

Thai Millennials' Online Political Engagement:
Investigating Motivation Behinds Their Engagement on Facebook
การมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองออนไลน์ของชาวไทยรุ่นมิลเลนเนียล:
วิเคราะห์แรงจูงใจในการมีส่วนร่วมบนเฟซบุ๊ก

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Abstract

Facebook mobilizes society by facilitating users to engage in political issues quite freely. Motivations behind this political communication phenomenon remain to be explored in greater detail. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 225 samples of Thai Millennials in Bangkok to examine how Selective Exposure (SE), Willingness to Self-Censor (WSC) and political news interest, influence their political engagement (Like, Comment, and Share) on Facebook. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis showed that the samples' SE, WSC and political news interest significantly influenced their engagement with news article related to politics in general, and engagement with remunerative, and relational contents based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). Informational contents were significantly influenced by WSC and political news interest, whereas entertaining contents were significantly influenced by SE and political news interest.

Keywords: *Online Political Engagement, Facebook, Thai Millennials, Selective Exposure, Spiral of Silence, Uses and Gratification Theory*

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บทคัดย่อ

เฟซบุ๊กเป็นสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ที่ขับเคลื่อนสังคมด้วยการเป็นพื้นที่ ซึ่งผู้ใช้งานสามารถมีส่วนร่วมกับประเด็นทางการเมืองได้ค่อนข้างอิสระ ทั้งนี้ แรงจูงใจเบื้องหลังการสื่อสารทางการเมืองเป็นปรากฏการณ์ที่ยังคงต้องมีการศึกษาเพิ่มเติมให้ลึกซึ้งยิ่งขึ้น การวิจัยนี้เป็นการสำรวจแบบช่วงเวลาเดียวโดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างคือชาวไทยรุ่นมิลเลนเนียลจำนวน 225 คนที่อาศัยอยู่ในกรุงเทพฯ เพื่อศึกษาว่าการเลือกเปิดรับเจตนาในการควบคุมตัวเอง และความสนใจเกี่ยวกับข่าวการเมืองส่งผลต่อการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมือง (กดไลค์ แสดงความเห็น หรือส่งต่อ) บนเฟซบุ๊กอย่างไร ผลการวิเคราะห์การถดถอยพหุคูณแสดงให้เห็นว่าการเลือกเปิดรับเจตนาในการควบคุมตัวเอง และความสนใจเกี่ยวกับข่าวการเมืองร่วมกันทำนายการมีส่วนร่วมกับข่าวการเมืองแบบทั่วไป เนื้อหาที่ให้ผลประโยชน์ และเนื้อหาเชิงความสัมพันธ์ ทั้งนี้ เจตนาในการควบคุมตัวเองและความสนใจเกี่ยวกับข่าวการเมืองร่วมกันทำนายการมีส่วนร่วมกับเนื้อหาที่ให้ข้อมูล ส่วนการเลือกเปิดรับและความสนใจเกี่ยวกับข่าวการเมืองร่วมกันทำนายการมีส่วนร่วมกับเนื้อหาที่ให้ความบันเทิง

คำสำคัญ: การมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองออนไลน์ เฟซบุ๊ก ชาวไทยรุ่นมิลเลนเนียล การเลือกเปิดรับ ทฤษฎีการใช้ประโยชน์และความพึงพอใจจากสื่อ

Introduction

In Thailand, the situation of democracy was slowly developed due to a lack of political participation, but currently the social media shift the political atmosphere and political engagement (Chatchorfa, 2020). Social media are potential platforms for promoting the political engagement among younger generation, who uses online social media for political purposes such as updating their political information and knowledge and expressing political interest (Abdulrauf, Hamid, & Ishak, 2015). Moreover, the political engagement in online activities also relates to offline activity; for example, sharing political news outlet content has a positive relationship with offline political participation (Lane, Kim, Lee, Weeks, & Kwak, 2017). Yet, the relationship between online consuming and reading content was not found with offline political engagement (Chen, Chan, & Lee, 2016). This linkage has shown the room that social media should be a helpful platform to motivate the Thai millennial generation to increase their offline political participation through online political engagement.

Facebook is considered a very popular social media platform used by Thais. According to the data across the world, Thailand is the top 8th ranking of Facebook's users (Kemp, 2020). In general, the Thais also spend more time and are more likely to express personal views on Facebook compared to other countries (Magpanthong & McDaniel, 2015). Across the Facebook's users, approximately 32 percent of the millennium generation use this platform in Thailand (Kemp, 2020). They participated in a discussion about news threads on issues relevant to their generation including global warming, globalization, education, and culture (Paireepairit, 2012), and that associates with political consumerism rather than ideologies (Bennett, 2004).

Specific to political content, Facebook was found to be the most used platform by the Thai millennials especially from Facebook's pages of news agencies, journalists, and official agencies (Panthanuwong, 2017). Narrow down into political news from the newspaper's page, the Thais showed mostly comments within a post compared to others in this category, but only

a few showed share behaviors (Magpanthong & McDaniel, 2016). In addition, there is no correlation between the number of pages following and the amount of engagement in pages (Panthanuwong, 2017). The less sharing may occur by the political situation under the military junta government (Pootrakul, 2014), which is an interesting phenomenon for communication researchers to explore whether motivation behind political news sharing indirectly promotes political participation in the future.

To understand engaging political news on Facebook, this research adopted the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) as a fundamental framework to understand how individuals choose media that satisfies their needs (Katz & Foulkes, 1962). Specific to Facebook, the motives for engaging in Facebook content under the UGT are resulting in expressions of engagement with specific types of content including information, entertainment, remunerative, and relational content (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016). However, an engagement behavior -- like, comment, and share -- seems to have a personal bias and cognition process such as Selective Exposure (SE), or a tendency to favor or avoid contents depending on its consistency with their beliefs (Taber & Lodge 2006) and Spiral of Silence (SoS), or a tendency to self-censor their political views when they perceive a disagreeable opinion climate. These factors could potentially influence the specific type of content based on the UGT differently. Thus, this research aims to identify users' motivation of political engagement on Facebook by the specific content based on the integration of three theories -- UGT, SE, and SoS.

Objectives of Study

1. To investigate the roles of Selective Exposure on audiences' political engagement for four types of political news content, based on the UGT.

2. To examine the roles of Willingness to Self-Censor on audiences' political engagement for four types of political news content, based on the UGT.

Review of Related Literature

Generation is not defined only as people who were born during the same period of time, but the community of shared social experiences. The millennials are particularly experiencing social issues in much more fragmented ways comparing to previous generations, with various consequences by a variety of media. (Dahlgren, 2007). However, the survey on Millennials found that 61% of this generational group displays a high level of similar generational identification (Bennett, 2004), which means that this generation has shared identities and values.

Regarding political issues, Millennials displayed certain contemporary attitude towards the political system and the democratic process. They demonstrated distrust of conventional political engagement, but focused and were active on the political issues associated with certain issues affecting their generation such as global warming, globalization, education, and culture (Bennett, 2004). This shift illustrates that the political involvement focuses on 'self-actualization' and 'self-reflective' throughout the social media (Dolan et al., 2016).

Political engagement on social media

Social media is a platform that news publishers can reach many more audience

members by directly broadcasting the content to followers, and then the content were organically shared by the followers enabling that content to pass along to others in their social networks. Sharing political news articles was explained by social psychology, communication theories, and other disciplines.

In particular, the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) was applied to explain the motivation of political engagement on social media. Dolan and colleagues (2016) proposed that the four types of content in social media -- information, entertainment, remunerative, and relational content -- affect the general social engagement leading to engagement behavior. The "information content" refers to resourceful and helpful information to users. The "entertainment content" refers to the extent to which content is fun and entertaining to media users. The "remunerative content" refers to the users' expectation to gain rewards such as personal wants, economic incentives, or job-related benefits, whereas the "relational content" refers to the desire for social benefits and social interaction (Dolan et al., 2016).

Many researches explored uses and gratification of online sharing content in general in which users normally share content to inform others on Facebook as gratification for others to get the same information (Batorski & Grzywinska, 2018). They also shared business content on Facebook to gratify the primary needs of diversion, information, and personal identity (Nash, 2015). In addition, the rational or the sensory strategies content was more likely to trigger people to share, whereas self-related information strategy was less likely to be shared (Kim & Yang, 2017). For online political news content, there was less evidence

on the Uses and Gratification of online political content engagement. Therefore, this research aims to explore the Uses and Gratification theory in combination with other well-known theories such as Selective Exposure and the Spiral of Silence Theory in which the related research has explained the relationship existing between these theories. According to Pew Internet Study (2005), while there is a diversity of opinions online, people selectively expose themselves to information which may make them overestimate themselves as being in the majority. Both Selective Exposure and the Spiral of Silence Theory may together explain online engagement behaviors.

In terms of Selective Exposure, individuals tend to favor information that reinforces preexisting views and avoid contradictory information (Kaye & Johnson, 2014). When being applied in the Internet environment, the likelihood is to have less diverse information than in the offline social environment (Brundidge & Rice, 2009), where people have more room to search for various political opinions. Peer influences and credibility are other factors related to the selective exposure. The notion of "Selective Exposure" proves to be a phenomenon that has direct impacts on the democratic process. Hence, it is clear that exposure to media and content that is aligned with the individual's own view occurs and that plays a crucial part in how receivers politically engage in political activities and take actions. This leads to the development of the first research hypothesis and its four sub-hypotheses, as presented below.

HP#1: Thai Millennials' selective exposure positively influences their political engagement on Facebook.

HP#1.1: Thai Millennials' selective exposure positively influences their political engagement with *informational* content.

HP#1.2: Thai Millennials' selective exposure positively influences their political engagement with *entertaining* content.

HP#1.3: Thai Millennials' selective exposure positively influences their political engagement with *remunerative* content.

HP#1.4: Thai Millennials' selective exposure positively influences their political engagement with *relational* content.

The Spiral of Silence Theory is a tendency for individuals to less discuss these issues on social media than they were in person, if they perceived that their social media friends and followers disagreed with them (Hampton et al., 2014). The construct of Spiral of Silence Theory could be explained by "Willingness to Self-Censor (WSC)," referring to individuals' willingness to withhold their opinion from an audience perceived to disagree with that opinion (Hayes, Glynn, & Shanahan, 2005).

Currently, Facebook's construction as a public discussion space limits the users in actively engaging in some particular political topics (Batorski & Grzywinska, 2018). The Spiral of Silence Theory has been applied due to the private discussion in friends' online networks, namely echo chambers (Hampton et al., 2014). Chan's (2018) research compared the role of WSC and "Fear of Isolation" between face-to-face and Facebook settings on attitude toward supporting disagreed political content, and found the same pattern across platforms such that fear of isolation affected WSC and indirectly affected the political discussion. Moreover, Facebook usage has a direct and negative impact on willingness to deliberation in many offline

settings: home, workplace, social gatherings with friends, and community meetings (Hampton, Shin, & Lu, 2016). The roles of WSC seem to inhibit users' engagement in both offline and online contexts. This leads to the development of the second research hypothesis and its four sub-hypotheses, as following.

HP#2: Thai Millennials' willingness to self-censor negatively influences their political engagement on Facebook.

HP#2.1: Thai Millennials' willingness to self-censor negatively influences their engagement with *informational* content.

HP#2.2: Thai Millennials' willingness to self-censor negatively influences their engagement with *entertaining* content.

HP#2.3: Thai Millennials' willingness to self-censor negatively influences their engagement with *remunerative* content.

HP#2.4: Thai Millennials' willingness to self-censor negatively influences their engagement with *relational* content.

Methodology

This research used a mixed-method to understand the Thai millennials' motivation of political news engagement on social media. This research focuses on the quantitative approach by using a cross-sectional survey to capture the motivation of political engagement on Facebook. As mentioned in the literature review, the motivation chosen to explain users' political engagement on Facebook is based on the UGT.

With the use of self-administered online questionnaire, 225 millennials aged of 18-35 years living in Bangkok, Thailand voluntarily participated in this study in April 2020. Based on age and occupations, the samples were divided

into two groups, university student (18-23 years), and employee (24-35 years). The university student group was selected using convenience sampling and the office worker group was selected from Facebook closed groups with topics related to education, human resources, and private organization.

A power analysis using G*Power was conducted in order to determine the sample size needed for the present study. For a multiple linear regression with a medium effect size (Cohen's $f^2 = .15$), a probability level of .05, .95 power, and three predictors, the recommended sample size was at least 119. Hence, the number of 225 millennials participating in this study was considered far more than adequate.

The samples who expressed their interest in participating in this study were sent a link to take an online survey. It took about approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey questionnaire in which questions include five sections – 1) demographic information, 2) political news interest, 3) selective exposure, 4) willingness to self-censor, and 5) online political engagement.

Instruments

This section describes the following measurements for three independent variables and one dependent variable.

Selective exposure (SE): referring to individuals' motivation for selection of messages matching one's beliefs, this variable was measured using Tendency Toward Congruent Selective Exposure (TECSE) Scale developed by Tsfaty (2016). The measure contains five indicators with two sub-scales: selective exposure and selective avoidance. The examples of items in the TECSE are (1) "I try to avoid exposure to media outlets expressing irritating opinions";

(2) "I try to expose myself only to media outlets and news messages that are in line with my own attitudes." Response options were coded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The reliability for these items was shown by Cronbach's alpha = .76 ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.85$). Internal consistency of the TECSE measure on this research is .65 which is considered as acceptable values (Griethuijzen et al., 2014) and adequate (Taber, 2018). The higher mean score indicates a higher level of selective exposure.

Willingness to self-censor (WSC): referring to individuals' willingness to withhold their opinion from an audience perceived to disagree with that opinion. This variable was measured using Willingness to Self-Censor (WSCC) scale developed by Hayes et al. (2005). The examples of items in the WSCC are (1) "It is difficult for me to express my opinion if I think others won't agree with what I say"; (2) "There have been many times when I have thought others around me were wrong but I didn't let them know." Response options were coded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). The reliability for these items was shown by Cronbach's alpha = .83. Internal consistency of the WSCC measure on this thesis is .69 which is considered as acceptable values (Griethuijzen et al., 2014) and reasonable (Taber, 2018). The higher mean score indicates a higher level of willingness to self-censor.

Political news interest: the respondents answered one question, "How interested are you generally in political news?" on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (Strongly interest) to 1 (not at all interested). The higher mean score indicates a higher interest of political news.

Online political engagement: the respondents were asked about how frequently they like, comment, and share four types of news based on the UGT: 1) informational content (the political news that provided more detail and information), 2) entertaining content (Political satire or political meme), 3) remunerative content (game or activity that can exchange some rewards), and 4) relational content (create discussion within news article), as well as how frequently they like, comment, and share news articles related to politics in general, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (all the times). The reliability values of measurement on online political engagement, and engagement with all four types of content on this thesis are above 0.70 which is considered as acceptable. The higher mean score indicates a higher level of online political engagement with the particular type of news content.

Data Analysis

Multiple Regression Analysis was used to test the research hypotheses. Three independent variables are the Selective Exposure (SE), Willingness to Self-Censor (WSC), and Political news interest. The dependent variable was engagement with news articles related to politics in general, and engagement with four different content types based on the UGT – 1) informational, 2) entertaining, 3) remunerative, and 4) relational content.

Research Findings

Among 225 respondents who participated in the survey, they are ranged in age from 17 to 35 years ($M = 24.06$; $SD = 3.65$). In terms of gender, 63.5% ($n = 143$) identified as female, 31.5% ($n = 71$) as male, and 4.8% ($n = 11$) unidentified

their gender. In relation to occupation, 47.5% ($n = 107$) identified as student and 52.4% ($n = 188$) as employees. Majority of them have quite low income, 46.67% ($n = 105$) gain salary less than 15,000 baht/month and 28.00% ($n = 63$) gain salary between 15,001 and 30,000 baht/month.

As for samples' media consumption, as for the number of friends on Facebook, 34.22 percent of them have an average of 501 to 1,000 friends on Facebook. About half of them (52.44%) have one to ten likes or subscribe news pages on Facebook, followed by 11 to 100 (31.56%). In terms of the samples' average amount of time spent on social media (per day), they spent more than 2 hours per day on social media. As for the type of news in which they are interested, 72.89% of them are likely to be interested in politics news, followed by lifestyle and technology (62.67%). Majority of them have moderate to high interest in political news. They mainly use Facebook as source of news (83.56%), followed by Twitter (66.22%), and Instagram (32.44%). In terms of politics news-reading behavior, half of the samples (53.33%) read only articles that they are interested in whereas 21.33% of them read some articles.

In terms of Selective Exposure, the respondents have a moderate level of Selective Exposure ($\bar{X} = 2.36$, $S.D. = 0.95$) and Willingness to Self-Censor ($\bar{X} = 2.86$, $S.D. = 1.03$). Political news interest showed a high level of mean score ($\bar{X} = 3.66$, $S.D. = 0.93$). As for online political engagement, the respondents have a moderate level of engagement with general content on Facebook ($\bar{X} = 2.07$, $S.D. = .93$). Among the four types of content based on the UGT, the respondents had a moderate level of engagement with informational content

(\bar{x} = 2.33, *S.D.* = 1.02), entertaining content (\bar{x} = 2.11, *S.D.* = 1.01), and relational content (\bar{x} = 2.01, *S.D.* = 0.96). However, their engagement

with remunerative content is quite low (\bar{x} = 1.59, *S.D.* = 0.75).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the variables

Measurement	<i>N</i>	\bar{x}	<i>S.D.</i>	Number of item	Cronbach's alpha
Selective exposure (SE)	225	2.36	0.95	5	.65
Willingness to self-censor (WSC)	225	2.86	1.03	8	.69
Political news interest (Interest)	225	3.66	0.93	1	-
Online political engagement (like, comment, and share)					
General content	225	2.07	0.93	3	.77
Informational content	225	2.33	1.02	3	.73
Entertaining content	225	2.11	1.01	3	.76
Remunerative content	225	1.59	0.75	3	.75
Relational content	225	2.01	0.96	3	.78

Results of the Multiple Regression analyses indicated, first, that the residuals of test of dependence among the five outcomes in each model were significant and there is no multicollinearity among four predictors (VIF = 1.14-1.18, tolerance score = 0.85-0.88), supporting our need to use Multiple Regression to test both proposed research hypotheses. **Hypothesis 1** proposed a positive impact of selective exposure on the respondents' online political engagement, and also on their engagement with four different types of content – *informational*, *entertaining*, *relational* and *remunerative* content – based on the U&G. The first research hypothesis and its four sub-hypotheses were supported based on the results of the analyses using SE, WSC, and Political news interest as the

predictors with significant *beta* values for online political engagement, β = 0.19, $t(221) = 2.94$, $p < .01$; engagement with *entertaining* content, β = 0.13, $t(221) = 3.28$, $p < .001$; *relational* content, β = 0.11, $t(221) = 3.10$, $p < .05$; and *remunerative* content, β = 0.14, $t(221) = 1.98$, $p < .05$, but *SE* have no effect on *informational* content, β = 0.09, $t(221) = 1.40$, $p = .16$. As hypothesized, the respondents with higher Selective Exposure to political news on Facebook were likely to engage with political news articles on Facebook, and were likely to engage with *entertaining*, *relational* and *remunerative* content, based on the UGT.

Table 2 Results of the multiple regression analysis on predictors of political engagement on Facebook based on the type of news content

Predictors	B	β	S.E.	t
Informational content	$R^2 = 0.21, F(3,221) = 19.42, p < .001$			
SE	0.17	0.09	0.12	1.40
WSC	-0.44	-0.22	0.13	-3.37***
Interest	0.39	0.36	0.07	5.84***
Entertaining content	$R^2 = 0.12, F(3,221) = 9.94, p < .001$			
SE	0.41	0.23	0.13	3.28***
WSC	-0.16	-0.08	0.14	-1.18
Interest	0.26	0.24	0.07	3.69***
Relational content	$R^2 = 0.20, F(3,221) = 18.30, p < .001$			
SE	0.23	0.14	0.11	3.10*
WSC	-0.37	-0.20	0.12	-3.03**
Interest	0.37	0.35	0.06	5.70***
Remunerative content	$R^2 = 0.07, F(3,221) = 5.82, p < .001$			
SE	0.18	0.14	0.10	1.98*
WSC	-0.23	-0.16	0.10	-2.25*
Interest	0.14	0.17	0.05	2.58**
General content	$R^2 = 0.24, F(3,221) = 22.96, p < .001$			
SE	0.32	0.19	0.11	2.94**
WSC	-0.33	-0.18	0.11	-2.81**
Interest	0.39	0.39	0.06	6.49***

Noted: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, SE = Selective Exposure, WSC = Willingness to self-censor, Interest = Political news interest.

Hypothesis 2 proposed a negative impact of WSC on respondents' online political engagement, and also on their engagement with four types of content. This second hypothesis and its four sub-hypotheses were supported based on the results of the analyses using WSC, SE, and political news interest as the predictors with significant *beta* values for online political engagement, $\beta = -0.18$, $t(221) = -2.81$, $p < .01$; engagement with *informational* content, $\beta = -0.22$, $t(221) = -3.37$, $p < .001$; *relational* content, $\beta = -0.20$, $t(221) = -3.03$, $p < .01$; and *remunerative* content, $\beta = -0.10$, $t(221) = -2.25$, $p < .05$, but WSC have no effect on *entertaining* content, $\beta = -0.08$, $t(221) = -1.18$, $p = .24$. As hypothesized, the respondents who have lower willingness to self-censor regarding political news on Facebook tend to engage with political news articles on Facebook, and tend to engage with informational, relational, and remunerative content, based on the UGT.

As shown in Table 2, political news interest is the variable that significantly predicts engagement in all political news content types. Moreover, engaging in general content has $R^2 = 0.24$, $F(3,221) = 22.96$, $p < .001$ which reveals that 24 percent of variance of online political engagement can be explained by selective exposure, willingness to self-censor, and political news interest. In a similar vein, R^2 values of four different types of content vary from 0.07 to 0.21.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the association of Selective Exposure (SE), Willingness to Self-Censor (WSC), and political news interest in influencing Thai Millennials' political engagement (Like, Comment, and Share) on Facebook, and

expanded the roles of SE and WSC by detailing the difference of individual's motivation to engage in various political news contents. Overall, political news interest predicted every type of political news engagement, which coincided with previous research that indicated a positive relationship between political interest and online social media political participation (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Ljungberg, 2013). The relationship between political interest and news engagement may be indirectly explained by selective exposure and the Facebook algorithm (Thorson, Cotter, Medeiros, & Pak, 2021).

Based on the results of multiple regression analysis, SE has less power to explain the news engagement when compared to WSC and political interest. The low beta of SE may be explained by the uniqueness of the Millennial's generation who tends to seek opposite opinion and has the intention to read the opposite view which is a natural human tendency if they consider that information useful (Bobok, 2016; Gottfried & Barthel, 2015).

These research results partly supported the previous research that explained the positive relationship between Selective Exposure and the Spiral of Silences Theory that jointly promotes individual political engagement (Pew Internet Study, 2005). Among general, relational, and remunerative contents, SE and political news interest showed a positive influence on political engagement whereas WSC showed a negative influence on political engagement. However, this research found different effects of SE and WSC on informational and entertaining contents. The informational content was predicted by political news interest and WSC and entertaining political news content engagement were predicted by political news interest and SE.

Willingness to self-censor negatively predicted engagement with general, informational, relational, and remunerative contents except entertaining content, and that might be explained by the level of a self-related content type. Kim and Yang (2017) stated that posting self-related information strategy was less likely to be shared to prevent a negative consequence from fear of isolation and communication (Kwon, Moon, & Stefanone, 2015). According to the nature of the millennium generation, they highly concern about self-image and social position in their social media (Nuzulita & Subriadi, 2020). Therefore, engaging in high self-related information such as informational content is able to trigger the concern about their self-presentation on their own Facebook profile regarding how they will appear and how they will engage with politics.

Moreover, the negative impact of using Facebook exists not only online but also in many offline settings: home, workplace, social gatherings with friends, and community meetings (Hampton et al., 2016). In Thailand, many political situations scubas the midst of serious ideological clashes involving the “Red Shirts” and “Yellow Shirt” advocates (Magpanthong & McDaniel, 2016) with strict regulations being launched. Hence, expressing opinions against the government during the political situation under the military government (Pootrakul, 2014) is risky. For example, the Computer-related Crime Act 2007 could potentially inhibit the engagement of Thai Millennials by trigger their willingness to self-censor in order to avoid the negative consequences as revealed in the research findings.

This research had some limitations. It should be noted that the online survey was conducted

during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the situation of which is lacking of political mobs and overshadowing many political issues. This could affect the participants’ normal responses or inhibit their opinion expression. Also, as mentioned by Srimahawaro (2014), Thais’ political culture and the right perception about democracy were not adopted by a majority of the population which may lead to a low level of political participation and action.

Suggestion

A room for future research is available to clarify topics related to the political climate, political orientation, or different generations. The political climate could be applied to measure the political engagement across various situations, e.g. during national elections, political scandals, or mass protests. The netizens had various political orientations and identities to determine the influences on motivation to engage with online political news in more details (Nolan, 1971). Also, comparative studies across generations, countries, and platforms should be addressed to understand wider political phenomena within the online public sphere. Due to globalization, political news and issues appear worldwide, and may involve international politics and the relationship between Thailand and other countries. This topic should be addressed in future research.

According to these research results, Millennials’ willingness to self-censor is an important inhibiting factor that regulates political news engagement. The stakeholders should consider that building trust, security, and privacy between netizens, politicians, and government on online or social media can reduce self-censorship, as suggested by Sleeper

and colleges (2013) that the “permission to share” could be able to reduce self-censorship. The practical implications for many stakeholders included government officers, communication directors, and social media content strategists. They should consider using the variety of political news content types to gain more online engagement with political news posts. For example, the reporter who describes very informative political details by using the political meme for content coverage should increase “engagement” among readers. In the long term, this could lead to improving the quality of public engagement with online political news.

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