernise the agriculture sector. In 2015, they introduced the 'Agricultural Development Strategy to the Year 2025 and Vision to the Year 2030'. The vision for the agriculture sector by 2030 is '*ensuring food security, producing comparative and competitive potential agriculture commodities, developing clean, safe and sustainable agriculture and shift gradually to the modernization of a resilient and productive agriculture economy, linking with rural development contributing to the national economic basis*' (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2015).

Additionally, Lao PDR government recognises that digital technology has become essential for improving agricultural productivity. They highlighted 'Promotion of Agricultural Development by Using Digital Technology' in the 5-Year National Digital Economy Development Plan (2021-2025). The work plan focuses on (i) using digital technology and production data in managing agricultural products, cultivation, animal husbandry, and harvesting; (ii) promoting the transformation of traditional agriculture into digital agriculture operations, emphasising digital technology in commerce, marketing, logistics, and consumer services; and (iii) improving and developing digital agriculture knowledge. Consequently, it is expected that the agricultural sector in Lao PDR will advance towards smart agriculture in the future.

(2) Mining

During 2002–2016, the mining sector played an important role in driving Lao PDR's economic growth. The start of the boom period was in 2003 due to the opening of Sepon Mine (copper cathode and gold), followed by the operation of the Phu Kham Mine (copper-gold concentrate) and the nearby Ban Houayxai Mine (gold-silver) (World Bank, 2022b). Although the contribution of the mining sector to GDP has been declining in recent years, the mining sector is still an important source of national revenue. In 2023, it accounted for approximately 3.4% of GDP (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2024).

Businesses associated with mining include those carrying out mineral survey-exploration, feasibility studies, mine excavation, and mineral processing. Details of investment in the mining sector in Lao PDR as of 2022 are shown in Table 3.1.

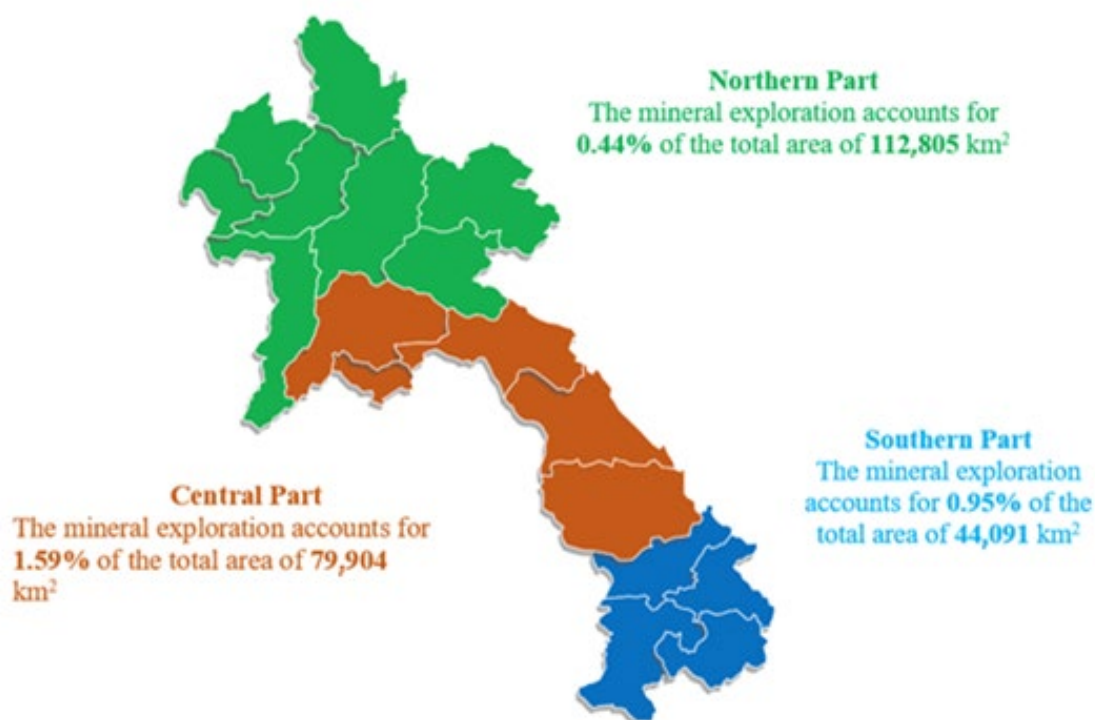
Table 3.1. Investment in the Mining Sector in Lao PDR as of 2022

No.	Project Status	Number of Companies	Number of Activities	Area (hectares)	Comparison with Areas Nationwide
1.	Mineral exploration	131	147	6,894,159.90	29.11%
2.	Feasibility study	33	51	146,337	0.65%
3.	Operation and processing	94	168	218,612.16	0.89%
Total		258	366	7,259,149.06	30.44%

Source: Ministry of Energy and Mines (2023).

Figure 3.2 shows the proportion of mineral exploration categorised by region.

Figure 3.2. Proportion of Mineral Exploration Categorised by Region



Source: Ministry of Energy and Mines (2023).

The northern part refers to the provinces of Phongsaly, Luangnamtha, Bokeo, Oudomxay, Luangprabang, Xayaboury, Houaphanh, and Xiengkhaung. The central part refers to the provinces of Vientiane Capital, Vientiane Province, Xaisomboun, Borikhamxay, Khammoune, and Savannakhet. The southern part refers to the provinces of Salavan, Sekong, Champasak, and Attapeu.

Table 3.2 shows the types of minerals that were under the mineral survey-exploration phase in 2022.

Table 3.2. Types of Minerals Under the Mineral Survey-exploration Phase

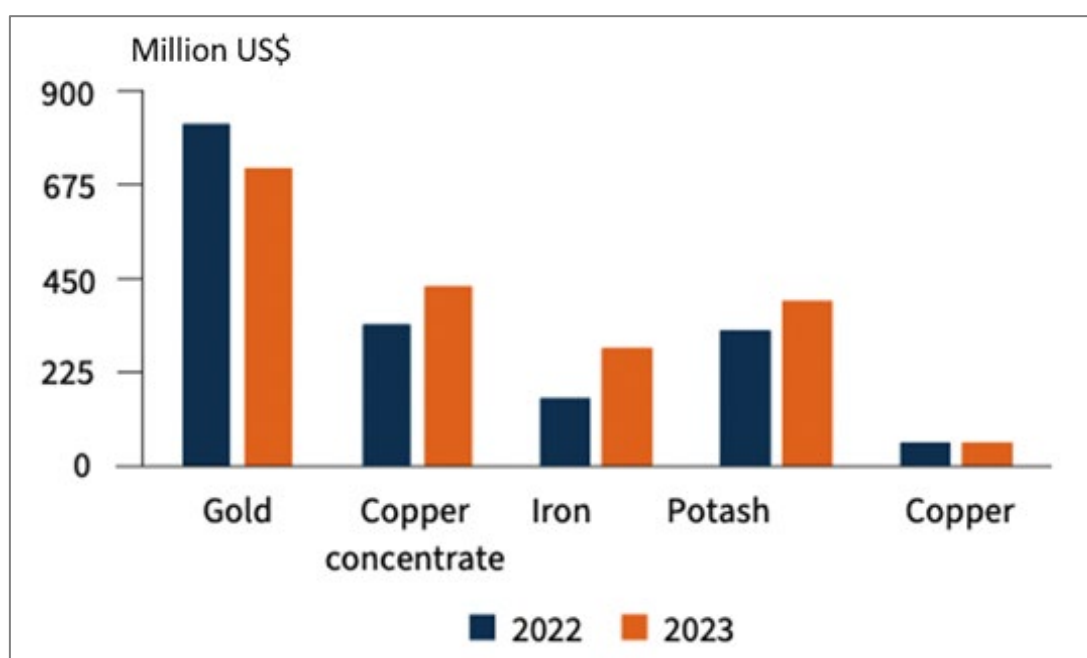
No.	Mineral Type	Numbers of Companies
1.	Gold and gangue minerals	38
2.	Copper and gangue minerals	18
3.	Iron ore	10
4.	Tin ore and gangue minerals	4
5.	Lead ore and gangue mineral	3
6.	Coal	19
7.	Limestone	6
8.	Clay-sand	1
9.	Marble and decorative stone	12
10.	Barite and gangue minerals	1
11.	Manganese	1
12.	Magnesium-Nickle	1
13.	Antimony	1
14.	Potassium chloride	2
15.	Crystal sulphide	1
16.	Bauxite – aluminium minerals	2
17.	Rare-earth elements	9
18.	Oil and gas contracts	2
Total		131

Source: Ministry of Energy and Mines (2023).

The export of minerals is also a major industry that generates income for Lao PDR. The main export destinations include China, Viet Nam, Thailand, Cambodia, India, and Switzerland.

In the first nine months of 2023, overall mining exports grew by 17%. Copper, iron ore, and potash outputs increased, whilst gold output slightly declined due to the depletion of existing reserves (World Bank, 2023b). Figure 3.3 illustrates a comparison of the values and types of mining exports in 2022 and 2023.

Figure 3.3. Comparison of the Values and Types of Mining Exports in 2022 and 2023



Source: World Bank (2024).

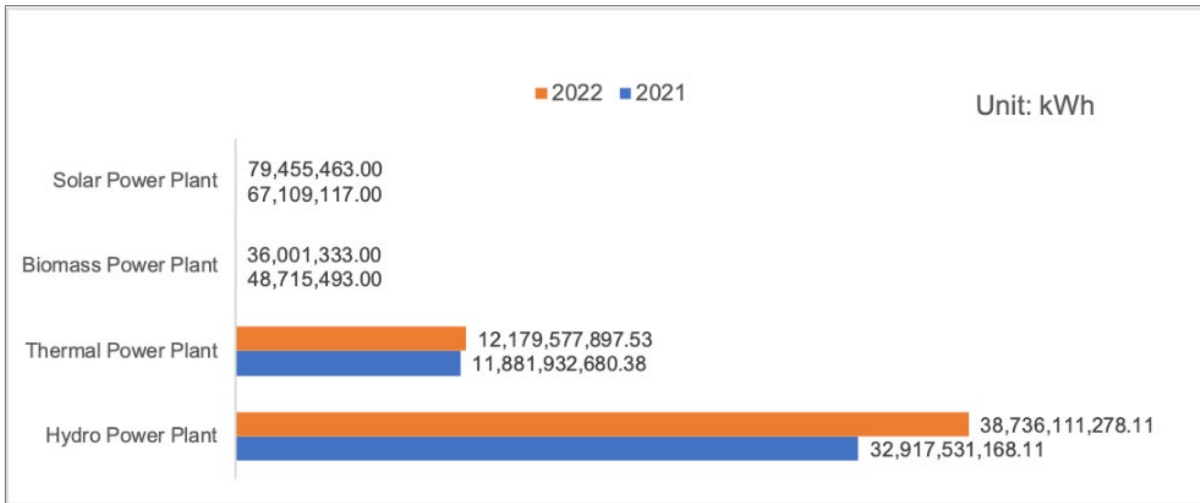
However, due to the poor performances of many companies that obtained concession rights to operate mining business in Lao PDR, Lao PDR government issued Notification No.620/PMO, dated 13 April 2023, to cease approval for new metallic minerals mining projects from 13 April 2023 until further notice, in order to review the effectiveness of the approved mining projects. Projects that have already obtained approval can continue operations; however, the relevant authorities may require them to report project progress. If the authorities find that any project's performance is not satisfactory, they may consider revoking the concession rights and operating licenses of such projects.

(3) Power and energy

Due to the geography and climate, Lao PDR is a landlocked country located in mountainous areas with abundant and diverse natural resources, especially water resources, which are fundamental for generating electricity. As a result, hydropower plants have become a major sector in national economic development for many years. In 2022, there were 94 projects considered as sources of electricity through the Électricité du Laos system, each with an installed capacity of 1MW or more. These included 81 hydropower plants, eight solar power plants, four bio-thermal plants, and one thermal power plant. The total installed capacity was 11,661.14 MW, with a potential electricity production capacity of 58,813.42 GWh/year (Ministry of Energy and Mines, 2023).

Figure 3.4 illustrates the total nationwide electricity production in 2021 and 2022.

Figure 3.4. Total Nationwide Electricity Production in 2021 and 2022



Source: Ministry of Energy and Mines (2023).

Moreover, under the 'Battery of Asia' policy, Lao PDR has become a major exporter of electricity to many countries in Asia, including Thailand, China, Myanmar, Singapore, Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Malaysia. The electricity exports of Lao PDR are more than any other country in Southeast Asia, and it ranks in the top 20 electricity exporters in the world (World Bank, 2022b). In 2022, the total exported electricity was 39,965,119,714 kWh. However, Lao PDR still needs to import electricity during the dry season from countries including Thailand, Viet Nam, and China. In 2022, the total imported electricity was 872,656,602 kWh (Ministry of Energy and Mines, 2023).

Energy sector development in Lao PDR has been guided by several national policies, including the Ninth Five-National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025), the National Green Growth Strategy of Lao PDR until 2030 (issued in 2028), and the Renewable Energy Development Strategy (issued in 2011). These policy directions aim to reduce the use of non-renewable energy sources, such as fossil fuels, coal, and natural gas, which will be depleted in the near future, and to develop new renewable energy sources, such as biomass energy, solar energy, wind, and small hydropower.

The development of small hydropower (with a capacity of up to 15 MW) and other small power systems is also intended to encourage people in rural areas to use renewable energy and to improve their economic conditions with the goal of reducing poverty in remote rural areas. Small hydropower is believed to provide a low-cost power supply to remote areas that have been relied heavily on imported electricity.

2.2. Current State of Digital Transformation in Lao PDR

(1) Legal framework on digital transformation

Digital transformation (DX) is the process of utilising digital technologies to create new or transform existing traditional and non-digital business processes, products, and services

into digital formats to meet new evolving market demands. In recent years, the pace of digital transformation has accelerated rapidly worldwide, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Lao PDR has also recognised that digital transformation is key to increasing economic efficiency and providing better economic opportunities for the country, leading to improved connectivity, new services, and borderless communication and trade. Consequently, in 2021, the Lao government approved the **20-Year National Digital Economy Development Vision (2021-2040)**, **10-Year National Digital Economy Development Strategy (2021-2030)** and **5-Year National Digital Economy Development Plan (2021-2025)** as foundations for guiding national digital economy development in the future.

It is estimated that Lao PDR's digital economy represents approximately 3% of GDP, with projections indicating that it will grow to 10% of GDP by 2040 (World Bank, 2022c). Reflecting this growth in digital transformation and the digital economy, the Lao government has begun updating outdated laws and regulations to align with modern standards. Changes in the legal framework and government institutions are essential for effective digital transformation. This section highlights the key legal and regulatory frameworks for digital transformation in Lao PDR.

A. Current telecommunications infrastructure

Telecommunication and internet infrastructures are foundational for developing digital transactions. Lao PDR has continuously developed and enhanced these infrastructures throughout the country. In 2021, the Ministry of Technology and Communications was established through the merger of the Ministry of Science and Technology and Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications to lead digital transformation efforts (Ministry of Technology and Communications, 2021). In 2022, fibre optic infrastructure spanned 96,670 km across the country (Ministry of Technology and Communications, 2023). However, internet infrastructure is mainly available in the big cities, currently covering 82% of the population nationwide (Ministry of Technology and Communications, 2023). Broadband internet access remains limited in many remote areas, and there is room for development to bridge the gap between urban and remote areas.

Currently, there are six telecommunications operators in Lao PDR: ETL Company Limited, Lao Telecommunications Public Company, Star Telecom Company Limited, TPLUS Digital Sole Company Limited, Best Telecom Company Limited, and Lao ASLA Pacific Satellite Company Limited (Ministry of Technology and Communications, 2023).

Regarding other ICT operators, Table 3.3 shows the number of ICT operators available in Lao PDR in 2022.

Table 3.3. Numbers of ICT Operators Available in Lao PDR in 2022

No.	Services	Number of Companies
1.	Internet café business	576
2.	ICT consultation business	73
3.	ICT training business	21
4.	Software development, production, and service business	123
5.	ICT equipment import business	68
6.	ICT equipment distributor business	1,505
7.	ICT equipment repair business	790
8.	Internet data centre	2
9.	Internet content centre	7
10.	Cloud service	4
11.	ICT security business	10

Source: Ministry of Technology and Communications (2023).

B. Telecommunications and internet regulation

The Law on Telecommunications (Amended) No. 05/NA, dated 16 November 2021, which replaced the Law on Telecommunications No. 09/NA, dated 21 December 2011, plays a key role in establishing principles, regulations, and measures for managing and inspecting telecommunications business operations and resources, as well as technical standards and the use of telecommunications services and equipment in Lao PDR. Additionally, it outlines regulatory requirements for licenses to operate telecommunications businesses, telecommunications number allocations, and the Telecommunication Development and Digital Transformation Fund.

Furthermore, there are various legislations related to telecommunications and ICT infrastructure, such as the Law on ICT, the Law on Radio Frequency, and the Decree on Internet Data Centers, etc.

To maximise the benefits of effective digital transformation, the Lao government recognises that creating new legislation or amending existing legislation is essential to protect consumers, business operators, and national interests. Consequently, the 'Development and Amendment of Policies, Laws, and Legislation' was set as a work plan in the 5-Year National Digital Economy Development Plan (2021-2025). This plan aims to ensure that relevant laws and legislation are complete, ready, and up-to-date to protect the benefits and rights of the government, business operators, and consumers. The government also anticipates that new policies and legislation will increase private sector investment, which will widely stimulate digital transformation in the country.

In addition to the development of legislation, since Lao PDR still requires digital infrastructure development, the Lao government has also addressed the 'Improvement and Expansion of Digital Technology Infrastructures' in the 5-Year National Digital Economy Development Plan (2021-2025). This plan focuses on improving and expanding fibre optic infrastructure and high-speed wired internet (FTTx) and wireless internet (5G) to cover most of the country. It aims to support the effective utilisation of digital infrastructure resources, improve telecommunications enterprises and internet service providers, and use the telecommunications and digital transformation fund to expand access to telecommunications and internet services in remote areas. Under this plan, it is expected that digital infrastructure in Lao PDR will be developed, advanced, and expanded to cover most of the country, enabling domestic businesses to compete with regional and international businesses.

C. E-commerce and e-transactions

To keep pace with the rise of e-commerce activities and e-transactions in Lao PDR, the government has issued laws and regulations to provide a legal framework for e-commerce and e-transactions, including the Law on Electronic Transactions (Amended) No. 31/NA, dated 29 December 2022 (**E-Transaction Law**); the Law on Electronic Signatures No. 59/NA, dated 12 December 2018 (**E-Signature Law**); and the Decree on E-Commerce.

The Decree on E-Commerce was enacted to regulate e-commerce businesses, including the registration, operation, and management of e-commerce activities in Lao PDR. It also provides the legal implications of e-commerce agreements made on digital platforms, including the rights and obligations of parties to the agreement. Under the Decree on E-Commerce, there are three types of e-commerce: trading through their own electronic channel, trading through electronic marketplaces, and providing services for electronic marketplaces (Article 6 of the Decree on E-Commerce).

Business operators engaged in trading, whether on their own electronic channel or through electronic marketplaces, are required to notify the competent authorities under the MOIC about their businesses (Article 7 and Article 8 of the Decree on E-Commerce). Upon receipt of the documents, the authorities will issue an acknowledgement certificate to the business operators to certify that their businesses have been officially acknowledged by the authorities (Article 12 of the Decree on E-Commerce). For electronic marketplace service providers, a business operation license from the MOIC is required before commencing operations. Also, they are required to submit information about sellers registered on their electronic marketplace to the MOIC for data collection (Article 9 of the Decree on E-Commerce). However, the Decree on E-Commerce does not currently specify penalties for noncompliance.

Regarding e-transactions in Lao PDR, the adoption of the E-Transaction Law and E-Signature Law, along with relevant subsidiary regulations, provides a legal framework defining principles, regulations, and legal implications for digital transactions. Due to the rapid development of digital transactions globally, the current E-Transaction Law, which came into effect in 2023, was promulgated to replace the previous Law on E-Transactions

No. 20/NA, dated 7 December 2012, to deal with the complexities of e-transactions. The current E-Transaction Law defines and addresses the legal implications of data messages, electronic time stamps, electronic contracts, electronic signatures, electronic documents, electronic transaction systems, proof and authentication of digital identities, and electronic transaction businesses.

The E-Signature Law has the main function of promoting the recognition and use of electronic signatures, as well as regulating electronic signature certification services. It recognises that digital signatures and seals compliant with the provisions of the E-Signature Law and its subordinate regulations will have the same legal effect as signatures and seals on paper documents (Article 15 of the E-Signature Law).

D. Digital payments

The digital economy and e-commerce in Lao PDR have been continuously growing in recent years, which has led to new online payment methods and non-cash payment options that are now widely available in the country. To response to this development in payment instruments, the Law on Payment System No. 32/NA, dated 17 November 2017, and various subsidiary regulations have been issued. The law formally adopts non-cash payment instruments as part of the country's payment system.

The Law on Payment System (Amended) No. 45/NA, dated 20 November 2023 (**Payment System Law**), was enacted to replace the Law on Payment System No. 32/NA, dated 17 November 2017, in order to improve the regulatory system and ensure that relevant activities are safe, transparent, modernised, and effective. The law defines the 'payment system' as all activities relating to payment services using payment instruments or through the payment mechanisms of the payment system operator and payment system service provider. According to the Payment System Law, the current instruments used in the payment systems in Lao PDR are cash, cheque, card, and E-Money. Additionally, the Bank of Lao PDR may include other payment instruments as deemed appropriate (Article 12 of the Payment System Law). In this regard, the Department of Payment System, under the supervision of the Bank of Lao PDR, is the main authority responsible for monitoring and overseeing the national payment system.

It is important to note that the current Payment System Law became effective on 15 January 2024, but most of the relevant subordinate legislation was issued under the previous Payment System Law, which has since been cancelled. In practice, this subordinate legislation is still considered effective and remains in full force until replaced by new legislation. Based on information obtained from the Bank of Lao PDR, the relevant authorities are currently in the process of updating regulations to be consistent with the current Payment System Law.

According to the 5-Year National Digital Economy Development Plan (2021-2025), the 'development of digital payment system' was identified as one of the work plans for future implementation. This plan aims to improve payment infrastructure and payment systems and services to meet the standards that support the digital economy in the country. It also

focuses on, amongst other things, reducing cash and cheque usage, promoting the e-payment systems and tools, and developing cross-border payment systems to support multi-channel payments. The Lao government has been working to modernise the country's financial infrastructure to promote digital payments and support the growth of the digital economy in the country.

E. Cybercrime and cybersecurity

Cybercrime and cybersecurity threats have become major issues affecting the growth of digital development in recent years. Cybersecurity is crucial to enable secure and reliable digital development. Thus, the Law on Prevention and Combating Cyber Crime No. 61/NA, dated 15 July 2015 (**Cybercrime Law**), was enacted to define the principles, regulations, and measures to prevent, combat, curb, and eliminate cybercrime, as well as to protect database systems, server systems, computer data, and information to ensure national security and create peace and order in society. Following the Cybercrime Law, various subordinate legislation has been continuously issued to enhance the prevention and response to cybercrime in Lao PDR.

The Cybercrime Law provides list of offenses that are considered as cybercrimes, including the following: disclosure of specific computer access prevention measures; unauthorised computer access, unauthorised editing of pictures, animations, audio and video; unauthorised interception of computer data and information; causing damage via online social media; dissemination of pornography; computer system interference; computer's data and information forgery; destruction of computer data and information; and operating business of tools and equipment for cybercrime (Article 8 of the Cybercrime Law). Violations of the Cybercrime Law may lead to civil and criminal measures depending on the severity of the violation.

In addition, the Lao Computer Emergency Response Team (LaoCERT), established under the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (now Ministry of Technology and Communications), has been set up administer and protect against cybercrime. Its main roles and responsibilities include being a central point of coordination, both domestically and internationally, for emergency response and developing strategic plans, policies, and regulations for preventing and combating cybercrime in Lao PDR.

Further to the Cybercrime Law, additional laws and regulations have been enacted to protect against cybercrime and raise awareness amongst the public. These include the Recommendation Regarding the Implementation of the Law on Prevention and Combating Cyber Crime No. 2543/MPT, dated 24 September 2018; the Recommendation Regarding the Safety of Using Online Social Media No. 1561/MPT, dated 26 August 2020; the Recommendation Regarding the Safe Creation, Development, and Management of Websites No. 2088/MPT, dated 16 August 2019; and the Recommendation Regarding the Safety of Computer Systems No. 3623/MPT, dated 11 December 2017.

The Lao government recognises that cybercrime and cybersecurity affect public confidence in using digital technology and the development of digital transformation in the

country. Consequently, 'Security of Digital Technology Development' was listed as a key strategy under the 10-Year Strategy (2021-2030) of National Digital Economy Development to emphasise the importance of security, standards, frameworks, and guidelines on cybersecurity in the country. Thus, it can be anticipated that there will be numerous developments in Lao PDR in terms of cybercrime prevention and response, including upgrades in security tools and legislative developments.

F. Data protection

The protection of personal data is one of the crucial issues for digital transformation, requiring the government to ensure that the protection of personal data and the use of such data for certain purposes are balanced. The Law on Electronic Data Protection No. 25/NA, dated 12 May 2017 (**Data Protection Law**) is the main law regulating the protection of electronic data in Lao PDR, whilst the Recommendation on the Implementation of the Law on Electronic Data Protection No. 2126/MPT, dated 8 August 2018 (**Recommendation on the Implementation of the Data Protection Law**) is a subsequent regulation supporting the implementation of the Data Protection Law.

The purpose of the Data Protection Law is to protect 'electronic data', which can be categorised into two types: general data and specific data. Therefore, non-electronic data are not under the scope of protection under this law. 'General data' refers to the general data of individuals, legal entities, or organisations that is accessible, usable, and disclosable, provided its source is correctly indicated (Article 9 of the Data Protection Law), for example, name, job position, address, telephone number, and email address, (Item 2(2) of the Recommendation on the Implementation of the Law on Electronic Data Protection No. 2126/MPT, dated 8 August 2018). 'Specific data', on the other hand, refers to data that may not be accessed, used, or disclosed without permission from the data owners or relevant organisations, including personal data and governmental data according to the details provided in the law (Article 10 of the Data Protection Law). The Recommendation on the Implementation of the Data Protection Law provides examples of the specific data, such as customer information, financial information, CVs, medical treatment history, race, religion, project plans, budget plans, and official confidentiality (Item 2(3) of the Recommendation on the Implementation of the Law on Electronic Data Protection No. 2126/MPT, dated 8 August 2018).

In comparison to the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) concept, 'personal data' under the GDPR refers to any information related to an identified or identifiable natural person; examples include the name, home address, email address, and identification card number. There are some special categories of data known as 'sensitive personal data' that are subject to higher levels of protection; these include personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, and health-related data (Intersoft Consulting, n.d.). It appears that 'general data' under Lao law aligns with the 'personal data' concept under the GDPR, whilst the 'specific data' would be considered as 'sensitive personal data' under the GDPR. Moreover, the Lao Data Protection Law applies to legal entities, whereas personal data under the GDPR only applies to natural

persons. However, an interpretation and implementation of this law in Lao PDR is still vague.

The Data Protection Law also provides broad requirements for managing electronic data, including the collection, transfer, storage, and maintenance of electronic data. However, the current legal framework seems insufficient in terms of implementation and enforcement, and further revisions are necessary to address potential issues that may occur with respect to the data protection field.

Moreover, the concept of data protection is also stipulated in other specific regulations. For example, the Decree on Consumer Protection for Financial Services No. 225/GOV, dated 6 April 2020, outlines certain consumer protections using financial services in Lao PDR to ensure and encourage that service recipients receive quality, accurate, transparent, and fair services from financial institutions in the country. The data of financial service recipients protected under this Decree include personal data, financial data, and any types of passwords and passcodes, whether in hard copy or electronic form. Service providers have an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of personal data of service recipients and must not disclose such data to any unauthorised third party or organisation. The personal data of the service recipients may be disclosed to a third party only with written consent from the service recipients in accordance with relevant laws. The decree further provides that if the personal data of service receivers is leaking or disclosed without authorisation, the service providers must record the incident and immediately notify the affected service recipients. If such a leak or disclosure causes material adverse effects, service providers must immediately report to the competent authorities.

(2) Current state of fintech in Lao PDR

Financial technology, or fintech, refers to any technological innovation – such as software, mobile applications, and other technologies – designed to improve traditional forms of finance for businesses. Fintech is reshaping financial products, payments, business models, market players, market structure, and money (Feyen, Natarajan and Saal, 2023). Digital transformation has given rise to new infrastructure for delivering financial services, such as fast payment service systems and the promotion of financial inclusion to support the market. In recent years, digitalisation has become an integral part of the financial services industry.

In Lao PDR, fintech and related digital financial services are at a very nascent stage. Two main reasons make the development of fintech in Lao PDR challenging: firstly, internet infrastructure is limited and not widely available across the country, which is inadequate to support the use of fintech services. Secondly, supporting services or environments for developing fintech startups are underdeveloped. However, there have been some signs of development in recent years, as well as increased potential for fintech companies to enter the market (Morgan and Trinh, 2019). The Lao government also addresses these issues in the 20-Year National Digital Economy Development Vision (2021-2040), 10-Year Strategy (2021-2030) of National Digital Economy Development, and 5-Year National Digital

Economy Development Plan (2021-2025) regarding the use of digital technology and the development of digital economy.

There are many categories of financial services offered by fintech firms, including payments and transfers (e.g. mobile banking, mobile wallets, digital currency and cross-border transactions), personal finance (e.g. robo-advisors, mobile trading and personal financial management) and alternative financing (e.g. crowdfunding and alternative lending). Since fintech services in Lao PDR are still limited, not all of the abovementioned services are currently available.

A. Mobile banking

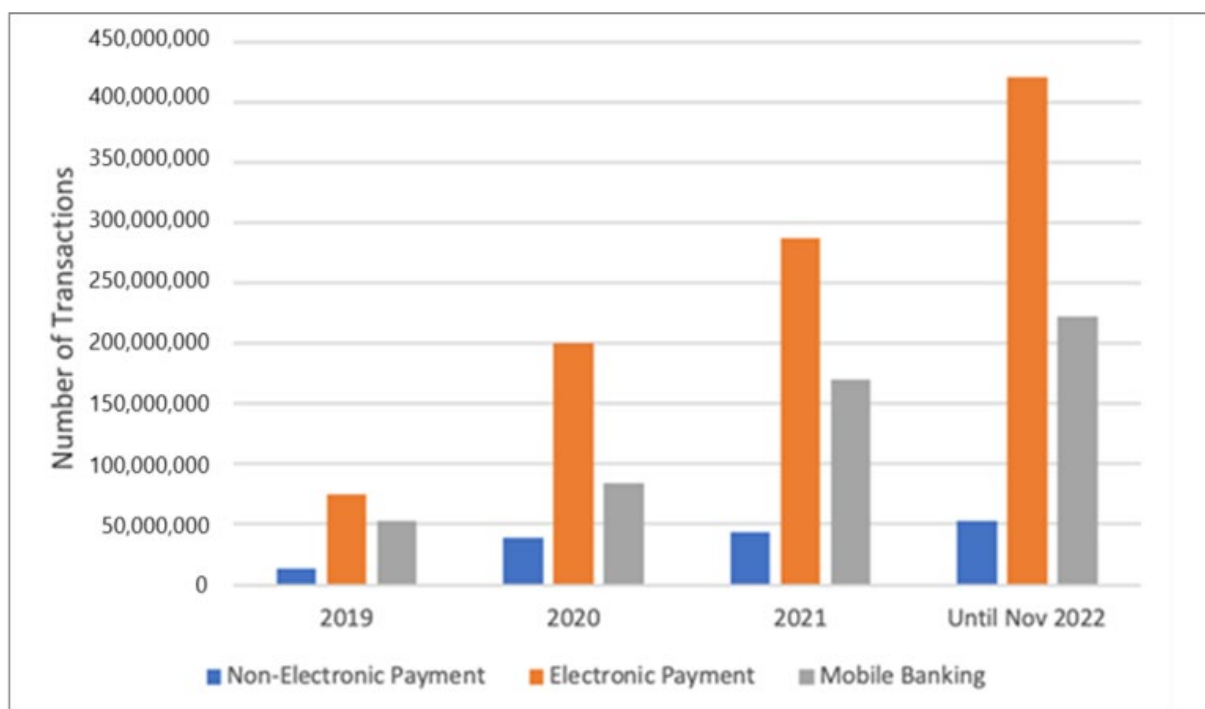
Although cash is still the predominant method of payment in Lao PDR, mobile banking usage has been expanded rapidly. Recently, several commercial banks have begun offering mobile banking services and applications that support various digital payment methods, including QR code payment, bill payment, mobile top-up, and money transfer.

The commercial banks that currently offer mobile banking applications include Banque Pour Le Commerce Exterieur Lao Public (BCEL), Lao Development Bank (LDB), Maruhan Japan Bank Lao (MJBL), Acleda Bank Lao (ACLEDA), Indochina Bank (IDCB), Agricultural Promotion Bank (APB), Lao-Viet Bank (LVB), Joint Development Bank (JDB), ST Bank (STB), Saigon Thuong Tin Bank Lao (Sacombank), Military Commercial Joint Stock Bank Lao Branch (MB), and Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Limited Vientiane Branch (ICBC).

B. Digital payment and money transfers

As mentioned in the legal framework for digital payments above, Lao PDR has already recognised digital payments and money transfers and has established basic systems to support the increased transactions. The forms of digital payment that are commonly used in Lao PDR include card payments, e-money, prepaid cards, e-money transfers, and QR code payments. According to statistics from the Bank of Lao the PDR, the number of transactions using digital payments has increased significantly in recent years. Figure 3.5 illustrates trends in digital payment usage in Lao PDR from 2019 to November 2022.

Figure 3.5. Trends in Digital Payment Usage in Lao PDR from 2019 to November 2022



Source: Bank of Lao PDR.

Importantly, those companies or commercial banks that provide digital payment services must obtain authorisation from the Bank of Lao PDR in accordance with Notification No. 461/DPS, dated 17 June 2021. Table 3.4 shows the numbers of authorised service providers for digital payments.

Table 3.4. Number of Authorised Service Providers for Digital Payments

No.	Type of Service	Number of Service Providers
1.	Retail Payment System Operator	1
2.	Card Payment	19
3.	E-Money	10 (6 commercial banks and 4 companies)
4.	Electronic Acceptance	39
5.	Electronic Money Transfer	42 (39 commercial banks and 3 companies)

Source: Bank of Lao PDR.

The number of service providers has increased in 2024. However, no updated official statistics or data have been announced by the Bank of Lao PDR yet.

C. Cryptocurrency

Since 2018, cryptocurrency has not been recognised as an official currency for payments in Lao PDR. The Bank of Lao PDR issued Notification No.314/O, dated 29 August 2018, to officially notify and warn the public that cryptocurrency is neither considered as money nor legally valid for debt payments. However, it appeared that some groups of people continued to use cryptocurrency for payments in Lao PDR. Thus, a similar notification was issued again in 2021 (Notification No. 156/O, dated 11 August 2021) to emphasise the legal status of cryptocurrency. Moreover, the Bank of Lao PDR issued Notification No. 382/O, dated 30 October 2018, to notify all financial institutions that they were prohibited from investing, trading, or engaging in transactions involving cryptocurrency or encouraging its use in the country. Thus, it is evident that Lao PDR strongly rejects the recognition of cryptocurrency as a payment tool under the law.

However, Lao PDR has not completely disregarded the existence of cryptocurrency and other digital assets. On 9 September 2021, the Prime Minister's Office issued Notification No. 1158/PMO, announcing the prime minister's directive regarding cryptocurrency mining. This notification approved a pilot programme for cryptocurrency mining and trading and authorised six companies to participate in the programme. The Ministry of Technology and Communications was appointed as the responsible authority to coordinate with other authorities regarding this pilot programme and to draft relevant regulations related to cryptocurrency mining and trading.

Consequently, the Ministry of Technology and Communications issued the Decision on the Trial of Digital Asset Transactions No. 888/MTC, dated 9 September 2021, to regulate digital asset transactions and specify requirements for related licenses. According to the decision, only cryptocurrency mining and trading businesses are allowed to be in the trial period, and they are required to obtain licenses from the competent authorities to operate. In this regard, the trading of cryptocurrency is only allowed to be conducted via authorised trading platforms.

Presently, two companies have obtained approval and licenses from the Bank of Lao PDR to operate cryptocurrency trading platforms: Bitqik Sole Co., Ltd (officially authorised in March 2024) and Lao Digital Asset Exchange (LDX) (currently is the process of setting up its system).

D. Crowdfunding

There are no specific regulations regarding online crowdfunding platforms in Lao PDR at present. However, in the case of equity crowdfunding, it may be conducted in the form of bond issuance or public offering, which must comply with the Law on Enterprise No. 33/NA, dated 29 December 2022, the Law on Securities Exchange No. 79/NA, dated 3 December 2019, and related regulations of the Lao Securities Commission and Lao Securities Exchange.

E. Peer-to-peer lending

Peer-to-peer (P2P) lending is a lending business model that uses online platforms to match potential lenders with borrowers. P2P platforms rely on the automation of the lending process, including examining credit histories, reviewing applications, and granting approvals.

The legal framework for P2P lending in Lao PDR is still unclear, as there is no legislation that expressly provides legal implications and requirements for P2P lending activity. Moreover, no P2P lending platform operators have obtained authorisation to operate in Lao PDR at this time. Therefore, it takes some time for the competent authorities, especially the Bank of Lao PDR, to consider and issue regulations governing the operation of P2P lending.

(3) Startups in Lao PDR

A. Legal framework

Currently, the legal framework for startups in Lao PDR is the same as that for general enterprises. If the characteristics of a startup meet the definition of a micro, small or medium enterprise (**MSME**) as provided in relevant legislation, it will be considered an MSME, and the applicable legal treatments for MSMEs will apply. Therefore, there is no specific regulation yet for startups.

The Law on the Promotion of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (Amended) No. 16/NA, dated 7 July 2022 (**MSME Promotion Law**), and its subsidiary legislation, including the Decree on the Size of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises No. 04/GOV, dated 12 January 2023 and the Decree on the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Fund No. 05/GOV, dated 12 January 2023, form the main legal framework for MSMEs in Lao PDR. The Department of Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion (DOSMEP), under the supervision of the MOIC, is the core authority dealing with MSMEs in Lao PDR. DOSMEP works with the Bank of Lao PDR to develop and implement the government's policies regarding MSME sectors.

Pursuant to Article 3 to Article 5 of the Decree on the Size of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises No. 04/GOV, dated 12 January 2023, the criteria for MSMEs shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5. Criteria of MSMEs

Type	Type of Business	Annual Average Labour (persons)	Total Value of Assets (KN)	Annual Total Income (KN)
Micro Enterprise	Production	1–5	No more than 120,000,000	No more than 400,000,000
	Trading	1–5	No more than 180,000,000	No more than 400,000,000
	Service	1–5	No more than 240,000,000	No more than 400,000,000
Small Enterprise	Production	6–50	No more than 1,200,000,000	No more than 3,000,000,000
	Trading	6–50	No more than 1,200,000,000	No more than 4,500,000,000
	Service	6–50	No more than 1,800,000,000	No more than 2,250,000,000
Medium Enterprise	Production	51–99	No more than 4,800,000,000	No more than 6,000,000,000
	Trading	51–99	No more than 4,800,000,000	No more than 9,000,000,000
	Service	51–99	No more than 7,200,000,000	No more than 6,000,000,000

Source: Author, using data summarised from the MSME Promotion Law.

However, the Lao government recognises that the growth of MSMEs and startups will contribute to the development of the country’s socio-economy, especially the production, trading, and service sectors. The Ninth Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025) addresses the direction and focus in connection with startup businesses:

‘Start-up promotion: Enhance competitiveness by improving telecommunication infrastructure, providing quality Internet at low service rates, as well as creating an ecosystem to support aspiring entrepreneurs; develop policies and strategies to promote new enterprises to be robust, sustainable, and competitive at the regional and international levels; create opportunities for access to SME capacity building services by supporting an effective functioning of SME service centres; and promote start-up businesses, especially those that use information technology in business administration, and businesses that produce handicrafts, food, beverages, and utensils, among others, as well as the ODOP products that are environmentally friendly, green and sustainable and meet the needs of the local and regional markets.’

In addition, the MOIC launched the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Plan 2021-2025 (**MSME Development Plan 2021-2025**) as a guideline to determine policies and measures to implement the development of MSMEs in Lao PDR.

A number of policies related to the promotion of startups have been addressed in the MSME Development Plan. For example, there is a policy to promote financial inclusion for the MSMEs, which includes providing funding for the development of fintech; a policy to increase productivity, technology, and innovation, which includes promoting digitalisation to enhance the efficiency of business operations; and a taxation policy to provide tax incentives for startups, amongst others.

B. Tax incentives for startup companies



Similar to the legal framework for startups discussed above, in term of tax incentives, Lao authorities also treat startups in the same manner as MSMEs. Although the Lao government has a policy to provide tax incentives and subsidiaries to startups, such a policy has not yet been implemented. Thus, there are currently no special tax incentives or subsidies specifically provided to startups.





Since tax incentives and financial support policies for startups were addressed in the MSME Development Plan, it is expected that the Lao government will provide such incentives in the future to encourage new investors and entrepreneurs and to boost the startup ecosystem in Lao PDR.

C. Current status of startups in Lao PDR

The startup environment in Lao PDR is still in its early stages but is gradually developing. However, there is no official information centre established for gathering details about Lao startups. Only a few companies are well-known amongst Lao people, whilst some companies are in the process of developing their innovations and services. Table 3.2.6 shows examples of famous Lao startups.

Table 3.6. Examples of Famous Startups in Lao PDR

No.	Enterprise	Products/Services	Technology Utilisation
1.	 <p>LOCA GET AROUND LIKE A LOCAL</p> <p>LOCA COMPANY LIMITED</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation • Payment System • Advertising 	Mobile applications, e.g., for online taxi payments, finding EV charging stations, etc.
2.	 <p>GREEN GOODS</p> <p>Green Goods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture • Social enterprise • Agribusiness • Livestock and poultry • Agritech 	Using technology for diagnostic services and the streamlined management of integrated poultry services.

No.	Enterprise	Products/Services	Technology Utilisation
3.	 LTS Venture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social enterprise • Finance • Rural development • Financial inclusion • Banking software • Banking tech • Fintech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business advice and risk management for banking • AI and machine learning to improve loan decisions • Creating and maintaining a digital village bank platform.
4.	 The Makerbox Lao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture • Energy • Robotics • Social enterprise • Consulting • Internet of Things • Telecommunications 	Software and hardware engineering
5.	 Cofarm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture • Hospitality • Logistics/supply chains • Restaurant management systems • Agritech 	Using technology to manage agricultural supply chains.
6.	 Startnovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulting • Startups • Training and coaching • Training skills • Strategic consulting 	Online platform for teaching, training, and consulting with customers.

Source: Author, using data collected from interviews with the enterprises and the current market.

In addition, food delivery platforms in Lao PDR are growing very quickly recently. Despite high service fees, these applications are popular amongst the Lao people. Well-known food delivery applications include GoTeddy, Foodpanda, My Delivery, E-Gets Food and Drink Delivery, and Hungry Delivery.

In recent years, the Lao government, through cooperation with the private sector and international organisations, has organised startup competition events, such as hackathons, eco-entrepreneurship marathons (Ecothon), and startup weekends, with the purpose of

promoting and encouraging new startup businesses in the country. There have been 600 participants in these activities (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2022). In addition, the MOIC and the Ministry of SMEs and Startups of the Republic of Korea entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance cooperation for exchanging personnel and technologies and providing expertise to facilitate startups and SMEs (Vientiane Times, 2022). Thus, it is expected that the capabilities of Lao startups will be strengthened and promoted by the Lao government.

D. Challenges and obstacles

It is undeniable that the development and promotion of MSMEs, particularly startup business in Lao PDR, are still underperforming. According to the MSME Development Plan 2021-2025, the challenges and obstacles can be summarised as follows.

1) The entrepreneur ecosystem in Lao PDR is nascent

The availability of education or training centres for developing entrepreneurial skills is limited. This is further compounded by a lack of fundamental infrastructure, human resource development, and related legislation.

2) Financial inclusion

Many MSMEs lack access to financial services. This is due to interest rates from financial institutions and the requirement for collateral for loan, which is difficult for MSMEs or startup entrepreneurs in the early stages of their businesses.

3) Lack of technology and innovation development

Many entrepreneurs have limited knowledge and funding to access technology and innovation for business operations. Whilst they may use basic technology, such as Microsoft Office, email, or social networks, these skills are insufficient for effectively operating a business.

4) Limited access to business support services

Although business support centres are provided by governmental agencies, they still face limitations terms of quantity and quality. For example, training topics are not yet tailored to business development needs, and information about training courses is not widely advertised. As a result, many entrepreneurs fail to realise the importance of business support services.

5) Marketing

Most MSMEs heavily rely on domestic market, which is very small. As a result, the potential customer base for their products or services is very limit. Whilst government has been trying to support these business sectors in expanding into international markets, many MSMEs lack the necessary knowledge and funding to access these markets.

6) Business operation environment

The procedures for starting a business in Lao PDR are complex and time-consuming. As a result, many enterprises operate without business licenses or formal registration.

7) Entrepreneurial culture

Lao culture is strongly influenced by agriculture and the agricultural cycle. Many workers return to their hometowns during planting and harvesting seasons, leading to labour shortages in many business sectors. Moreover, entrepreneurship is not a profession that parents commonly encourage their children to pursue. Most families push their children to pursue university degrees and work as white-collar workers or government employees (Roosmalen, Phodsavang, and Emerging Market Consulting, 2019).

8) Taxation and financial supports from the government

Whilst there are various policies for supporting MSMEs and startup businesses, the implementation of these policies remains ineffective.

(4) Current status of traditional crafts

The handicrafts sector in Lao PDR is the second-largest source of rural employment after agriculture. The majority of handicrafts are produced in rural and home-based settings, relying on traditional skills such as weaving, sewing, and wood carving. These crafts typically do not require formal education or training from industrial or technical sectors. Since handicrafts are normally produced at home and primarily produced by women, production aligns well with their living conditions. As a result, Lao handicrafts are not only a significant source of income for people in rural areas but also a source of cultural pride (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2021).

Lao government recognises that the handicrafts sector is essential for the country's economy. Consequently, the MOIC, as the responsible authority for this sector, issued the **Industry and Handicrafts Development Plan 2021-2025** as a guideline for developing the sector. The plan aims to promote handicrafts and improve product quality to create local jobs and preserve national traditions and culture.

Several pieces of legislation have been issued to provide principles and measures for protecting and promoting the handicrafts sector in Lao PDR. The primary law is the Law on Handicraft No. 02/NA, dated 25 July 2008 (**Handicraft Law**), which defines the characteristics and types of handicrafts and outlines measures and policies for their promotion and development. In addition, various subordinate legislations have been enacted to implement the Handicraft Law and the government's policies. Examples include the Decision on Lao National Handicraft Branding No. 0144/MOIC, dated 31 January 2024; the Decision on Handicraft Groups and Cooperatives No. 355/MOIC, dated 4 October 2022; and the Decision on Handicraft Promotion Centers No. 1227/MOIC, dated 31 December 2020.

To support the implementation of these regulations, in March 2024, the MOIC, supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), officially launched the Lao National Handicraft Branding. This initiative aims to empower local handicraft producers to increase the quality of the products so they can compete more effectively with other countries on the global stage. It is expected that the Lao National Handicraft Branding will help promote Lao cultural heritage, as represented by its handicrafts, whilst also raising awareness of the country's cultural legacy. In turn, this is expected to stimulate the tourism sector and generate more income for the country (USAID, 2024). However, based on information from the Department of Trade and Handicraft Promotion, MOIC, there have been no products submitted for the Lao National Handicraft Branding as of yet.

A. Characteristics and types of Lao handicrafts

Pursuant to Article 3 of the Handicraft Law, the characteristics of Lao handicrafts are identified as follows:

- a) Primarily made by hand, with some machinery used when necessary;
- b) High value in art, cultural identity, and economic significance;
- c) Unique identity;
- d) Produces for consumption and trade purposes;
- e) Representing national, local, and ethnic identity; and
- f) Reflecting chronological history.

Generally, Lao handicrafts have very strong local relevance, with many made in specific villages and regions based on their natural resources and ethnical history. The products are highly localised and unique. This uniqueness has led to the Lao government's 'One District One Product' (ODOP) campaign.

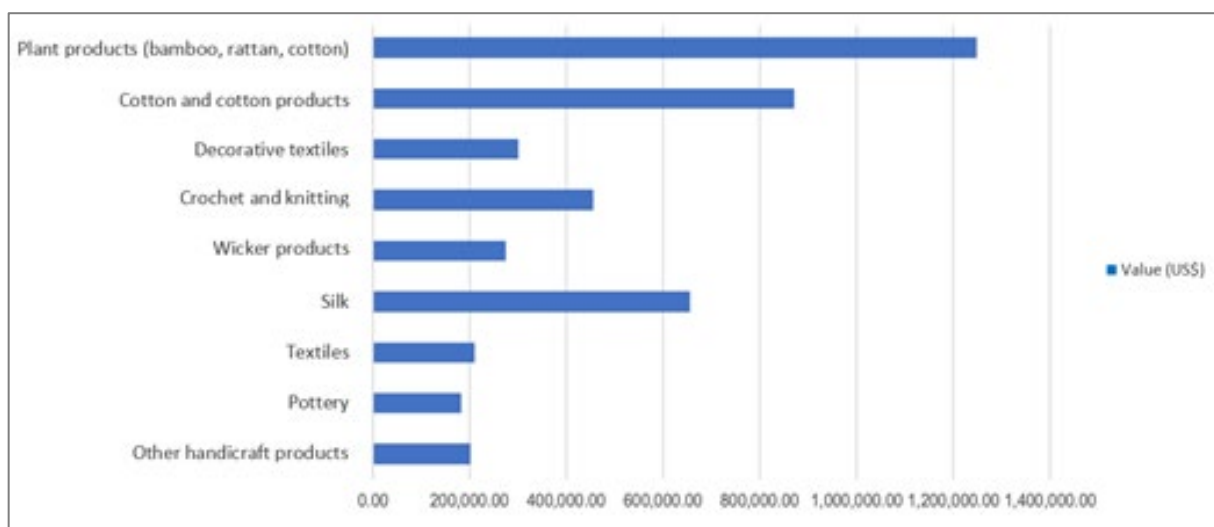
Under the Handicraft Law, there are seven main handicraft sectors. Some specific activities are designated as 'Conserved Handicrafts', which are required to be maintained and protected to prevent extinction or destruction (Article 15 of the Handicraft Law). The conserved handicrafts are as follows:

- a) **Traditional textiles:** Weaving, natural dyes, silk, sewing, design, knitting, ikat;
- b) **Wood, rattan, bamboo, woody vine:** Basket weaving and wood carving;
- c) **Traditional paper:** Production of mulberry bark paper (Saa paper) and straw paper;
- d) **Metal and non-metal arts:** Forging, casting, and carving animal horns;
- e) **Clay:** Modelling clay and production of brick and other items;
- f) **Jewellery and decorative objects:** Silversmithing, goldsmithing with traditional patterns, and sword forging; and
- g) **Traditional food and beverages:** Production of Lao paste, riverweed, and traditional beverages.

The textiles, apparel, and leather subsectors are the largest contributors to manufacturing employment in Lao PDR (World Bank, 2022b).

In terms of exports, even though the data obtained by the United States Agency for International Development from the Department of Industry and Handicrafts did not categorise handicraft products according to the above seven categories, it is evident that textiles (including textiles, silk, decorative textiles, and cotton products) and bamboo, wood, and vine products (including plant and wicker products) make up the majority of exported handicraft products. Figure 3.6 illustrates the export value of Lao handicrafts during 2016–2020.

Figure 3.6. Export Value of Lao Handicrafts During 2016–2020



Source: USAID (2021).

However, it is important to note that the mentioned statistics might not demonstrate the precise figures because the majority of Lao handicraft exports are from small enterprises, and their export data may not have been completely reported to the central authority for statistical collection purposes. Therefore, it is expected that the numbers for these sectors is greater than those reported. Similarly to the domestic consumption statistics, no precise official data are available showing how big the market is (USAID, 2021).

B. Key constraints for handicrafts sector development

Even though Lao handicrafts are well known and consumed domestically, the domestic market is very small and has many limitations. Expanding the market and developing the production of traditional crafts is a significant challenge for Lao local craftsmanship. Key constraints for the development of the Lao handicrafts market are outline below (USAID, 2021).

1) Legal and governmental constraints

Although some legislation has been promulgated to promote and support Lao local enterprises, these laws and regulations have not yet been fully implemented. For example, the Handicraft Law stipulates a general concept for the government to endorse policies to support and promote the development of Lao handicrafts, including funding, taxation, marketing support, technology support, advisory services, and training centres. However, these provisions are vague, and their implementation seems to be ineffective.

2) Export-related constraints

Expanding from the domestic to the international market involves several obstacles. Firstly, competition from regional countries such as China, Thailand, and Viet Nam, which have greater capacity and resources, makes it difficult for Lao PDR to compete. In addition, many Lao local enterprises lack international business experience, especially in international business practices and e-commerce.

3) Production constraints

Despite the high quality of Lao handicraft products, local craftsmen face significant challenges in meeting international market expectations. For example, product variations often occur when items are made by multiple people. Many local producers operate in small groups in their villages with limited manpower. As a result, fulfilling large orders or meeting specific delivery deadlines is particularly difficult.

4) Marketing constraints

From the global market perspective, Lao handicrafts and branding are not widely recognised compared to other countries producing similar products. This lack of recognition makes it difficult for Lao enterprises to attract international customers, especially wholesale and export customers. Additionally, Lao PDR still lacks professionals specialised in digital marketing and communications who can attract new customers from abroad to the Lao market. These professionals include product photographers, copywriters, and content writers with expertise in storytelling and marketing.

5) IP Rights

According to the Industry and Handicraft Development Plan 2021-2025, the Lao handicraft sector has faced issues with IP right infringement. Counterfeit textile products from China, featuring patterns similar to Lao traditional designs, have been sold at low prices. These products have been widely available in popular markets in Vientiane and other provinces. This issue has directly and indirectly affected local craftsmen and business operators who preserve traditional handicrafts.

To tackle this problem, Lao authorities formed a responsible committee to oversee, monitor, and resolve these issues. The committee has intercepted and banned the importation of products from China with patterns similar to Lao traditional products. Additionally, they have been promoting IP rights awareness amongst craftsmen, encouraging them to register their silk and cotton patterns as IP to protect them as

government-preserved handicrafts. Furthermore, the committee proposed a policy to promote and register relevant intellectual property as part of the national heritage (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2021). Unfortunately, despite these efforts, the problem still continues, and the authorities continue to work on resolving it.

(6) Current status of other areas for potential branding: Tourism

In 2023, Lao PDR's economic growth was approximately 3.7%, largely benefiting from the recovery of the services sector. Apart from the mining industry, tourism and transport and logistics services also supported economic growth in 2023 (World Bank, 2024). The services sector accounted for 35.8% of GDP and grew by 5.6% in 2023 (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2024). The services sector comprises various activities, but this section will focus on the tourism sector, which holds potential for the Lao economy as well as branding developments.

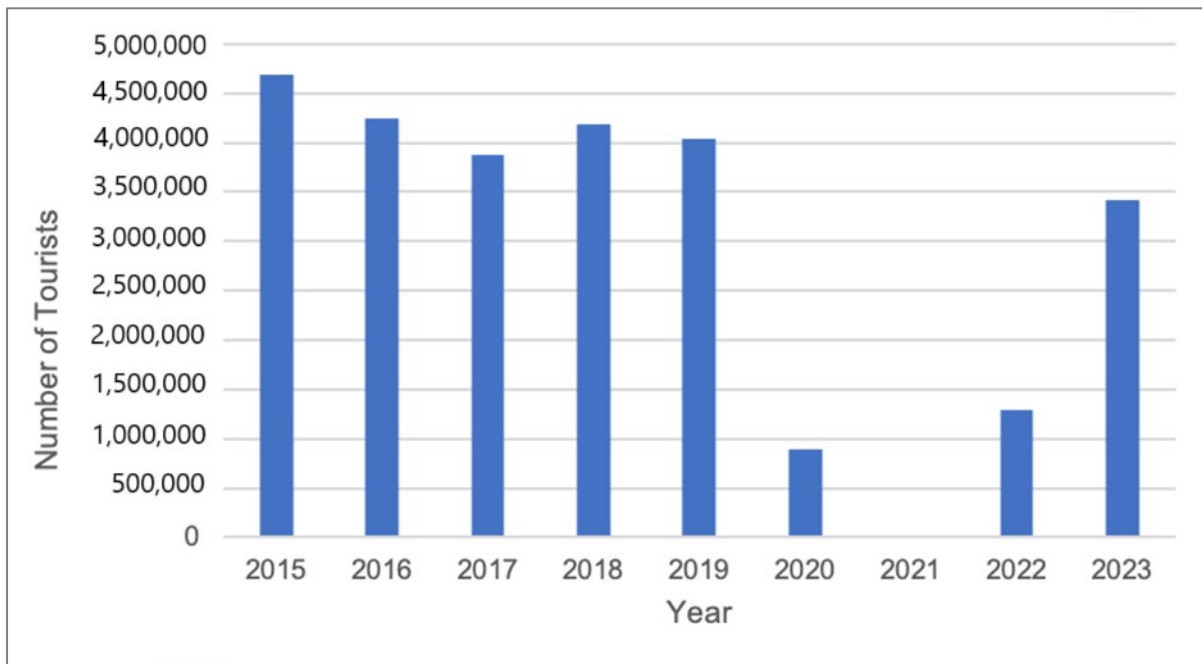
Tourists often visit Lao PDR not only to explore its famous sites but also to participate in its annual festivals. Most festivals are connected to Buddhism and the rice farming cycle. Famous festivals in Lao PDR includes Lao New Year (in April), Boun Bang Fai (in May), Boun Khao Padabdin (in August), Boun Ok Phansa and the Boat Racing Festival (in October), and That Luang Festival (in November). In addition, the main destinations for tourists include World Heritage Sites, such as the ancient town of Luang Prabang, Vat Phou Temple in Champasak Province, and the Plain of Jars in Xiengkhaung Province. Notable, Lao PDR is renowned as one of the world's leading ecotourism destinations.

A. Tourism in Lao PDR and COVID-19

Before COVID-19, tourism was a key contributor to the Lao economy and was one of the largest sources of foreign exchange earnings, second only to mining and electricity in 2019 (Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, 2021). The Lao tourism industry was on the rise, with a growing number of tourists, particularly from ASEAN and Asia-Pacific countries. It was estimated that tourism contributed approximately 5% to GDP and provided employment for approximately 19% of the Lao workforce (World Bank, 2023a). Lao PDR heavily relied on international tourists rather than domestic tourists.

However, during the COVID-19 outbreak, the number of tourists in Lao PDR dropped significantly. As a result, the tourism industry was devastated, and many businesses had to temporarily cease operations during the lockdown. Whilst many businesses were able to resume operations later, others permanently closed during that period. The impact of COVID-19 was particularly severe in tourism-dependent cities, especially Luang Prabang and Vangviang, where the local economy heavily relied on the tourism industry. Lao PDR started to reopen in May 2022. Although tourists have been returning, the number of tourists in 2023 had not yet reached pre-pandemic levels. Figure 3.7 illustrates the number of inbound tourists in Lao PDR from 2015 to 2023.

Figure 3.7. Number of Inbound Tourists in Lao PDR During 2015–2023



Source: Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism.

In 2023, the number of inbound tourists increased by 164% (Lao Statistics Bureau, 2024). The Lao government recognised that the recovery of tourism industry was crucial. Therefore, the government launched the 'Lao PDR Tourism COVID-19 Recovery Roadmap 2021-2025' as a guide to implement policies to support the tourism industry during the post-COVID recovery period. The Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism is the main authority responsible for overseeing the recovery of the tourism industry. In this regard, the roadmap covers three main themes as follows:

- a) Providing economic relief to protect jobs and interventions to revive the tourism sector;
- b) Building confidence amongst travellers and strengthening the sector; and
- c) Upgrading, expanding, and diversifying tourism products, services and markets.

B. Digital technology in tourism sector

The rise of digital technology and social media has become increasingly important for the tourism sector in Lao PDR. Travel content related to Lao PDR is mainly produced by volunteer bloggers who use their own equipment to create content. Initially, these bloggers may be self-funded, but as they gain popularity, they can earn advertising fees from sponsors. With a growing number of followers on social media, they gain influence and can encourage tourists to visit their recommended destinations. A survey indicates that Facebook and Instagram are the main content sources, highlighting potential for Lao PDR to capitalise on social media platforms to attract tourists and promote travel destinations (World Bank, 2023a).

Realising the power of social media, the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, in collaboration with public-private partnerships, launched an official Facebook page for the 'Lao Thiao Lao' campaign to encourage domestic tourism. This campaign was originally planned to run from September 2020 to January 2021, but it still remains active until present. The page showcases interesting travel destinations, popular foods, accommodations, and activities in every province. It also features online competitions with prizes to attract local people to participate in the campaign. Thus, it has become an effective channel for boosting the tourism industry in Lao PDR.

C. Nature-based tourism

Lao PDR is rich in natural resources, and the Lao government has focused on nature-based tourism as a strategic focus for the country's growth and COVID-19 recovery. Nature-based tourism refers to a wide range of tourism activities involving natural resources and, sometimes, the cultural heritage of communities. Examples include, kayaking, trekking, mountain biking, and ziplining. It can also involve educational experiences, such as visiting local craft centres, sampling traditional food, or participating in religious festivals (World Bank, 2023a).

Lao PDR has 20 national protected areas, covering almost 14% of the country. These areas are home to various ecotourism attractions, including tropical monsoon forests and diverse wildlife. The Lao government recognises that the protected areas have potential for economic growth and can generate income for the country and local communities. This is because many protected areas are located in remote areas with high poverty rates and low agricultural production. The development of the tourism sector in these protected areas would benefit economic growth and poverty reduction, as well as increase the quality of life for people living nearby (World Bank, 2021).

According to the Tourism Marketing Department, Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, the recommended destinations for the nature-based tourism and trekking include:

- a) Luang Namtha Province: Visiting villages of ethnic groups living in mountain forests;
- b) Luang Prabang Province: Trekking and enjoying various natural experiences, such as cruising and elephants;
- c) Xayaboury Province: Known as the capital of elephants;
- d) Vangvieng: A famous tourist spot located beside the Nam Song River, featuring stunning limestone mountains and caves;
- e) Bolikhamxay Province: Visiting wild elephants in Phou Khao Khouay;
- f) Khammouane Province: Visiting the Nam Hinboun River, which flows through steep mountains to create the limestone Konglor Cave;
- g) Savannakhet Province: Visiting villages of ethnic groups living in forests;
- h) Champasak Province: Visiting famous waterfalls and experiencing buffalo and elephant bathing at Kiet Ngong.

3. Case study

This section highlights leading brands of products in various industries and some registered geography indication (GI) products in Lao PDR, considering their background, branding concept, marketing aims, branding methods, and the effectiveness of their branding. In addition to the information acquired from direct interviews with the responsible persons for each targeted brand and GI product, relevant details are also gathered through internet research, official websites, and published articles.

3.1. Khamphouvong

History of establishment

Khamphouvong is a brand that has three main underlying businesses: (i) Khamphouvong Store (a gold jewellery store); (ii) KPV Gold (selling gold bars); and (iii) Easy Gold (an application for saving, buying, selling, and withdrawing gold). Amongst these businesses, Khamphouvong Store was the first to be established by Mr. Phouvong Phamisith in 1983 in Saiyabouly Province, followed by KPV Gold and Easy Gold. All three businesses are duly registered with the MOIC.

In the early days, Mr. Phouvong Phamisith, the founder of Khamphouvong, was a skilled goldsmith selling small pieces of gold in Saiyabouly Province. The founder gained knowledge in the field by practicing craftsmanship with friends for a few years before deciding to establish the first gold store, Khamphouvong Store, in 1990 at the Morning Market in Vientiane. Since the gold jewellery sold at Khamphouvong Store was made of 99% pure gold, rendering the selling price higher than general gold jewellery sold at that time, the store did not gain much attention at first. It took three years from 1990 for Khamphouvong Store to be recognised by customers who acknowledged the uniqueness and specialty of 99% gold jewellery. Khamphouvong Store then gradually became a leading player in the jewellery store industry, demonstrated by the fact that there are seven branches and several distributing agents of Khamphouvong Store across Lao PDR in 2024. Notably, the name of the brand 'Khamphouvong' originated from the name of the founder.

Figure 3.8. Examples of the Products of Khamphouvong



Source: Khamphouvong Jewellery.

Branding concept

The distinctiveness that makes Khamphouvong a flagship gold brand in Lao PDR is reflected in three main factors: innovation, specialty and traditional design, and customer orientation. These elements have allowed the brand to gradually achieve market acceptance and customer recognition in a sustainable manner.

Specifically, innovation is demonstrated through Khamphouvong's dynamic approach to consistently adjusting its business operations to align with global trends. One key adjustment is the implementation of innovative operations in both manufacturing and service delivery. Khamphouvong manufactures its gold jewellery using sophisticated technology in combination with special craftsmanship. To connect with customers more efficiently, Khamphouvong offers gold saving, buying, selling, and withdrawing services within Easy Gold, an app that allows customers to save money and purchase gold in real time. The focus on innovation reinforces Khamphouvong's position as a premium gold brand rather than a general one in the market.

In terms of specialty and traditional design, each piece of gold jewellery sold at Khamphouvong Store is crafted from 99% pure gold in a contemporary Lao traditional style that can only be purchased in Lao PDR. Although Khamphouvong Store offers a variety of jewellery, including diamond products, its signature designs maintain a strong sense of Lao identity. Additionally, Khamphouvong Store has expanded beyond jewellery to include other gold-related products and services, such as KPV Gold and Easy Gold, to increase convenience for customers who want to save, buy, sell, and withdraw gold. These efforts highlight why the domestic gold market consistently keeps its attention on Khamphouvong.

Another essential concept for Khamphouvong is customer orientation. The brand prioritises customer service as a core business achievement. The brand, therefore, provides training to its employees and offers after-sales services to customers to ensure that the standards and characteristics of the brand itself and the future gold industry will remain high.

Marketing aims

In 2024, Khamphouvong aims to effectively expand its market in Lao PDR and develop its services, business operations, and products to meet global trends. Whilst entering foreign markets is a long-term vision, this goal is classified as a prospective plan. One of Khamphouvong's prominent objectives is not only to keep developing its business to ensure stability in the gold industry but also to preserve industry standards for present and future generations.

Regarding market expansion in Lao PDR, the brand envisions continuous development by adopting innovative manufacturing techniques from foreign countries with established uniform standards. To ensure sustainability in its marketing concept, the brand will also

consistently bring in new technology to respond to the changing demand from customer, whilst customer service will be improved over time.

Foreign market entry remains a long-term goal for Khamphouvong, as the brand aspires to elevate Lao PDR gold to the global level. However, in 2024, the brand recognises that the export process is relatively complex. Therefore, the primary focus will be on expanding its presence at the national level. This reflects the brand's marketing aim of entering the foreign market in the long term.

Method of branding

Khamphouvong is operated by a team with boundless enthusiasm. The approaches taken by the brand to maximise the value of its product in the marketplace can be categorised into two main methods: customer engagement through innovative methods and advertising.

As a luxury brand Khamphouvong positioned in the upmarket segment, customer engagement is an essential element for ensuring customer satisfaction. Khamphouvong maintains relationships with customers by providing standardised service and aftersales support, such as offering free product exchanges within one month. Additionally, the brand utilises innovative channels to enhance market engagement, exhibited by its business line, 'Easy Gold', an application platform that enables customers to save money and purchase gold bars instantly. The brand attributes its market acceptance and business growth to its long history and the trust established through consistent customer service.

Advertisement is another crucial element enabling Khamphouvong to gain market interest. The brand effectively utilises online platforms, such as Facebook and TikTok, to attract customers without boundaries. Regarding tie-in advertising, the brand collaborates with beauty pageants, such as Miss Grand Lao PDR, for showcasing its gold jewellery, presents its products at relevant exhibitions, and supports charity projects. With the precious value of its products, Khamphouvong can effectively and directly communicate the brand's core values through these forms of advertising.

Effectiveness of the branding

The establishment of seven branches and several distributing agents across Lao PDR by 2024, demonstrates Khamphouvong's success, which exceeds the founder's initial expectations. Khamphouvong is now regarded as a leading gold brand in the country. This recognition is evidenced by its receipt of the ASEAN Enterprise Special Recognition Award in 2017 for its outstanding potential as a business leader in Lao PDR (Business Inquirer, 2017). Although the brand has not yet entered foreign markets through export channels, it is effectively recognised in Lao PDR and is deemed a reputable gold brand by foreign entities. In other words, Khamphouvong is at a stage of maturity in the domestic market and may grow further through strategic export trade.

Regarding branding and trademarks, an online search conducted via the DIP database in June 2024 confirmed that Khamphouvong has registered its trademarks 'PHOUVONG JEWELRY' and 'KPV' with the DIP. Applications for these trademarks were filed on 24 June 2013 and 25 October 2017, respectively. The trademarks were registered under Class 14 (precious metals and their alloys; jewellery, precious and semi-precious stones; horological and chronometric instruments) of the Nice Classification on 14 November 2014 and 1 October 2018, with protection terms expiring on 14 November 2024 and 1 October 2028, respectively. On a separate note, Khamphouvong encountered intellectual property infringement when a store sold products that were not part of its brand. This issue was resolved amicably through negotiation, allowing the store to sell Khamphouvong products in exchange for permission to use the trademark.

Figure 3.9. Registered Trademarks: 'PHOUVONG JEWELRY' and 'KPV'



Source: DIP Database.

3.2. Sinouk Coffee

History of establishment

Sinouk Coffee is a coffee brand chiefly under Sinouk Coffee Sole Co., Ltd., a sole limited company officially registered with the MOIC. The company's registered office is located in Somsanouk Village, Hadxayfong District, Vientiane. According to the National Enterprise Database and market recognition, in addition to its coffee products, Sinouk Coffee operates several business lines, such as cafés, barista classes, and coffee tours.

Figure 3.10. Examples of Sinouk Coffee's Products



Source: Sinouk Coffee.

The brand was established in 1994 by Mr. Sinouk Sisombat, driven by three primary motivations and philosophy: (i) starting a business in the Southern part of Lao PDR, (ii) creating social impact through job creation for rural communities to provide alternative and sustainable sources of income, and (iii) developing a product or exploiting commodities with export potential.

With the intention of contributing to the southern part of Lao PDR, Sinouk Coffee not only grows green beans on its plantation but also engages in direct trade with Lao coffee farmers on the Bolaven Plateau. This region, situated at an altitude of 1,000 metres, offers an ideal environment for coffee cultivation due to its cool climate, consistent rainfall, and volcanic, fertile, organic soil, which together guarantee optimal growing conditions (Sinouk Coffee, 2020).

Branding concept

Sinouk Coffee is highly recognised and considered a leading coffee brand in Lao PDR due to its innovation and quality in specialty coffee, its status as a Lao brand with a long history at the international level, and its strong farmer community orientation.

The innovation and quality of its specialty coffee are demonstrated through its organic planting and coffee roasting processes. Selected coffee beans must meet strict standards. The green beans are cultivated on the Bolaven Plateau in southern Lao PDR, where the geography provides the optimal conditions for achieving beans with an ideal shape and weight. This enables the natural production of the best quality fully washed Lao Arabica premium beans (Sinouk Coffee, 2020). For the roasting process, the brand uses only specialised roasting machines in addition to precise time and temperature control and the skills of expert craftsmen. Today, Sinouk Coffee sells several styles of coffee beans, including French roast, Italian roast, drip coffee, and coffee capsules. These elements establish Sinouk Coffee as a prominent specialty coffee brand in the market.

A key attribute is that Sinouk Coffee is a Lao brand with a long history since 1994 that supplies quality coffee beans to worldwide coffee connoisseurs. Sinouk Coffee plants, purchases, and roasts its coffee beans in Lao PDR, leveraging the country's geography to cultivate fertile beans under suitable conditions. Successfully showcasing a local agricultural product from Lao PDR on the global stage is a key strength of the brand's conceptual framework.

Lastly, improving farmers' livelihoods remains the primary objective of the founder and is a defining aspect of the brand's identity. When selecting Sinouk Coffee, customers are aware of the source of the coffee, and have a connection with local farming and farmers. The simultaneous growth of Sinouk Coffee and the development of farming communities is a key characteristic of the brand.

Marketing Aims

Despite being recognized as a leading coffee brand in Lao PDR, Sinouk Coffee continues to seek market expansion both domestically and internationally to enhance brand awareness

and increase accessibility for target customers. Establishing a strong franchise system for Café Sinouk, the brand's coffee shop, is also a key goal for 2024.

In terms of market expansion, the brand plans to create a sub-brand, diversify its product line (e.g., instant sweet coffee), and collaborate with other entities domestically and internationally. One of the objectives is to reach customers in a more down-market segment. In 2024, the brand is coordinating with local gas stations and planning to enter contracts to establish coffee shops at these locations. To support its export goals, Sinouk Coffee is actively seeking a partner capable of managing the necessary paperwork for exporting the brand's products to foreign markets. Additionally, the brand prioritizes employee development, as well as ensuring quality, taste, and the integrity of its brand identity.

Strengthening the franchise system for Café Sinouk is another key objective for 2024. Café Sinouk, where global coffee connoisseurs enjoy the brand's offerings, currently operates 14 branches across Lao PDR, primarily in Vientiane Capital (Sinouk Coffee, 2020). The brand aims to further highlight its expertise and specialty in Lao coffee by expanding Café Sinouk's franchising operations to cater to both Lao and foreign visitors.

Method of Branding

Sinouk Coffee is positioned as a flagship brand for Lao coffee through branding methods that can be classified into three main strategies: local connection, specialty coffee identity, and partnership enhancement.

First, the strong local connection between Sinouk Coffee and the farmers of the Bolaven Plateau is evident in the sourcing and selection of coffee beans. Local farmers are integral members of the coffee network, allowing Sinouk Coffee to acquire high-quality green beans. This connection not only drives prosperity within the industry but also enhances customer trust in the brand.

Second, as a specialty coffee brand, Sinouk Coffee does more than sell coffee beans and related products. It offers coffee machines, equipment, gifts, barista accessories, training classes, and coffee tourism experiences. By aligning all coffee-related activities with its brand identity, Sinouk Coffee cements its position as a specialty coffee leader in the industry, creating a clear and distinct brand image.

Lastly, to enhance brand recognition and market share, the brand employs a partnership enhancement strategy by strengthening Café Sinouk's franchising system. Franchising makes Sinouk Coffee more visible and accessible to customers, whether they are coffee connoisseurs or casual drinkers. Moreover, this type of partnership fosters corporate involvement, helping to elevate the Lao coffee industry as a whole. Through these efforts, Sinouk Coffee aims to remain one of the top market leaders in Lao PDR.

Effectiveness of the branding

Sinouk Coffee considers itself an industry leader and a proud flagship brand of Lao PDR, serving as one of the country's key ambassadors on the international stage (Sinouk Coffee,

2020). Whilst the brand continues to focus on enhancing export performance and diversifying its product offerings, it has already achieved high recognition within Lao PDR and is gradually making strides into the international market. This indicates that the brand is effectively established domestically and is steadily gaining global acknowledgment.

Regarding branding and trademarks, Sinouk Coffee Sole Co., Ltd. has registered three trademarks with the DIP: 'Sinouk with logo', 'Café Sinouk with logo', and 'Sinouk DRIP COFFEE'. The applications were filed on 21 February 2019, and the trademarks were registered under Class 30 (including coffee) of the Nice Classification on 21 November 2019, with protection valid until 21 February 2029. As of May 2024, no IP infringements against Sinouk Coffee's registered trademarks have been reported.

Figure 3.11. Registered Trademarks: 'Sinouk with Logo', 'Café Sinouk with Logo', and 'Sinouk DRIP COFFEE'



Source: Sinouk Coffee.

3.3. Piggy B

History of establishment

Piggy B is a brand under Saikhong Confectionery Factory Sole Co., Ltd., a company officially registered with the MOIC. Its registered office is located in Xaythany District, Vientiane.

Piggy B primarily sells sandwich-like products and related products made of bread. The brand's first store was established in 2019 in a market owned by the founder's family. It was initially set up by the founder based on his experiences of travelling to foreign countries and discovering kebabs. The founder started the brand with the idea that kebabs could be made in a Lao style in a way that was easier to eat. Lao baguette (khao jee), a food associated with local people with a long history, was transformed into a triangular shape to add uniqueness to the brand whilst preserving the traditional food of Lao PDR. Notably, the name 'Piggy B' was thought up by the founder because the name is memorable, reflects the main ingredient used, and is cute.

The brand was founded by an individual with a solid background in the food industry, gained through experience in the family business. This expertise has been a key factor in enabling Piggy B to compete effectively in the prepared meal industry from its inception.

Figure 3.12. Examples of the Products of Piggy B



Source: Piggy B.

Branding concept

Piggy B embodies the concept of providing prepared meals that are easy to eat on the go, high in quality and taste, and affordably priced, all whilst preserving the traditional dietary preferences of Lao people. The brand's target customers range from school-age children to the elderly, including corporate clients who often purchase products in bulk.

A key strength of Piggy B lies in the distinctiveness, quality, and taste of its products. The brand relies less on intensive advertising and more on word-of-mouth marketing. Piggy B introduces a unique triangular sandwich design that is both memorable and convenient for busy customers. The sandwiches are crafted from bread made with a special recipe, pork prepared using a proprietary method developed by the brand, and select ingredients imported from abroad. Most of the ingredients align with the eating habits of the Lao people, ensuring an immediate connection with customers. Piggy B takes pride in offering delicious and high-quality prepared food that reflects Lao traditions whilst catering to the fast-paced needs of modern consumers.

The brand ensures its products are priced affordably, making them accessible to a diverse customer base. The perceived value of its sandwiches, given their quality and taste, has made Piggy B a popular choice for corporate events and other bulk purchases, appealing to a wide range of customers.

Marketing aims

As of early 2024, Piggy B has expanded its franchise operations into Thailand, with branches in Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Udon Thani, and Nong Khai, and plans to establish branches in additional provinces soon. The brand's long-term goal is to expand its presence across nine other ASEAN countries. Additionally, Piggy B aims to diversify its product offerings whilst maintaining or exceeding its current quality and taste standards.

Whilst the brand has not set a specific timeline for achieving its expansion goals, it is committed to adapting its business operations to align with global market trends. ASEAN countries serve as the initial target for expansion, with the ultimate objective of entering the global market. Alongside sandwiches and other bread-based products, Piggy B is exploring new product lines to attract both domestic and international consumers.

Method of Branding

Piggy B communicates its identity as a provider of quick, high-quality, and delicious meals through promotional efforts and community-oriented initiatives, leveraging social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok to reach a broader audience.

In terms of promotions and community engagement, Piggy B frequently organises monthly campaigns to foster long-term customer loyalty. These initiatives include giveaway contests with significant prizes or discounts on selected products, depending on the promotional period. Such strategies help Piggy B strengthen public engagement and position itself as a convenient meal option in the minds of consumers.

The brand also uses social media to showcase its products in a relaxed and engaging style through short video clips. This approach has proven effective in driving social media engagement. Piggy B believes that, in addition to traditional marketing, word-of-mouth marketing plays a crucial role in its success. This can be achieved by consistently delivering excellent taste and quality through sustainable manufacturing methods. The founder emphasises that product quality and taste are more critical to the brand's success than aggressive marketing campaigns.

Effectiveness of the branding

As of early 2024, Piggy B has established branches in multiple cities across Lao PDR and Thailand. Considering the brand's aspiration to expand into nine other ASEAN countries, it can be concluded that Piggy B is well-recognised in the domestic market and is in the early stages of international expansion.

Regarding its trademark, Piggy B registered the trademark "PIGGY B together with logo" with the DIP in 2021. The trademark was registered for goods and services under Class 43 (services for providing food and drink; temporary accommodation) and Class 30 (which includes flour and preparations made from cereals; bread, pastries, and confectionery) of the Nice Classification in 2022, with a protection term expiring in 2031. As of May 2024, there have been no reports of intellectual property infringement against Piggy B.

Figure 3.13. Registered Trademark of Piggy B



Source: DIP Database.

3.4. Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk

History of establishment

Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk is a branded product under Lao Agro Industry Co., Ltd., a company officially registered with the MOIC, with its registered office located in Kern Village, Thoulakhom District, Vientiane.

Lao Agro Industry Co., Ltd. was established in 1995 and operates in agricultural food, such as pickled ginger, pickled garlic, and pickled lettuce. Due to changing market demand, the company began manufacturing canned corn for export to Europe, and found out that there was leftover substandard corn from the manufacturing process. The company then turned this corn into sweet corn milk in 2001 and later branded the product as 'Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk'.

The brand 'Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk' was established based on the founder's background, as they were born in Kern Village, where the factory is also located, and the corn is sourced from the surrounding area. The founder's primary intention is also to promote corn, a renowned local agricultural product. As Kern Village is well-known for its salt and zoo, the founder aims to make local corn famous for its taste and quality as well.

Figure 3.14. Examples of Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk Products



Source: Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk.

Branding concept

Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk is manufactured, controlled, and primarily distributed by Lao Agro Industry Co., Ltd. The corn used for production is a special type that must be freshly harvested by the local community and processed directly by Lao Agro Industry Co., Ltd. in Kern Village. The company aims to differentiate its product from other corn milks in the market by maintaining exceptional taste and quality. Notably, the product is gradually reaching the international level, having been trial-launched in China.

With its reliance on local corn, Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk benefits from a strong reputation built on a long-standing history of trust and quality. As one of several products offered by Lao Agro Industry Co., Ltd. – including palm seed, pickled lettuce, pineapple juice, coconut juice, and canned corn – Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk has not required significant promotional efforts to gain recognition in the agricultural food industry.

In addition, the brand values customer relationships and engagement, which are maintained through occasional promotions and free product distributions at various events in Lao PDR.

Marketing aims

Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk products are currently sold in major convenience store chains, such as Big C and 7-Eleven, with positive customer feedback. Whilst the company has not outlined specific long-term marketing objectives, it plans to expand exports to neighbouring countries such as China and Viet Nam, where transportation can be effectively managed. Domestically, the company intends to increase its presence by expanding the number of distribution agents and investing in advertisements.

Moreover, the company aims to promote local Lao agricultural products on the international stage by encouraging more local farmers to grow and sell corn to the company.

At present, the company does not plan any significant changes to its marketing strategy, believing the product is already well-established in the market. However, ensuring proper cross-border transportation remains a key focus.

Method of branding

There are two main methods that the company uses to promote and sell Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk products: internal sales and external sales. Regarding internal sales, the company makes direct sales both domestically and internationally. The activities conducted by the company also include online advertisements (specifically on Facebook), offline advertisements, promotional campaigns, and the distribution of free products at certain events. For external sales, the company collaborates with distributing agents and offers them agent deals based on their sales performance.

Regarding brand awareness, the brand is recognised for its genuine taste, derived from local corn grown in Kern Village, which is used to manufacture sweet corn milk. The key elements that make the brand stand out from competitors are its distinctive taste, high quality, nutritional benefits, and the product's longer shelf life. These factors highlight that the carefully selected ingredients play a pivotal role in propelling the brand's success.

Customer orientation and engagement are gradually built by the company's consistent participation in certain Lao festivals and other events, such as Lao New Year and International New Year celebrations. Consequently, customer relationships are considered a critical aspect that the brand prioritizes.

Effectiveness of the branding

According to Lao Agro Industry Co., Ltd., Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk is now a well-recognised brand in Lao PDR, competing successfully in convenience stores such as Big C and 7-Eleven. Regarding exports, the product was first introduced to the Chinese market with a trial shipment of 80,000–100,000 bottles per month.

As such, it can be concluded that the brand enjoys significant recognition within Lao PDR and is in the early stages of transitioning to an international brand.

Branding and trademark

Following the brand's initial success, Lao Agro Industry Co., Ltd. registered the trademark 'BAN KERN SWEETCORN MILK' with the DIP by filing an application on 4 August 2016. The trademark was registered for goods under Class 32 (including non-alcoholic beverages, fruit beverages, and fruit juices) of the Nice Classification on 10 October 2017, with protection valid until 10 October 2027.

To date, no intellectual property infringements against Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk have been reported as of May 2024.

Figure 3.15. Registered Trademark of Ban Kern Sweet Corn Milk



Source: DIP Database.

3.5. Dalone

History of establishment

Dalone is a Lao product brand established in 2019 by Mrs. Phouthaphiang Thongkhampha and officially registered with the MOIC in accordance with Lao law.

The products under the Dalone brand include badminton rackets, shuttlecocks, and sports clothing. The inspiration behind the establishment of the brand stems from the founder's personal background and experience (Dalone, 2004). Initially, Mrs. Phouthaphiang Thongkhampha was a seller of pétanque equipment and was enthusiastic about maintain a healthy lifestyle. Considering her personal interests and ambition to create a reputable brand representing Lao PDR, she became interested in setting up a business in the sports industry. Additionally, at the time of the brand's establishment, the founder noticed that there were not many famous sports brands in Lao PDR. This fact urged the founder to manufacture badminton rackets and related products by coordinating with a manufacturer in China. Notably, Dalone also aims to operate as a business that fully complies with the law.

Figure 3.16. Examples of Dalone Products



Source: Dalone.

Branding concept

Dalone mainly sells badminton rackets, shuttlecocks, and sports clothing through the concept of personal branding to the target customers of children and elderly people. The brand takes pride in being an authentic Lao sports brand that currently covers approximately 70% of the domestic area. Recognition was gained through its affordable prices, the quality of its products, and the way it presents itself to the customer in a lively personal style.

One of the main branding techniques of Dalone is to establish trust between the seller and the customer. Apart from affordable prices and standardised products, the brand also provides aftersales services to ensure that relevant problems are solved in an effective manner to maintain long-lasting relationships with customers. In short, personal branding and trust are the significant branding concepts of Dalone.

Marketing aims

Initially, Dalone aims to expand its market in Lao PDR and neighbouring countries whilst developing product variety and quality. The first cross-border country that Dalone entered in 2023 was Thailand, with the purpose of promoting Lao sports equipment to international audiences and enhancing brand recognition by enabling foreigners to use its products. Currently, there are five locations in Thailand where customers can purchase Dalone products.

Although Dalone has not explicitly set defined long-term criteria for success, the brand sets marketing goals for each period. In 2024, Dalone plans to increase its reach to both foreign and domestic customers, provide more types of products customers, and effectively promote brand recognition. To achieve these goals, the brand is focusing on online marketing and providing more training to its employees. However, to further develop the business, financial aid from relevant domestic and international institutions is a significant factor for the brand at present.

Method of branding

Dalone promotes its products via online and offline advertisements, incorporating technical, sport-related knowledge as one of the indispensable elements of its business operation. The brand carefully designs its badminton rackets, distinguishing them from general equipment available on the market, and consistently integrates practical knowledge gained through experience to drive the brand forward. Despite the superb attention to detail in product manufacturing, the brand keeps the prices of its products at an affordable level to ensure that customers who desire to play badminton will have an opportunity to use high-quality badminton equipment.

The brand's strategy for entering the Thai market is to learn methods for entering the international market from other foreign countries. Dalone's products are sold at five locations in Thailand, allowing foreigners to experiencing the brand's physical products instead of merely viewing them online. Thailand was chosen because it is a neighbouring country of Lao PDR. The main objective of the brand is to learn from a practical rather than theoretical approach.

In terms of distribution, Dalone sells its products directly and through selected selling agents. The enforces strict pricing policies to ensure that customers can purchase the same product at the same price, preventing price undercutting.

Effectiveness of the branding

Although Dalone was officially registered in 2019, its business operations began a few years. There is no fixed criterion for evaluating the branding's effectiveness other than the indication of market progress, demonstrated by the brand's entry into the Thai market in 2023.

Regarding branding and trademarks, Dalone registered its trademark 'Dalone', with the DIP by filing an application on 15 March 2019. The trademark 'Dalone' was registered for goods and services under Class 35 (advertising; business management; business administration; office functions) and Class 39 (transport; packaging and storage of goods; travel arrangement) of the Nice Classification on 26 December 2019, with a protection term set to expire on 15 March 2019. The trademark registration underscores the founder's initial intention to establish a Lao brand that fully complies with the law. On a separate note, no IP infringement against Dalone has been reported as of May 2024.

Figure 3.17. Registered Trademark of 'Dalone'



Source: DIP Database.

3.6. Saya

History of establishment

Saya is a Lao art and craft brand established by Mrs. Dalayphone Sayasithsena and other two co-founders, officially registered with the MOIC under Lao law.

The brand was established in 2019 by three founders who share the same vision and strong passion on producing valuable Lao products. One of the founders, Mrs. Dalayphone Sayasithsena, initially worked closely with a community of local weavers with the primary goal of community development. Over time, she recognised that Lao PDR has high-quality cotton fabric that possesses special characteristics and potential to be developed into useful, high-quality products that appeal not only to the elderly but also to younger generations. The initial products that brought the brand recognition were cotton placemats, coasters, and bags. The primary intentions of the founders include supporting local manufacturers, preserving authentic fabric manufacturing techniques, and improving product quality.

The brand name, 'Saya', is a homophone of the name of one of the founders and carries a positive meaning in Lao, associated with 'prosperity'. The word is also the root of many Lao words, and most Lao family names start with 'Saya'. Notably, the founders believe that the word 'Saya' is easy for foreigners to pronounce and remember whilst conveying a sense of Lao PDR.

Figure 3.18. Examples of Saya Products



Source: Saya.

Branding concept

The story of the brand, its designs, and the source of its main materials collectively deliver a unique identity to Saya, positioning its arts and crafts with distinctive branding characteristics.

The brand operates with the dual intention of promoting growth and supporting local craftsmanship, primarily in the southern and northern regions of Lao PDR. The selection of cotton fabric woven by local artisans is meticulously handled, with preliminary training sessions provided to ensure the fabric meets the brand's quality standards. The use of handwoven cotton fabric by local communities strengthens the brand's concept and highlights its commitment to authenticity.

In terms of design and materials, Saya strives to produce timeless products that appeal to various generations, with a particular focus on foreign customers. Alongside quality and practicality (e.g. bags, placemats, coasters, and keychains), Saya positions its products as general souvenirs that visitors to Lao PDR will consider bringing back home. Currently, Saya's products are also available at duty-free shops in Lao airports, enhancing their visibility.

Marketing aims

Saya aims to enhance recognition as a Lao brand whilst expanding its market internationally, with Japan identified as the first target country for establishing a store. This choice is based on the belief that the brand's concept and products align well with Japanese lifestyles and preferences. Domestically, the brand has also prioritised the local market, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when purchasing capabilities in foreign markets were limited.

In addition to market expansion, Saya seeks to diversify its product range and uphold product quality under a sustainable framework. Although its primary product lines cater to women, the brand introduced male products in 2022, which have yet to be formally promoted in the Lao market. Most of its current customer base consists of foreigners. Furthermore, Saya is exploring basketry as a new product line, aiming to capitalise on the traditional craftsmanship of Lao artisans. By adding modern design elements, the brand intends to elevate local products and create new market opportunities for this craft.

Whilst the founders have not set an ultimate marketing goal, they envision the brand growing alongside the local community and employees. The brand provides training in weaving and customer service to support this vision.

Method of branding

Saya employs a blend of word-of-mouth marketing, partnerships with institutions and businesses, and a strong emphasis on community engagement. Online promotion, direct customer interaction, and fostering a service-oriented mindset are areas the founders consistently prioritise.

The brand's integration with local communities and its emphasis on using authentic materials distinguish it from competitors whose products are often machine-made. Saya collaborates with local communities for cotton procurement, which not only enhances its uniqueness but also strengthens its position in the market. Additionally, the brand works with institutions by providing training sessions and creating unique products (e.g. limited editions) in collaboration with business entities.

Saya also focuses on promoting customer engagement through direct outreach. For instance, the brand contacts customers via phone when promotions are available. The founders emphasise the importance of employee training in areas such as customer service and problem-solving, as demonstrated through workshops and weaving development sessions provided to local communities and employees.

One notable branding strategy is the offer of customised order services, which allows customers, especially corporate clients, to design and personalise products as corporate gifts. This strategy broadens Saya's target customer base and enhances its appeal.

Effectiveness of the branding

Saya has established key performance indicators to measure its monthly business performance, consistently achieving its set goals. Whilst the founders acknowledge that the business does not generate significant profits at this stage, they take pride in enabling people in Lao PDR to access and appreciate locally made products. This indicates that the brand currently resonates with a specific group of customers and has the potential to expand into international markets in the future.

At present, Saya has not yet registered its trademark with the DIP, but the registration process is underway.

3.7. Green Goods

History of establishment

Green Goods is a brand under The Green Company Limited, a company officially registered with the MOIC since 2021. Green Goods operates in the farming industry, offering organic chicken meat, eggs, and live chickens as its key products. Business operations commenced practically in 2019, starting with a survey conducted in Lao PDR in cooperation with the Faculty of Agriculture at the National University of Laos. Despite the presence of several farming-related businesses in Lao PDR, the founder believes there is still room for organic and green products. The company was subsequently established to enter the organic poultry farming market in Lao PDR, leveraging the country's geographical connectivity to strategic neighbouring countries such as China, Viet Nam, and Cambodia for ease of export transportation in the future. Notably, the name 'Green Goods' was chosen to reflect the company's primary intention to create a business that can support environmental protection and climate change awareness.

Figure 3.19. Examples of Green Goods Products



Source: Green Goods.

Branding concept

The concept of the Green Goods brand is evident from its name. The brand operates with the vision of offering organic, chemical-free, and high-quality products to customers in the market. Green Goods emphasises environmental protection and sustainability as key values of the business, ensuring that farming methods are conducted with these considerations in mind. Furthermore, community orientation is a vital aspect of the brand's image, as Green Goods trains local farmers and directly purchases chickens from them at fair prices. In essence, organic farming, environmental sustainability, and community orientation are the core concepts that define the brand.

Marketing aims

In 2024, the company plans to focus on stabilising brand recognition and expanding its business within Lao PDR. The company believes that the credibility and reputation of Green Goods need to be promoted more effectively in the short term. However, as part of its long-term marketing strategy, the company aims to export its organic products under the Green Goods brand to organic product enthusiasts in foreign markets once domestic business stability is achieved. From interviews, the company has identified neighbouring countries, such as China, Viet Nam, and Cambodia as primary export destinations, leveraging Lao PDR's organised transport infrastructure to facilitate exports to these connected countries.

Method of branding

The company is gradually building brand awareness for Green Goods through localisation and advertisement. It believes that social engagement is a critical strategy for promoting the brand at a national level, with plans to expand internationally afterwards.

One notable milestone in the brand's journey was its response during the COVID-19 pandemic. With products remaining in stock due to reduced demand, the company opted to distribute products free of charge to people in need at quarantine sites across Lao PDR. This charitable act not only resolved the issue of excess stock but also helped Green Goods gain recognition from a broad audience. Additionally, the company has cultivated strong relationships with local farmers by engaging in poultry trading at fair prices. As a result, localisation is a prominent element embedded in the brand's image.

For advertising, Green Goods uses both online and offline channels to promote the value and concept of organic products. Online advertisements are made through the company's website and Facebook page, where promotions, product launches, and updates on daily activities are regularly posted. Offline channels include billboard advertising, such as standee boards placed in supermarkets to attract immediate attention from shoppers. These are the current strategies used by the brand, and the company intends to refine them further to meet market demands effectively.

Despite its efforts, the company acknowledges that it has not fully met market demands, including in 2024. Consequently, the company plans to adopt alternative, less aggressive promotional methods to gradually build market presence and recognition.

Effectiveness of the branding

The company acknowledges that Green Goods has not yet reached its desired level of market recognition, as past performance has not fully aligned with market demand. The brand sees an opportunity to grow by gradually connecting consumer behaviour to the organic movement. This assessment indicates that the brand is still in its introductory stage, with substantial potential for growth within Lao PDR.

Regarding the international market, the brand has yet to establish a presence, though this remains a future marketing goal. Overall, the growth and branding effectiveness of Green Goods are still a work in progress.

Regarding branding and trademarks, the company had not registered its trademark as of May 2024 but plans to do so in the near future. Additionally, the company encountered unauthorised use of the 'Green Goods' trademark by a farm. However, the conflict was amicably resolved through negotiation.

3.8. Kouï Ing Tea

History of establishment

Kouï Ing Tea is a business officially registered as an enterprise with the MOIC for tea cultivation and sales. It began operations in 2023 in Phongsaly Province, located in the northern part of Lao PDR. The founder, who has knowledge of tea cultivation and brewing, was appointed to be the leader of a local tea association, known as the 'Komaen Tea Association'. The brand's products include Komaen tea and Phongsaly tea with the aroma of new rice, both of which are well-known types of green tea Phongsaly Province.

The brand was established with the founder's intention to promote the taste of local tea and to build up an income separately from the local tea association. The name 'Kouï Ing' originates from the name of the founder's wife.

Figure 3.20. Examples of Kouï Ing Tea Products



Source: Kouï Ing Tea.

Branding concept

Kouï Ing Tea is a recognised tea brand known for the original taste of Phongsaly tea, its quality, and the story of its founder. Preliminarily, the brand cultivates and sells tea directly to customers without intermediaries. The tea retains its aroma, and when customers think of Kouï Ing Tea, they associate it with the origin of the tea. For instance,

the brand also sells Komaen tea, which was registered as a geographical indication (GI) with the DIP in 2020.

The brand embraces a customer-orientated concept and is eager to serve the best quality tea to its customers by taking into account their comments and suggestions to continuously develop its products. The founder places significant emphasis on the tea's aroma, which distinguishes the brand from other in the market.

Marketing aims

Currently, the brand's target customers are in provinces such as Vientiane Capital, Xayaboury, and Luang Prabang. The brand aims to expand its market domestically and internationally. The first country where Kouï Ing Tea plans to export its products to is China, followed by countries in Europe. Domestically, Vientiane Capital is marked as the first location for establishing a store outside Phongsaly Province.

To achieve these goals, Kouï Ing Tea has a strategy to improve its online marketing channels (e.g. social media) alongside offline marketing (e.g. attending more exhibitions). Also, the founder is considering improving the product packaging as part of the brand's strategy.

Method of branding

Although Kouï Ing Tea has not yet cooperated with other business entities to boost brand recognition or expand its business, the brand mainly promotes itself through various marketing methods. These include online platforms, such as Facebook, offline advertisements, and regular attendance at relevant exhibitions. Undoubtedly, the brand's unique selling point lies in its use of authentic, local tea, which immediately evokes thoughts of Phongsaly Province.

Additionally, the founder's background as a member of the Komaen Tea Association also creates opportunities to introduce Kouï Ing Tea to customers who already have an interest in Phongsaly tea, helping the brand reach potential customers.

Effectiveness of the branding

The brand is still in the initial stages of branding and market expansion. There is no clear indicator yet to demonstrate the effectiveness of the branding strategy in relation to its goals. However, the brand seems to be gaining recognition through word-of-mouth amongst customers looking for Phongsaly tea.

Regarding branding and trademarks, Kouï Ing Tea registered its trademark 'KOUÏ ING together with logo' with the DIP by filing the application on 20 April 2022. The trademark was registered for goods and services under Class 30 (including tea) and Class 43 (services for providing food and drink; temporary accommodation) of the Nice Classification on 25 November 2022. The protection term will expire on 20 April 2032. As of May 2024, no IP infringement against Kouï Ing Tea has been reported.

Additionally, the brand is in the process of registering its latest trademark design.

Figure 3.21. Registered Trademark: 'KOU I NG Together with Logo'



Source: DIP Database.

3.9. Sekong Wine

History of establishment

Sekong Wine is a branded product under Inpeng Import-Export Sole Co., Ltd., a company that was established in 2017. The name 'Sekong Wine' was chosen based on the background of the brand. Initially, the wine is made of ingredients mainly found in Sekong Province and was also manufactured there. The primary intention of the founder was to promote products from Sekong province and also to provide jobs to the local people. The founder believes that the unique wine-making method used is traditional wisdom of Lao PDR, so being able to preserve such wisdom is deemed as a core value of the business too. The first product launched by Sekong Wine was Indian gooseberry wine, which was later recognised as one of the products in the One District One Product (ODOP) project of Sekong Province.

Figure 3.22. Examples of Sekong Wine Products



Source: Sekong Wine.

Branding concept

Sekong Wine is now well-known for its use of healthy local ingredients and the variety of unique wine flavours available in the market. Beyond the product itself, the brand stands out by promoting the living standards of local people and emphasising the cultural identity of Lao PDR. This is exemplified by Sekong Wine's recognition as an ODOP item of Sekong Province, where fruits grown by local farmers are procured.

Regarding the wine's taste, Indian gooseberry wine remains Sekong Wine's most famous product. The brand has since diversified its offerings by creating innovative flavours using

various healthy local fruits. Currently, in addition to Indian gooseberry, the available flavours include banana, passion fruit, and chan fruit (local gold apple). By using local Lao fruits, Sekong Wine not only brings a fresh dynamic to the wine industry, traditionally dominated by grapes, but also strengthens the bond between customers and Lao cultural heritage.

Moreover, local community development is another cornerstone of the brand's values. This is evident in the company's efforts to create jobs for local people by purchasing fruits from farmers in Sekong Province and neighbouring areas. As such, the brand embodies the values of local identity and community growth.

Marketing aims

The company's short-term goal is to expand its market within Lao PDR, whilst its long-term objective is to elevate Sekong Wine to an international level within 5–10 years from 2024. Extending the product line is viewed as a critical step toward achieving these goals. The company intends to develop and distribute other types of beverages and new wine flavours, all whilst preserving the product's quality and symbolic value.

For domestic expansion, the company aims to introduce Sekong Wine and future products to iconic malls in Lao PDR, making them more accessible to the public – particularly to target customers aged 18 and above. Currently, Sekong Wine is distributed by agents in Savannakhet Province, Luang Prabang Province, Vientiane Capital, and Champasak Province, whilst the company handles distribution in areas without agents. The company believes that collaborating with agents in tourist destinations will boost sales, as the product appeals to foreigners and can be purchased as a souvenir.

Regarding global expansion, Sekong Wine plans to launch its products in ASEAN countries, followed by Europe. The company aims to gather feedback from domestic customers to ensure the products align with market demands before entering the international sphere. However, throughout this expansion, the brand's identity as a local Lao product, made with national ingredients, must remain intact.

Method of branding

The innovative wine flavours, healthy local ingredients, and community-oriented approach are key factors in Sekong Wine's branding and market positioning. The selection of fruits for distilling the wine not only establishes the brand's identity but also contributes to its uniqueness in the beverage industry.

Sekong Wine distinguishes itself from competitors by crafting wines from healthy local fruits, offering new and innovative flavours to wine enthusiasts. These fruits, which represent Sekong Province, are rich in health benefits. The company emphasises the quality, unique packaging, and special flavours of its wines as central elements of its branding strategy.

In 2024, the company collaborated with distributors in major provinces of Lao PDR, aiming to showcase Sekong Province's products to a broader audience. Additionally, the company

promotes its products through online channels, particularly Facebook, and offline channels, such as participation in domestic and international exhibitions. Notably, the company has attended exhibitions in Viet Nam and events organised by the Lao government. Recognised as an ODOP product, Sekong Wine has garnered attention from domestic and foreign customers. The wine has also become a popular choice amongst corporate clients as a locally made gift, replacing imported alternatives.

Effectiveness of the branding

The company considers Sekong Wine to be well-recognised in Lao PDR due to its rich history and unique story. Whilst there are no formal indicators measuring the effectiveness of its branding efforts against specific goals, the brand appears to be gaining domestic recognition through word-of-mouth amongst customers seeking local, healthy wines or gifts made in Lao PDR. Sekong Wine also holds the potential to grow internationally as planned, given the health benefits of its products.

Trademark and intellectual property

The company is currently in the process of registering the Sekong Wine trademark. As of May 2024, no intellectual property infringements against Sekong Wine have been reported.

3.10. KSV

History of establishment

KSV is a branded product under Ms. Keo Savan's Shop Sells Clothes and General Dried Goods Enterprise, a sole trade enterprise in Phongsaly Province, officially registered with the MOIC. KSV was established in 2019 after experiment by the founders to create the most satisfactory products since 2017. The brand offers various products under the name 'KSV' (including dried Indian gooseberry, Indian gooseberry tea, liquor, and wine). However, the most prominent product that has brought widespread recognition to the brand is dried Indian gooseberry, registered as an ODOP of Phongsaly Province. KSV's gooseberry products are made from local Indian gooseberries, which are found in Phongsaly Province. The primary goal of the brand is to promote local products and improve the livelihoods of the people in the province. This commitment is demonstrated through the fact that the brand purchases Indian gooseberries and other natural ingredients from local farmers. The name 'KSV' (which stands for Keo Savan) comes from a combination of the family names of the co-founders.

A significant milestone that helped the brand expand into a broader market was its participation in a training session organized by the Food and Drug Department under the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with China and Thailand. During this session, KSV gained valuable knowledge and received a training certificate. This achievement gave the brand the confidence to establish its first branch in Vientiane in early 2023.

Figure 3.23. Examples of KSV Products



Source: KSV.

Branding concept

The most evident concept of the brand is showcased through the use of a healthy fruit as the primary ingredient for all products sold under the brand. Creativity is another factor that makes KSV's goseberry-related products stand out from other Indian goseberry products in the market.

Regarding the product ingredients, the brand believes that the natural benefits of Indian goseberry effectively attract customers to purchase KSV's products. Most of the brand's customers are middle-aged to elderly individuals who are already aware of the fruit's benefits. Therefore, selecting high-quality fruit for production is crucial and meticulously handled by the brand. Additionally, by exclusively using Indian goseberry for its products, KSV reinforces clear branding awareness amongst consumers. This means that when consumers think of Indian goseberry products in Lao PDR, KSV is likely to be one of the top-tier brands that come to mind.

KSV also brings innovation to the food and beverage industry, where Indian goseberry is traditionally used for medicinal purposes rather than as a snack. The brand reimagines Indian goseberry by creating various fancy food and beverage products, making them edible and enjoyable at any time or event. This creativity allows KSV to expand its market access to a broader range of target customers.

Marketing aims

Although the brand has not explicitly stated its marketing aims, KSV plans to enter the foreign market through exports, with China as the first target. This decision is based on the positive feedback received during an exhibition in Shanghai, China.

At present, the brand does not plan to extend its product line to include items made from other fruits. Instead, KSV aims to focus on market expansion domestically and internationally, proudly centring its offerings around Indian goseberry. With its products already sold in key convenience stores, such as Kokkok Mart and Jmart, as well as local wholesale stores in Lao PDR, KSV anticipates being featured in additional major retail outlets.

Method of branding

KSV's market presence is built on soft-sell advertising aimed at its target customers – middle-aged to elderly individuals, as well as corporate clients – through genuine

recognition of Indian gooseberry's benefits and customer-focused service. Additionally, the brand leverages online and offline advertisements to consistently promote its products.

Soft-sell advertising is primarily achieved through word-of-mouth recommendations, stemming from the brand's commitment to healthy ingredients. By obtaining customer consent, KSV collects their contact information to periodically send promotional messages. For corporate customers, KSV emphasises its status as an ODOP product of Phongsaly Province and offers tailored promotions on a case-by-case basis. These efforts demonstrate the brand's focus on customer orientation and its dedication to Indian gooseberry as its defining product.

Beyond soft-sell strategies, KSV relies on online and offline channels for broader promotion. The brand uses its Facebook page as a primary platform to engage with both domestic and international customers, keeping them informed about promotions and product launches. Additionally, KSV actively participates in domestic and international exhibitions, with significant facilitative support from the Lao government, particularly the MOIC.

Effectiveness of the branding

The fact that KSV entered the market of Vientiane Capital in 2023 highlights its early stage of market expansion within Lao PDR. However, the brand faces logistical challenges due to its manufacturing facility being located in Phongsaly Province, which complicates the transportation of products to Vientiane Capital. KSV believes that establishing a factory in Vientiane Capital would enable more efficient market penetration in the area.

At the international level, KSV is not yet widely recognised in 2024, despite showcasing its products at an exhibition in China. From this perspective, KSV is still in the introduction stage, gradually moving into the growth stage in terms of market expansion and brand awareness.

Regarding branding and trademark, KSV is in the process of registering its trademark. On a separate note, no intellectual property infringement issues against KSV Gooseberry have been reported as of May 2024.

3.11. Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi

Background of the GI product

Khao Kai Noi is a type of sticky rice grown across Lao PDR, but the most reputable varieties are Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi and the Houaphanh Khao Kai Noi, which are cultivated in areas around 1,000 metres above sea level. These varieties have specific geographical origins and are registered as geographical indications (GI). Both Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi and Houaphanh Khao Kai Noi were registered as Lao PDR GI in 2018, with the registration certification number LA/GI/01. However, they were separately registered as two registered GI in 2020.

To analyse this case study, we had the opportunity to interview the Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi Promotion Association (**Khao Kai Noi Association**) about the background and specifications of Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi. The Khao Kai Noi Association was established in 2017 with the aim of promoting and protecting local Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi to ensure that the quality and manufacturing processes meet the required standards under the laws. It also acts as an intermediary agent to connect the local farmers in the province to business operators by following the established rules.

Additionally, authorisation to use the GI sign is granted to distributing agents who are primarily members of the Khao Kai Noi Association for the purpose of transparency control, price-setting consideration, and legal compliance. For example, members of the Khao Kai Noi Association are required to grow, cultivate, mill, and store the rice in compliance with established standards.

Figure 3.24. Examples of Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi Products of Sold Under the Control of the Khao Kai Noi Association



Source: Khao Kai Noi Association.

GI product concept

To distinguish Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi from similar types of rice, the Khao Kai Noi Association controls and promotes the uniqueness of the rice through two main approaches: preserving its geographical origin and maintaining its quality.

The Khao Kai Noi Association was established to promote Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi and ensure its reputation aligns with market demand. The preservation of its geographical origin is employed as a measure to certify the authenticity of the rice and to build customer awareness through GI registration. By having the rice registered and sold under the GI sign, consumers can trust the origin and milling process of the rice. This approach is a strategic factor that enables Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi to gain recognition both domestically and internationally.

From the above, it is clear that the Khao Kai Noi Association obtained GI certification for Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi to enhance the rice's reputation on a broader scale. To comply with GI standards, the production process – from farming to milling – must adhere to legal requirements. Beyond the general missions of the Khao Kai Noi Association, legal compliance is a critical focus to ensure the rice meets the required quality standards. In

short, the quality of the rice serves as a significant indicator, making Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi stand out in the market.

Marketing aims

In 2024, Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi is sold within the province and in Vientiane Capital through authorised distribution agents. The Khao Kai Noi Association aims to expand the rice's availability across Lao PDR and expects to export it to countries such as China, Cambodia, and Western nations. Currently, export proceedings are underway. In this context, setting an appropriate selling price is also a priority, as the Khao Kai Noi Association believes the current price is relatively low compared to what this premium rice can command in the market.

Regarding domestic expansion, the Khao Kai Noi Association has identified Vientiane Capital, Bolikhamxay Province, Khammouane Province, Savannakhet Province, and neighbouring provinces as key sales destinations. The primary focus is to enhance the reputation of this local rice amongst Lao people sustainably. To achieve this aim, the Khao Kai Noi Association strives to regulate production by ensuring all farmers selling Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi under the GI sign follow the same GI standards in farming, cultivating, and milling processes.

For international market entry, the Khao Kai Noi Association is planning to export the rice to China and Western countries on a trial basis. Previously, Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi was showcased at an exhibition in Cambodia, where local interest led to business operators contacting the Khao Kai Noi Association to initiate exports. As of May 2024, export preparations are being managed by the business operator in collaboration with the Khao Kai Noi Association.

Aside from market expansion, price stabilisation is another focus for the Khao Kai Noi Association. Recognising Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi as a unique type of rice, the association believes its selling price can be increased to reflect its distinct value. Currently, the rice is sold at a price comparable to standard varieties in the market. Adjusting this price to better reflect its premium quality is a key objective for the association.

Effectiveness of the GI product

The Khao Kai Noi Association views the packaging design of Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi as a key component in conveying the authenticity of the rice. The inclusion of the GI-certified sign on the packaging provides customers with information about the rice's origin, boosting their confidence and making Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi a top choice for purchase.

Beyond GI registration, which has heightened market interest, the Khao Kai Noi Association actively promotes Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi through various online and offline advertising channels whilst paying close attention to packaging design.

In terms of offline advertising, the Khao Kai Noi Association utilises posters, brochures, free product distribution, and participation in domestic and international exhibitions to increase visibility in the rice industry. For instance, the association's attendance at an

exhibition in Cambodia generated significant interest from foreign markets and facilitated contact with business operators.

Online marketing is another effective channel for connecting with consumers. The Khao Kai Noi Association operates a Facebook page to update customers on product information, activities, and articles, helping to maintain a consistent and strong relationship with them.

To date, business operators have made agreements with the Khao Kai Noi Association to export the rice to Cambodia and other foreign markets, indicating that Xiengkhaung Khao Kai Noi is gaining moderate recognition both domestically and regionally.

Regarding intellectual property, there have been no reported cases of infringement against the GI sign of Khao Kai Noi currently available in the market.

3.12. Houaphanh Silk

Background of the GI product

Houaphanh Silk is a GI product manufactured under the control of the Houaphanh Silk Promotion Association (**Silk Association**), registered with the DIP under registration certification number LA/GI/05. The GI registration was successfully carried out through cooperation between domestic ministries and foreign entities, such as the MOIC, the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Lao PDR.

Houaphanh Silk is regarded as a unique silk fabric due to its special characteristics, including its design, details, thickness, and softness. The silk used for weaving comes only from silkworms in Luang Prabang, Chomphet, Nam Bak, and Phon Thong, where the quality of silk is said to be distinctive from general silks in the market. The main factors contributing to the silk's uniqueness include the specific mulberry cultivation, the silk production process, weaving, and natural dyeing methods that have been passed down through generations. Notably, the primary intention of the Silk Association is to upgrade the quality of the local silk fabric, enhance its reputation, and preserve the local wisdom of Lao PDR.

Currently, approximately 140 business operators are members of the Silk Association, with around 31 members engaged in full-scale operations. The members are classified into two main groups: the mulberry cultivation group and the weaving group.

Figure 3.25. Examples of Houaphanh Silk Products Sold Under the Control of the Houaphanh Silk Association



Source: Houaphanh Silk Association.

GI product concept

The distinctiveness of Houaphanh Silk is derived from three main aspects: GI registration, the characteristics of the silk fabric, and the preservation of local wisdom and community livelihoods. These elements collectively make the silk more widely recognised both domestically and internationally.

The GI registration has significantly increased market attention for Houaphanh Silk compared to the period when silk fabric was produced inconsistently. GI registration not only grants the Silk Association the legal rights to claim the geographical indication of the product but also unifies the silk fabric market, particularly in Houaphanh Province. By ensuring a standardised manufacturing process and adherence to GI standards, Houaphanh Silk is able to showcase the finest characteristics in pattern, design, and quality, effectively capturing customer interest.

Moreover, the characteristics of the silk fabric play a fundamental role in defining its uniqueness in terms of production, quality, and design. Firstly, the silk is sourced from standardised silkworms raised on mulberry trees cultivated exclusively in Luang Prabang, Chomphet, Nam Bak, and Phon Thong, ensuring consistent quality. Secondly, the fabric is recognised for its special thickness and softness, with specific types of silk designated for particular products. Lastly, the fabric is produced following authentic patterns and designs that are distinct from general silk fabric patterns available on the market.

Additionally, the preservation of local wisdom and community livelihoods is a core value demonstrated through the Silk Association's efforts to promote local consumption, traditional silk production methods, and career development within Houaphanh Province. This cultural and economic background further enhances the market appeal of Houaphanh Silk.

Marketing Aims

The Silk Association aims to stabilise the domestic recognition of Houaphanh Silk and expand its presence within Lao PDR as a short-term goal. While there is no explicit indication that the Silk Association plans to export the silk fabric internationally, the fact

that 30% of customers are foreigners suggests that export could become a future marketing strategy.

To achieve these aims, the Silk Association believes greater government engagement is essential to support mulberry cultivation, weaving and dyeing training, legal compliance, and quality assurance. Additionally, the establishment of internal rules and guidelines for the Silk Association is critical to ensure all members comply with standardised cultivation and weaving practices. In other words, achieving strong harmonisation is a key factor in raising market awareness of Houaphanh Silk.

Effectiveness of the GI product

Since obtaining GI registration, the Silk Association believes Houaphanh Silk has gained greater market attention, although the product has yet to be formally introduced to international markets or exported. It can be concluded that Houaphanh Silk is progressing towards the growth stage, currently transitioning from the late introductory stage in the domestic market.

To promote Houaphanh Silk, the Silk Association employs a mix of advertising strategies, GI member-led store establishment, and made-to-order services. While the product has not yet been showcased at foreign exhibitions for sale, the Silk Association has participated in international conferences and projects to enhance its understanding of GI and intellectual property.

Domestically, the Silk Association promotes Houaphanh Silk by attending exhibitions, publishing advertisements in newspapers, and giving interviews. Both hard and soft advertising approaches are utilised, resulting in 70% of customers being Lao nationals and the remaining 30% being foreigners.

Sales of the silk fabric are conducted by business operators who have established customer bases and are members of the Silk Association. These members are required to produce silk fabric in compliance with the standards set by the association. To ensure conformity, the products and production processes are inspected quarterly. Currently, Houaphanh Silk is available in stores located in Houaphanh, Vientiane Capital, and Luang Prabang.

Another branding method involves offering made-to-order services. Whilst some items, such as scarves or shoulder cloths (Pa Biang), are readily available in stores, other garments are produced on a custom-order basis. This dynamic and personalised approach is an additional strategy the Silk Association uses to engage both domestic and international customers.

Intellectual Property Infringement

Instances of unauthorised use of the GI sign for Houaphanh Silk have been identified, often due to insufficient monitoring. These infringements are typically addressed through educational measures or the imposition of fines.

3.13. Paksong Tea

Background of the GI product

Paksong Tea is a GI product manufactured under the control of the Paksong Tea Promotion Association, registered with the DIP with certification number LA/GI/04 with the support of the Office of Agriculture and Forestry of Champasak District and Province. The main activities of the Paksong Tea Promotion Association are to purchase, pack, and sell tea leaves.

According to the membership rules of the Paksong Tea Promotion Association, members are entitled to use the GI sign and the association's mark to label Paksong Tea products. This enhances the product's value and increases the credibility of the products amongst customers.

Figure 3.26. Examples of Paksong Tea Products Under the Control of the Paksong Tea Promotion Association



Source: Paksong Tea Promotion Association.

GI product concept

The most prominent branding concept of Paksong Tea is reflected in its GI registration and the source of the tea itself, which also includes community engagement in tea leaf picking and production.

Although the Paksong Tea Association does not directly engage in marketing activities, customers' initial perception of the tea is often shaped by the GI-certified label, which boosts their confidence and ensures transparency about the tea's origin, grown and roasted in Paksong.

However, the Paksong Tea Association is currently facing the following challenges, which may prevent Paksong Tea from fully realising its potential as a GI product:

- a) A lack of structural strength and efficiency in operational performance;
- b) Insufficient electrical power for machinery; and
- c) An inadequate budget for the development of the Paksong Tea Promotion Association.

Marketing aims

To promote and expand Paksong Tea, the Paksong Tea Promotion Association plans to advertise tea cultivation methods and other relevant information through online platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. For this initiative, the association is also seeking assistance from internal units.

Currently, Paksong Tea is in the process of entering ASEAN and European markets under the leadership of the DIP. The government is managing export proceedings and providing ongoing support to the Paksong Tea Promotion Association. This implies that the association's primary marketing goal is to export Paksong Tea to foreign countries with significant backing from the government sector.

To achieve this goal, the Paksong Tea Promotion Association is increasing the visibility of Paksong Tea through online advertisements and establishing measures to prevent GI infringement. These efforts aim to maintain the credibility of Paksong Tea and gain the trust of potential customers. Nevertheless, the association still requires additional support from both domestic and international entities to foster the growth and reputation of Paksong Tea.

Effectiveness of the GI product

The GI registration has enhanced the reputation of Paksong Tea, provided local people with a source of income, and contributed to the nation's recognition. However, due to unresolved challenges, Paksong Tea is currently sold only within Lao PDR. As a result, the Paksong Tea Promotion Association is requesting support from domestic and international agencies to promote and further develop the product.

It can be stated that the strategy for Paksong Tea to enter international markets is not yet well-defined. Efforts are being made to export Paksong Tea under the support of the government sector, but certain issues – such as operational efficiency, technological improvements, and legal measures to combat infringement – need to be addressed first.

From this perspective, it can be concluded that whilst Paksong Tea is relatively new to the market, it holds significant potential for growth, provided it receives the necessary support from government agencies such as the DIP and the Division of Agriculture and Forestry of Champasak Province.

Additionally, the Paksong Tea Promotion Association has sought government assistance in monitoring the use of the GI sign. Instances of unauthorised use of the GI sign have been reported, which have undermined the credibility of Paksong Tea.

In summary, whilst the GI registration has contributed positively to the reputation of Paksong Tea, continued support and protection from Lao PDR authorities remain crucial for the brand's growth and long-term success.

Chapter 4

Analysis of Trademarks, GI, and Branding in Lao PDR

Lao PDR has been actively adopting and developing its legislation on intellectual property (IP) to protect the rights of owners. According to the research in this report, trademarks and GI are two areas that have undergone robust improvement in terms of regulations and the registration system. Both areas have clear criteria and requirements for registration, examination system, registration caveats, and protection against infringement. Some international standards, such as the international classification of goods and services issued by WIPO, have also been applied to the registration process. These developments build confidence and encourage IP owners, including brand owners, to register and be protected under the law.

Currently, for trademarks, statistics from the MOIC covering three areas – (i) resident applications through the national system; (ii) foreign applications through the national system; and (iii) applications filed via the Madrid System – show that application levels during 2019–2023 remained relatively constant (peaking at 3,807 applications in 2019). Domestic trademark applications outnumber international ones, reflecting a gradual increase in domestic applications likely driven by the growing establishment of businesses in Lao PDR.

For GI, research and analysis of GI activities since 2014 reveal that seven Lao GI products and three foreign products have been registered in Lao PDR. The government is actively developing the GI system in collaboration with international organisations, particularly to promote the distinctive cultural heritage of Lao PDR. By 2025, it is expected that an additional four Lao products will be registered under the country's GI scheme.

Alongside the increasing trademark and GI registrations, the development of branding in the Lao market is also noteworthy. This report identifies nine types of branding commonly used by businesses: corporate branding, product branding, service branding, retail branding, personal branding, cultural and geographical branding, co-branding, online branding, and offline branding. Interviews with 13 companies – from cooperatives and SMEs to well-known commercial enterprises – cover the history of establishment, branding concepts, marketing aims, branding methods, and the effectiveness of branding, as described in Chapter 3. Each brand has its unique story and objectives. However, the analysis found that all eight branding methods, except co-branding, were utilised. Co-branding is uncommon in the Lao market.

With the emergence of technology, modern branding methods are widely adopted in Lao PDR. Most brands rely on online branding through social media platforms, but often in a straightforward manner, such as sharing product details, launches, and sales promotions. Advanced strategies, such as viral campaigns or user-participation initiatives, are less

common. Product branding remains a core focus, while corporate branding, which requires strong, long-term strategies, is less widely used. Interestingly, many brands utilise cultural and geographical branding, with 'Laoness' emerging as a significant element. Amongst the brands analysed, three were GI products, which rely heavily on exhibitions as a key promotional strategy. Additionally, most brands are enthusiastic about protecting trademarks and GI products, with registrations already in place.

As technology becomes pivotal in branding, the digital transformation in Lao PDR presents further opportunities. Lao PDR has basic legislation supporting digital transformation, but these laws require updates, and new regulations may need to be introduced to keep pace with rapid developments. Importantly, the legal framework must address not only central government policies but also the implementation of relevant policies by governmental agencies across various ministries and departments. Many policies, such as those outlined in the 20-Year National Digital Economy Development Vision (2021–2040), 10-Year National Digital Economy Development Strategy (2021–2030), and 5-Year National Digital Economy Development Plan (2021–2025), have yet to be fully implemented. Regular review and coordination between authorities are crucial to ensure coherent progress.

Improved connectivity is critical for digital transformation. Whilst internet access has expanded in recent years, rural areas still lack reliable and affordable broadband. The government should prioritise expanding internet access nationwide, ensuring it is secure and competitively priced. Encouraging more mobile and internet operators to enter the market can foster competition, leading to reduced costs and improved quality for users.

Strengthening digital skills amongst the population will support long-term digital transformation. Currently, there is insufficient training and business support for new entrepreneurs. The government should invest in educational institutions and create business support services to enhance digital literacy and entrepreneurship.

Beyond regulatory responsibilities, the government can actively support GI entrepreneurs. Initiatives such as creating directories with detailed information about GI products and establishing platforms for direct consumer access to GI products can enhance visibility. Collaborating with the tourism sector to promote GI products alongside domestic tourism projects can also be highly effective.

A proactive approach from the government in terms of branding activities by the companies should also be considered. In the past, branding activities have been dominated by major advertisement agencies since the typical offline branding activities, such as billboard advertisements or TV commercials, tended to incur a large amount of money to conduct. That is the reason SMEs tend to focus more on the product branding, especially emphasising on the quality of the product since its perception was that branding activities is something done by large companies with abundant financial resources. In comparison with such typical branding methods, recent methods of branding, such as online branding, can be done at minimal cost. This is why recently we do see many companies utilising online branding for their products and services. However, online branding, like other methods of branding, does require expertise in order

to be effective. Simply using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or X will not be sufficient to make a big impact on the branding of products. Advertisement agencies and marketing companies possess the necessary knowledge to conduct online marketing, and if the government can provide subsidies to support the use of such agencies, such support from the government could greatly enhance product branding efforts. The involvement of such professional agencies can further promote companies in utilising more complicated branding activities, such as corporate branding, personal branding, or co-branding.

By implementing these recommendations, entrepreneurs in Lao PDR can develop stronger, more resilient brands and products that appeal to both local and international markets, whilst government support can foster a conducive environment in which these brands can thrive.

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