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Digital Factors Influencing the Use of Social Media in Political Communication Among Thai Youths

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the digital factors influencing the use of social media in the political communication of Thai youths. Four hundred samples were collected through multi-stage sampling from undergraduate students studying at higher education institutions in Thailand. A questionnaire was used as a research tool and the content validity of the questionnaire was examined. Cronbach's alpha was also applied in a pre-test stage to measure the reliability. The alpha coefficient for all items was 0.95. The results showed that political news tracking was most influenced by the motivation for using social media, and media literacy in analysis of political issues, in terms of creating political content, and in the dimension of access for political information. The variation of political news tracking was explained at 33.6 %. Political discussion was mostly influenced by media literacy in access for political information, as well as the motivation for the use of social media. The variation of the political discussions was explained at 35.3 %. Political mobilization was most influenced by media literacy in creating political content, motivation for using social media, and media literacy in access for political information. The variation of the political mobilization was explained at 33.0 %.

Keywords: digital factors, media literacy, social media, political communication, youths, media.

1. Introduction

The Internet connection and further development of modern communication technology have made social media the most popular channel for communication between people and groups (Jun, 2012), allowing citizens and politicians to interact closely through two-way communication. The Internet has progressed into a key force in driving political activities. Factors involved in the use of social media to promote participation in political communication are referred to as 'digital factors' that influence online media usage; including accessibility, usability, and the knowledgeable use of media. They embraced motivation for using the media as well as social media literacy, which can act as both reinforcement and a barrier to political communication. Differences and inequalities between those with access to the Internet and those without are now considered a challenge in modern society (Breindl, 2010; Jensen, 2006).

It was also found that exposure to political information promotes political communication among members of society with common interests, thus greatly increasing the audience's knowledge and understanding of political situations (Conroy-Krutz, 2018). Social media presents three potential forms of political communication: Information (tracking political information); Discussion (discussion of political issues); and Mobilization (political mobilization) (Anouar, 2014; Breindl, 2010). In the first objective, social media plays a role as a channel for news exposure.

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By keeping up with the news regularly, it helps to build awareness of information, thereby promoting informed citizens. In the second objective, political debate and discussion may reflect political views, as well as the identities and stances of communicators as active citizens. The third objective leads to the mobilization of political forces in various activities. Through communication between groups of people with common political interests, political communication is the starting point for political participation both online and in the real world (Lee, Chan, 2015).

Social media is a relatively new media that influences online communication. Motivation for using social media is therefore part of the digital factors influencing participation in online political communication. They include two-way communication, ease of access and dissemination of information, virtual community building, the ability to employ portable communications devices, processing content from multiple sources together, promoting cyber inclusion, allowing users to change the content (theirs and that of others), and the ability to strengthen and maintain relationships in networks (Logan, 2010; Medaglia et al., 2009). All of these factors influence today's Thai youth to choose social media for political communication at different levels. Digital factors also cover social media literacy as a path to help young citizens thrive in the digital world. As a result, they can develop into active citizens and participate in political activities (Ashley et al., 2017; Mihailidis, 2014). New media features have strengthened the freedom of expression among younger members of society, thereby giving them rights and voices in society. This will lead to communication and sharing of different and diverse political views. Media literacy is therefore becoming increasingly important to promote the quality and accurate communication of information to others and society (UNESCO, 2021).

New media has opened up a 'space' for youths to participate in political communication through various channels, particularly social media. This research, therefore, aims to study youths who are first-time voters from leading universities in each region of Thailand. The country is classified into four regions according to the original administrative area: the Central Region; Northern Region; Northeastern Region; and the Southern Region (Office..., 2005). Each region is home to leading educational institutions, which have been a crucible for decades of youth's attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors. Social institutions, especially higher education institutions, serve to produce graduates and are downstream in creating human resources for society. However, higher education institutions are not only responsible for transferring knowledge and new ideas to youths but are also political lulling institutions that prepare graduates to perform civic duties and participate in a democratic society.

Based on a review of previous research, there appeared to be no study of the factors influencing youths in political communication in both Thai and international social contexts, nor any reference to the possible digital factors. This led to the research question: What factors influence the youths' use of social media in political communication? This research aims to study factors influencing the use of social media in political communication among youths and to enhance understanding of the digital factors of social media motivation and social media literacy influencing political communication. The results herein help to determine guidelines for Thai youths to develop the potential to use social media in constructive political communication and make relevant agencies aware of the influence of social media and social media literacy in political communication. This may further lead to the development of a democratic Thai society in the next order.

2. Materials and methods

Conceptual Framework

Uses and Gratifications

Ahmed and Zia (Ahmed, Zia, 2022) indicated that Blumler, Katz's theory of *Uses and Gratifications* has studied the reactions of individuals to media influence (Blumler, Katz, 1974). McCay-Peet, Quan-Haase (McCay-Peet, Quan-Haase, 2016) also stated that the uses and gratifications theory aimed to study a person's media utilization and what attract a person's attention to media exposure.

In the past, the uses and gratifications theory proposed a media usage paradigm that motivated media consumption and access to mass media (Rubin, 2009), which is inconsistent with the preferences of new media characteristics (Sundar, Limperos, 2013), namely interaction features, which are important motivations for new generation media (Korhan, Ersoy, 2016). However, in an era where new media has more influence on audiences, the theory of uses and gratifications has become a guideline in the study of new media and particularly social media. This

is because social interaction promotes active exposure of the audience and is a key motivation to promote exposure from various social media platforms (Valenzuela et al., 2009). Social media was also found to have benefits for relaxation, time-passing, information seeking and sharing, entertainment, mood management, and the enrichment of social relationships through the strengthening of social relationships. Through the development of social media as a communication paradigm, it has encouraged receivers to create and share information.

Political Communication

Political communication refers to the process of creating and interpreting political messages that stimulate reflexes (Griffin, 2009). In the process of political communication, receivers take a passive role through one-way communication or one-dimensional communication. They may play an active role in interacting with politicians, government officials, or political powers through the process of two-way (or two-dimensional) communication.

In addition, it may be a communicative interaction between receivers, who are citizens in a democratic society through a two-way communication process in a communication network via social media. However, such communication is not an interaction between two people, but rather a response to interactions between groups of people who share common interests and who are involved in the communication network, described as three-dimensional communication. Political communication may thus occur simultaneously (synchronous) or not occur at the same time (asynchronous) (Hoffman, 2012).

Anouar (Anouar, 2014) and Breindl (Breindl, 2010) outlined three main pillars of political exploitation of the Internet, the first of which is the monitoring of political information. Information, or data, is an important aspect in encouraging citizens to keep up with information and become informed citizens, which is the heart of democracy. Information drives communication and political participation.

The second core is discussion and/or debate; another mechanism that promotes 'active citizens', which help to refine and nurture political ideas between citizens or political representatives in public spaces. The third core is political mobilization, which is based on the idea that citizens need to be more politically involved in order to build a democratic society through active political participation.

Factors influencing Use of Social Media

Digital factors, which are new factors that influence online media usage, consist of the accessibility, usability, and knowledgeable use of media. They embrace motivation for the development of media usage and social media literacy, acting as both reinforcement and a barrier to political communication through communication technology (Breindl, 2010; Jensen, 2006).

Motivation for use

The study of motivation in the use of social media is one of the digital factors influencing participation in online political communication.

Therefore, new media features (Logan, 2010) are integrated with social media features (Medaglia et al., 2009), which can be summarized as social media motivation as follows: 1) social media can communicate in two directions where users can change their roles to senders; 2) social media is easy to access and disseminate information; 3) social media promotes continuous learning; 4) social media facilitates the creation of virtual communities; 5) social media can be installed and connected to portable communication devices; 6) social media has a converged nature by gathering various media into a single communication device; such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter; and 7) social media presents content processed from multiple sources.

Social Media Literacy

UNESCO (UNESCO, 2007) defines media literacy as the ability to analyze, criticize, and evaluate media, media accessibility, and media production and presentation in several forms. Media literacy also includes educational activities to develop analytical and critical skills, as well as to create opportunities for media access. The development of 'Social media literacy' frameworks in this study integrated the UNESCO's (UNESCO, 2007) media literacy component with the media literacy component of Ofcom (Office of Communications, 2008). At the same time, it has also linked digital literacy skills of the Center for Media Literacy's (Center for Media Literacy, 2008) five key concepts in media literacy, and the six characteristics of social media developed by Medaglia et al. (Medaglia et al., 2009) which characterized important principles in media literacy.

From a review of related literature, the researchers developed a conceptual framework (Figure 1) by setting an independent variable, namely, the digital factors influencing the use of

social media in political communication, including motivation for using social media and social media literacy (Breindl, 2010; Jensen, 2006). The dependent variable was the use of social media in political communication, which covers three issues: political information or following up on political news; political discussion; and political mobilization (Anouar, 2014; Breindl, 2010).

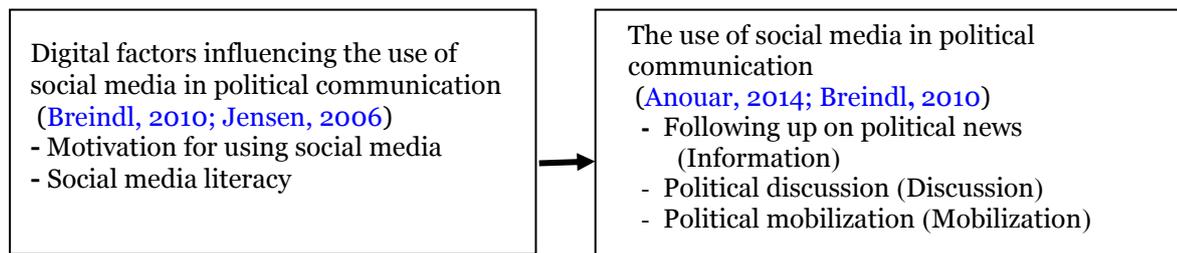


Fig. 1. Research conceptual framework

Research Method

This study applied the quantitative research method. The population under the study consisted of 3,401,148 undergraduate students, aged 18-22 years, studying in higher education institutions in Thailand (Ministry..., 2021).

This research uses multi-stage sampling, the first of which was a stratified sampling of Thailand's four regions: Central, Northern, Northeastern, and Southern, representing youths demonstrating different media usages and political communication behavior. Then, purposive sampling was performed by choosing the first leading university in each region, which had experience in imparting knowledge and new ideas to young people, and a long-time political facilitator to nurture youths to perform civic duties and participate in a democratic society. The sample size was divided according to population. The next step, cluster sampling, classified students in each educational institution to obtain a representative sample of the population by random delegation, classified by field of study and year. Simple random sampling was conducted by teachers via an online questionnaire.

Data were obtained from December 2021 to April 2022 and involved the use of social media in political communication. The validity of the content of the questionnaire was examined using the Index of item-objective congruence (IOC). Each question had an IOC value of 0.6-1.0. After a review by three content experts, recommendations were provided to improve its quality. Upon improvement, the questionnaire was tested for reliability through the responses of 30 students at the selected University in the northeast of Thailand (*Anonymous for reviewers*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.95, indicating that the questionnaire was of sufficient quality for data collection. A total of 400 questionnaires were then collected, omitting any incomplete responses.

The method of data collection was authorized by each of the universities, and then further coordinated by the researchers with program lecturers and students via e-mail.

The questionnaire was developed from concepts, theories, and research related to the use of social media in political communication among youths; consisted of three parts: (1) questions about the students' personal attributes; (2) questions about digital factors influencing their use of social media in political communication, including motivations for using social media, and social media literacy; and (3) questions about the use of social media in political communication consisting of the study of the three following issues; access to political information, political discussions, and political mobilization.

Data analysis was performed by using descriptive statistics; frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, and the testing of the independent variables that influenced one another (the motivation in using social media and social media literacy) and one dependent variable (the use of social media in political communication). The three potential forms of political communication (Information, Discussion, and Mobilization) were analyzed through multiple regression analysis.

This research is eligible for an exemption for human research ethics from the Human Research Committee of Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand on November 3, 2021, authorized under Registration Number HE643221.

3. Discussion

Motivation for using social media mostly influenced the use of social media in political information, followed by political communication. Incentives for using social media embrace the ease of access and dissemination of information since it can be conveniently installed on portable communication devices. Communication occurs in two directions, resulting in social interactions between users. The creation of content by users (user-generated content) generates profiles that connect users through communication, including the political dimension. Social media also provides virtual spaces that promote information seeking and sharing, which help unite a group of people in a virtual community (Chan et al., 2017). Everyone has a different motivation for using social media. This motivation has encouraged political exposure and the follow-up of political news, as well as significantly affecting levels of political participation (Chan et al., 2017). In political communication, especially in the area of political information, social media has fostered both intentional and incidental exposure to political news among youths, thus causing political news to become part of their lives. The motivations to promote political activities are 1) decision-making tools, such as judging candidates; and 2) social utilities, such as communicating with other people (Kaye, Johnson, 2002). The growth of social media has fostered the potential of communication through digital platforms to connect people in society and provide a place for political expression; resulting in the interaction, cooperation, and mobilization to support political activities among groups of people with common interests (Calderaro, 2018; Chadwick, 2017). The knowledge gained from following political news represents an important factor in promoting effective political communication and participation. It was also determined that media literacy was a factor influencing political communication. Political communication was predominantly influenced by political information (Ashley et al., 2017).

Although the use of new media has the potential to promote political participation, academics have become concerned about the messages youths are exposed to and how young people choose to interact with online political issues. Their concerns involve the spread of misinformation (Allcott et al., 2019) caused by media algorithms and the news sharing by members of social networks (Brundidge, 2010; Lee, Kim, 2017; Prior, 2007; Tewksbury et al., 2001), internet outrage language (Middaugh, 2019; Wollebæk et al., 2019), and the 'Filter Bubble' (Pariser, 2011), 'Echo Chamber' (Sunstein, 2007), and 'Information Cocoon' (Sunstein, 2018). This implies that youths may choose to receive only news that is consistent with their thoughts, beliefs, and political views; resulting in the perception of information in one direction, leading to political polarization (Sunstein, 2001). The individuals must be exposed to different information and ideas to reflect the reality of society, thereby creating a clearer understanding of complex political issues, (Brundidge, Rice, 2009; Habermas, 1989; Kahne, et al., 2012) as well as awareness of different political opinions; leading to mutual understandings (Jamieson, Cappella, 2008; Mutz, 2006).

Media literacy in term of access to political information mostly influenced the use of social media in political discussion because social media has the potential to promote political expression (Aboukacem et al., 2018). Therefore, media literacy in information access is related to social goals, which involve political participation and civic engagement (Kahne et al., 2016), where even the discussion of political issues cannot avoid the importance of media literacy (Mihailidis, Thevenin, 2013). News from media thus not only melds the thoughts, attitudes, and political behavior of society's members but also enhances political knowledge (Aboukacem et al., 2018; Ashley et al., 2017; Kember, Zylinska, 2015; Stoddard, 2014). Acquiring media literacy skills in access to political information will result in increased awareness of social and political events. At the same time, low political confidence may develop as a result of one's less positive political views or the suspicion of political information exposure. Research also found that the gap in media literacy is similar to the knowledge gap or digital inequality, resulting in participation gap (Jenkins et al., 2009) and unequal benefits from media exposure. Individuals with high media literacy skills are typically more politically informed and involved than those with low media literacy (Ashley et al., 2017). As a result, people develop rights and voices in society through access to information, thus leading to the communication and sharing of different political views. Media literacy is therefore becoming increasingly important to promote the quality and accurate exchange of information to others and society (Mihailidis, 2018; UNESCO, 2021).

Media literacy regarding analysis of political information mostly influenced the use of social media in political information. Critical thinking skills are one of the key skills in media literacy that promote the rational exposure of the audience. This makes following and consuming political news

useful in broadening the horizons and raising awareness (Ashley et al., 2017; Fleming, 2014; Silverblatt, 2018; Vraga et al., 2009, 2012) found that exposure bias was reduced, and that perceived credibility of news increases when youths have media literacy skills; as critical thinking skills help receivers distinguish fact from opinion, compare news through various sources and channels, distinguish fake news (Ashley et al., 2017; Hobbs, 2010; Lievrouw, Livingstone, 2006; Potter, 2019), and evaluate online news in both bias and credibility in communication (Kahn et al., 2012; Plotnikova et al., 2021; Silverblatt, 2018). As to the speed of producing and sharing information, news self-curation, youths prefer online news, as it is effortlessly accessible (Aboulkacem et al., 2018; Lankshear, Knobel, 2004). For this reason, understanding media ecosystems is essential for the awareness of the mechanisms behind online content, which will help consumers to determine credibility, as well as understand the potential and limitations of online media for civic duty in a democratic society. Media literacy skills promote the search for a wide variety of information from both like-minded and different-minded individuals to assess the credibility of online information from various channels (Kahne et al., 2012; McGrew et al., 2018).

The results indicated that media literacy concerning creation of (participation in) political information mostly influenced the use of social media in political mobilization. Social media fosters two-way communication between users. Communication through social media is therefore an important mechanism for political mobilization, where youths can become a sender to share political information, discuss and debate political issues, and persuade network friends to participate in political activities. However, to constructively communicate political issues for one's benefit or that of others, users must have the skills necessary to think critically before expressing their opinions (Silverblatt, 2018). Media literacy empowers young citizens to thrive in today's digital world with the skills necessary to receive and create media messages effectively (Drotner, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2009); such as effective information searching (Hargittai, 2010; Hargittai, Shaw, 2013), credibility assessment (Kahne, Bowyer, 2017; McGrew et al., 2017); and disseminating and creating content for political participation.

Individuals are more likely to be influenced through a network of friends or others with horizontal relationships, in which close interpersonal relationships foster political mobilization rather than loose ties (Bond et al., 2012; Tang, 2018). While youths conduct more online activities than adults; they are, nonetheless, less politically involved and not inclined to create or disseminate political information through online media (Cohen, Kahne, 2012). However, when social media has decentralized communication among its members, youths can then mobilize political forces through a network of communication between groups of people with common interests (Kahne et al., 2016). Political discussion, debate, and the persuasion of horizontal personal networks thereby encourage collective action to empower political activities (Tang, 2018).

As a result, social media has become an important tool for political mobilization playing a greater role in political communication than in the past (Allen, Light, 2015; Bennett, Segerberg, 2012; Weirman, 2020). Media literacy is, therefore, one of the necessities of a democratic society. It focuses on three outcomes: 1) being a critical thinker; 2) being a communicator and creator; and 3) being a leader in social change (Ashley et al., 2017), to foster informed citizens who are alert, aware, and up-to-date with current information (Hobbs, 2010; Lievrouw, Livingstone, 2006; Potter, 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

Media literacy is linked to skills in other disciplines; such as information literacy, digital literacy, critical literacy, and news literacy, as they encourage users to consume online information wisely, and promote the participation of citizens in various political activities within a democratic society (Aboulkacem et al., 2018; Ashley et al., 2017; Hobbs, Jensen, 2009; Hobbs, 2010; Silverblatt, 2018). The context of new media communication promotes greater audience engagement, referred to as 'participatory culture' (Jenkins et al., 2009), which features interaction and communication between peers within the social network (Middaugh et al., 2022), non-hierarchical communication, freedom from elites, and influential political organizations (Kahne, Bowyer, 2019).

In political communication, a participatory culture generates not just news consumption, but also the dissemination of information, as well as encouraging political behavior; where individuals can change their roles as senders or creators in political communication (Crampton et al., 2018; Kahne et al., 2015; Kahne, Bowyer, 2019). Strong democracy comes from access to high-quality information and the potential for debate, discussion, deliberation, empathy, and concession (Bradshaw, Howard, 2019). To promote effective political communication among youths, media literacy is therefore necessary.

Media literacy is an essential skill for communicating information in an era where new media has an increasing influence on the lives of members of society (UNESCO, 2021).

4. Results

The results of the research are presented in four categories: (1) characteristics of the youths; (2) digital factors affecting the use of social media in political communication, which were divided into two parts, motivation for using social media and social media literacy; (3) the use of social media for political communication; and (4) the analysis of the factors influencing the use of social media in political communication, which are detailed as follows:

Characteristics of Respondents

The results showed that the youths of the sample group were male and female in similar proportions, 55.70 percent and 44.30 percent, respectively, 18-20 years of age. Roughly forty percent reported an average monthly income of 138-276 US \$, with 34 percent not exceeding 138 US \$. Interestingly, more than a third of the respondents spent between 6-11 US\$ per month on the Internet, with over 57 percent spending more than 11 US \$ per month.

Descriptive Analysis

Influential Digital Factors

Research results involving the influential digital factors can be classified into two areas: motivation for using social media, and social media literacy in politics.

The results of motivation for using social media revealed that youths were mostly motivated to use new media for three primary reasons: that social media is easy to access and to disseminate information ($\bar{x} = 4.35$); social media encourages continuous learning ($\bar{x} = 4.28$); and that social media can be installed on portable communication devices ($\bar{x} = 4.27$), accounting for 45.20, 41.30, and 40.50 percent, respectively.

The results of the research into social media literacy found that in terms of access to political social media, students were able to use each type of social media to access political news ($\bar{x} = 4.22$), representing 40.60 percent. Regarding social media analysis in politics, they were able to distinguish facts and opinions of political news on social media at high levels ($\bar{x} = 4.11$), as well as to explain the main and hidden objectives of political news on social media ($\bar{x} = 4.10$), representing 52.50 and 50.60 percent, respectively. Concerning the assessment of social media use in politics, youths were able to make reasonable decisions to believe or not believe political news on social media ($\bar{x} = 4.15$), accounting for 57.50 percent. In terms of social media creativity in politics, the students were very capable of thinking critically before expressing opinions or criticizing political news on social media ($\bar{x} = 4.15$). Political news through social media was also presented with an awareness of ethics, respecting different opinions, and communication security ($\bar{x} = 4.12$), accounting for 52.40 and 51.40 percent respectively.

Use of social media for political communication

The results of the analysis of the use of social media for political communication consisted of political information, referring to following political news, political discussion, and political mobilization. It was determined that social media was employed for political communication at the moderate level of roughly 40 percent. When considering social media use in political information, more than 90 percent of the respondents had followed political news from news feeds and media pages or political news pages via Facebook, or online television programs and newspapers. In discussing political issues, 70 percent of youths chatted via Messenger when they found common interests, and 63 percent exchanged ideas with like-minded and dissimilar political figures via Twitter. Regarding political mobilization, most students (70%) expressed their support or opposition to political activities via Facebook, followed by Twitter (67 %) and YouTube (38 %).

Factor analysis

Factor analysis was carried out using multiple regression analysis, in which the independent variables and dependent variables were measured in interval scales or proportions. Any variable measured at the group level would be changed to 'dummy' and the reference group determined. Within the multiple regression analysis, no pair of variables taken for analysis was permitted to correlate at more than 0.75 to avoid the problem of multi-collinearity that would lessen the value of prediction (Prasitratasin, 1995). The research herein presents that all of the variables in each pair correlated lower than 0.75, thereby allowing the application of multiple regression analysis. (Table 1).

Table 1. Factors influencing the use of social media in political communication of the Thai youths

<i>Factors influencing use of social media of the youths</i>	<i>Political communication</i>		<i>Political information</i>		<i>Political discussion</i>		<i>Political mobilization</i>	
	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1. Motivation for using social media.	0.243	0.000	0.283	0.000	0.186	0.002	0.204	0.001
2. Media literacy								
2.1. Access to political information.	0.227	0.001	0.141	0.048	0.274	0.000	0.181	0.013
2.2. Analysis of political information.	0.175	0.044	0.244	0.010	0.112	0.238	0.137	0.154
2.3. Evaluation of political information.	-0.116	0.229	-0.091	0.346	-0.097	0.317	-0.121	0.216
2.4. Creation of (participation in) political information.	0.233	0.010	0.208	0.023	0.177	0.053	0.246	0.008
	R2= 0.383		R2= 0.366		R2= 0.353		R2= 0.330	

Motivation factors

Motivation for using social media mostly influenced the use of social media in political information (Beta = 0.283), followed by political communication (Beta = 0.243), political mobilization (Beta = 0.204), and political discussion (Beta= 0.186) at a significant level (0.01).

Media literacy factors

Media literacy in term of access to political information mostly influenced the use of social media in political discussion (Beta = 0.274), followed by political communication (Beta = 0.227), and political mobilization (Beta= 0.181) at a significant level (0.01).

Media literacy regarding analysis of political information mostly influenced the use of social media in political information (Beta = 0.244), followed by political communication (Beta = 0.175), at a significant level (0.01).

Media literacy concerning creation of (participation in) political information mostly influenced the use of social media in political mobilization (Beta = 0.246), followed by political communication (0.233), and political information (Beta= 0.208), at a significant level (0.01).

It was found that the motivation for using social media and the media literacy were able to mostly describe the variations of political communication at 38.3% (R2 = 0.383), followed by the ability to explain the variations of political information, political discussion, and political mobilization at 36.6, 35.3 and 33.0 respectively (R2 = 0.366, R2 = 0.353, and R2 = 0.330).

5. Conclusion

Youths were mostly motivated to use social media in three aspects: (1) social media is easy to access and disseminate information, (2) social media encourages continuous learning, and (3) social media can be accessed on portable communication devices. In terms of social media literacy, it was found that youths were able to use each type of social media to access political news at high levels; to distinguish facts and opinions from the political news, to make reasonable decisions to believe or not believe political news feeds, to choose to receive political news that is useful to themselves, to reject political content that is not useful or not constructive, and to think critically before expressing opinions or criticizing political news. When considering sources of social media usage, more than half of the youths used Facebook, Twitter, and/or YouTube Twitter at moderate to high levels (47.50, 41.50, and 40.50 percent, respectively).

There was also a direct correlation found between the use of social media for political communication, as well as the follow-up of political information, and the user's motivation for using social media. The use of social media for political discussion was mostly influenced by social media literacy regarding access to political information. It was also found that the use of social media for political mobilization was mostly influenced by social media literacy in terms of the creation of (or participation in) political information. Summarily, social media characteristics are key motivational factors in promoting political communication among youths; particularly the

interactive features that encourage two-way communication, thereby resulting in the exchange of news and discussions of political issues. This will subsequently induce political mobilization. However, although such features promote participation in political communication among youths, taking on a role in politics as a 'sender' can be problematic if the user doesn't have the necessary media literacy skills. Therefore, the family, educational institutions, and related agencies, such as the Parliament and the Office of the Election Commission; may cultivate and strengthen social media literacy skills to encourage youths to take advantage of social media in constructive ways, developing well-informed citizens who become an important force in the development of a democratic society.

Recommendations for further research are: (1) Other factors, apart from the digital factors, may warrant further study, such as personal and social factors influencing Thai youths' political communication. (2) The development of target groups could classify first-time eligible voters and non-graduates, further classified by university type, i.e., state universities, autonomous universities, private universities, and community colleges. Such target groups may thereby promote a role in political communication and political participation following the roles and duties of citizens in a democratic society.

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