

Social Media's Impact in Thailand's Politics



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ABSTRACT

The 21st century is known by different names such as, Information age, communication age satellite communication age and also a cyber and networking age. Social media gives various types of knowledge, information and opinions, and thoughts to build different types of knowledge society. The new Internet term, called worldwide web is based on cyber media that illustrated the information revolution in the age of globalization. The Canadian media sociologist Marshall McLuhan termed it as “Global Village”, as it was reflected in the social media. In his words “If the movie was the mechanization of movement and gesture, TV was the electrification of the same”. He wrote his thought which meant that every human action or event involves everybody in the village in the consequences of every event.

Keywords : Social, Media's, Impact, Politics, Different, Mechanization

I. INTRODUCTION

Thailand introduced Internet in 1987. In 1995 this connection were used for the commercial purposes. Since then, Thailand has seen rapid growth of Internet and increase in the Internet user. Thailand provides high-speed connections for public access, and the country offers reasonable plans at low cost Internet link fee. Due to the low cost Internet charge, 1.5 million Thai people were using Internet during the year of 1999. In 2013 this data had increased to 29 million, covering 43 percent of entire population. Only elite class, urban middle class people and college students adopted this benefit.

Social media is very popular in Thailand. There are 90 percent online users using social networking sites. Almost half of the user spends multiple times per day in social networking sites. On the other hand 22.4 percent population login only once a day. In this ratio

reflected 7 to 10 online users spend time with social media daily. (Peter Willnat and Annette Aw, 2014). Most of the user spends own time to chat with their friends and reading updates and sharing photo's, information or news.

During 2012 Thailand became 13th largest nation of having Facebook users. The maximum users of social site settle in Bangkok city. They want to make this city as worlds top most cities in terms of Facebook users. The largest groups of users are 18 to 24 years olds. Both male and females equally participate in social networking sites, but there is some discrimination between male and females population. The survey data provides some figures, which state that 52 percent users are females, and 48 percent are male users.

In mid-2013 there were two million twitter users in Thailand. It was the second largest group of twitter users in Southeast Asia. The citizens of Thailand on

regular post around 1.5 million tweets daily. In 2012 an expected 50 Thai political representatives and 700 journalists were active on twitter.

Thailand Social Media is a reliable network for communicating natural disasters. Thailand was suffering unprecedented flood situation in 2011. During this period, the established media was responding very slowly to the tragedy. Thai people turned to online sites and social media for necessary information. People were sharing flood photographs of overflowing canals and updated the exact location. They also advised fatal snakes on the movable on particular area and informed possible contributors about desired relief materials. During this period Facebook registration has been raised to 150 percent in daily use and Twitter 47 percent. On the other side Google provided *Thaiflood.com* website. Through this site, crises reply additional nonprofit organizations. After that this website became a social media hub for flood Information. During this period there were 150,000 members on Facebook page. This page name was "*Num Kuen Hai Reep Bork*" means when water rise tell me quickly. They inform flood status in actual time and all these information using by the government and citizens. Along with 150,000 floods related tweets were posted daily on its twitter account. The University student created series of animation that known as "*Roo Soo Flood*" means know how to fight the flood were spread broadly. Through animation video they advised viewers of the flood's gravity and educated them how to protect themselves. This animation Video gained 104,000 Facebook likes and this video viewed more than 1 million times on YouTube.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social media provides a platform to interact between groups and public sphere. In this virtual space people

exchange their idea and information. They create some content and share about the government policy, public policy in virtual space. Social media is a highly interactive platform but it depends on web-based technology and mobile. Now, Internet is more popular in Thailand cities. It is more reachable to different regions in the country. In 1996 Thailand was the third country in Southeast Asia to get Internet access. Social media acquired on a certain important role later the September 19, 2006 military coup. According to National Electronics and computer Technology center (NECTEC) there were 3.5 million Internet user in 2001 and 18.3 in 2009 and 27 percent of the countries approx 66 million citizens. In 2009 study found that most of the Internet consumer contact to high-speed Internet. In 2010 there was 69 million mobile phone subscribers that shows the investment amount of 104 percent. In Thailand social media is alternative source of information and platform. Which provide some information within the country current political crisis.

Nalinpat Porrawatpreyakorn (2009), In this article the author notes that Thailand telecommunication sector and industry has been continued growing in the last five years. In Thailand particular broadband Internet sector has been increasing. In 2007 Thailand become fastest rising user broadband markets as well as the country came one of five Asian countries rank between the world top ten countries. Unluckily, The software developers are still under pressure to provide excellence result. So, there were highly competitive environments. Due to software quality the Thai telecommunication industry face very typical problems. There were no proper management systems to expend their knowledge and experience within Executive Information System development teams. This also faced majority of software developers. During that period there were two software development companies that was TOT public Company Limited and True Corporation Public Company Limited. These two

are the major broadband Internet Service Providers (ISP) in the Bangkok city. They have own optical fiber cable networks within Bangkok city and around the city. The True Corporation Limited has 85 percent of market share in the Internet field. When we see the Thai's organizational context of EIS operation the result is very poor, because administrators could sometimes not deliver satisfactory contribution in the projects. In this situation juniors did not have complete powers to take decisions. The organizations communication structure is very complicated. Due to these restrictions the expansion teams sometimes not actuality identify the information requirements from administrators. Subordinates are waiting for routing committee decisions, but resulted are as usual administrative process. Lastly, be expected the plan were delayed.

One incident, which took place in May 2012 when lady Gaga flew into Bangkok city and sell, out their worth, coordinate to people, and sent a jolly message. "She had 24 million Twitter followers. Her message was I just landed in Bangkok baby! Prepared for 50,000 roaring Thai monsters" (Andrew Macgregor Marshall, 2014). I want to get lost in lady market and purchase a forged Rolex. In Bangkok city fake luxury watches are very famous for tourist men. These fake watches are openly sold in messy parts of the city. But, Thai citizens did not mention this issue, because it is understood for the individuals. Lady violated the unwritten rule of the country. Thousands of people condemned her activity on online platform and social media. Thereof impact the people quickly prepared a protest rally. Thailand director general Department of Intellectual Property considered the matter seriously and they took the enough responsibility therefore issued warrant and proper response. Government official reprove Gaga's tweet, it was offensive and making immoral appearance for the country.

Prime Minister Thaksin's know about the importance of Internet and telecom. He gave the first priority of telecom sector as well as Networking field. They want to develop Thailand as a Knowledge economy (Glen Lewis, 2006). During the Thai Rak Thai government rule the Net has been extended broadly. This development was the virtual but it was true in ground. Thaksin's government introduces Tele-centers in village communities, e-education policy. Specially, the e-education policy was developed by the Education Department and combination with National Electronics and Computer Technology Center. Ultimately, this policy had nominal affected to Thai community development and education of journalism. This policy did not become a part of improvers because it avoid the government control mainstream media for numerous of reasons. The Internet subscription fee was very low in Thailand because there were poor qualities of landline service in Internet and especially outside the Bangkok city. The expansion Internet Service Provider was large but they generated reliability problem. In Thailand there is language problem, because English is the most informative global communication in Net. But Thai People are not confident in English language. There is many cyber café in tourist spots, it use for the foreigner. The provincial towns has cyber café but its use fully young Thai boys, they regularly play in games. The Information Communication Technology Ministry advised compulsory registration in November 2004, because they want to control the computer game. During this period Ministry registered 5,600 Internet café. There is some Thai language site that carries political discussions uneven, but large people do not use this site for alternative Journalism. The language site is Sanook.com and Pantip.com.

In 2000 the entire situation had changed, because the CDs traders surprise to decrease the all-recording business in Thailand. In 2011 the popular Thai song

composers claimed that less than 500,000 copies of sales it was the tragedy. But today, more than 10,000 copies of sell it shows something different (Athip Jittarerk, 2014). In Thailand 90 percent band had their page on www.myspace.com. During the show they announce their Myspace addresses on stage. Through this platform they promote themselves on Internet and social media platform. In this space band can upload their song, show and pictures. They customized their page to fit their image. Now, in Thailand Myspace become a best interaction platform for bands because their friends, fans and organizers discuss about the band show. These bands post their latest release profile picture and advertisement for each other's. The show coordinators search new bands through Myspace and they invite them for cultural programme. Myspace is the best medium of Information circulation.

Telecommunication regulatory issue, because the government of Thailand reforming their telecommunication regulatory department, but some provocative issue continues unresolved (Conway, 2009). Therefore some important difficulties have foreign investment in the sector remain in place. Although, Thailand is still employed to open its basic telecommunication services, the government wants to adopt new technologies such as mobile phone and broadband Internet service. Those renovated the telecommunication sector in the intervening phase. According to 1997 constitution there were seven members of the National Telecommunication commission. They have autonomous authority and accountable for license. This responsibility assign the supervision of telecommunications operators and spectrum management, they activated it processes in November 2004. The government of Thailand builds new Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, which is complete responsible for telecommunication policy. The ministries take major initiatives equally Privatization of the

telecommunications companies. Through this initiative the government opens for the all sector clearly.

III. Methodology

This research conducted through mixed method that will be both quantitative and qualitative. The effort made to consult primary and secondary source material to give an objective analysis. Policy statements of the Council of Ministers, Ministry of Information and communication Technology, National Broadband Policy, Government policy book, Government foreign policy statements, E-Governing program, Political speeches, treaties and agreements, Interview reports, historical biographies and government policy papers etc. will be consulted.

Chronological study of Internet in Thailand

When Thai government commercialized the Internet in 1995 they were posting their views on online media. This online communication system took on a mainly important role after the 2006 military coup. Internet provides best way of communication for the yellow shirt and red shirt supporters. On the one hand Red-shirt supported former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and their constitutionalist. On the other hand yellow-shirt support Kings. They used online resources to mobilize citizens, backing to the democratic election of the Pheu Thai Party Yingluck Shinawatra, as prime minister in July 2011 (Freedom House 2009).

During the period of 2014 there were 35 percent of Internet user and next year it increased to four percent. Many Internet users inhabit in capital city Bangkok. But the Northeast region has very poor penetration for the Internet. In this region connection speed is average. Internet penetration was at 29 percent in 2014, up

from 26 percent in 2013. In 2013 mobile phone infiltration was from 140 to 144 percent. The government source stated that Internet penetration was at 37 percent in 2013, on the other side mobile phone increased to 120 percent in 2012. This data indicated that some people have two mobile phones device. In 2013 and 2014, as Thailand's increasing political conflict dropped into virtually every aspect of life, Internet freedom receded and flowed along with overall stability. A recent academic study highlights the overall scale of and exponential increase in online censorship over the past three years (Freedom House 2014).

According to the National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, the number of Internet users in Thailand steadily increased from 3.5 million in 2001 to 18.3 million in 2009. It represents the 27 percent of the country's population around 66 million-people. During the period of 2010 there were 69 million telephony and mobile phone subscribers it was the penetration rate of 104 percent. This was a noticeable rise from a penetration rate of about 27 percent in 2002. Internet and broadband usage continued to expand in 2010. Social media played a key role for citizen journalist to spread reports on events. Many times the mainstream media did not cover these reports. From April to May 2010 the country situation was unstable due to the civil conflict. During this period of time Facebook, YouTube, Twitter were in the top 20 most visited websites in Thailand. Subsequently in 2007, government authorities blocked a number of websites whose content was particularly criticized by the kings and his majesty (Annual Report 2012).

The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission Thailand's telecom regulator and the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology announced their collaboration to provide broadband Internet access at a reasonable cost to all

70,000 villages nationwide by the end of 2016. This link would be provided through both ways, wireless and fixed-line broadband access points. On the other side in April 2016, the Thai Cabinet approved a new frequency act. When it becomes a law it will officially ban the NBTC of independence. This law presented new way of online communication system, which comes under the control of the Commission for Digital Economy and Society, which will be headed by the Prime Minister (Freedom House 2016).

Social Media Politics in Thailand

Thailand is a unique country in the world in many aspects. There is a special law for King that is known as lese majeste law. According to the Thailand constitution, article 112 states that whoever defames, insults or threatens the King, Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years. This article came under the Thai criminal code. Despite this the country gives explanation and justification about lese majesty law. Thailand is a constitutional monarchy its move towards democracy and becomes an art of the country. The lese majesty protectors claim that the country love and respect their king is unique. On the other hand, People criticize this law and they say this law has become prime danger to freedom of expression. Now, recent discussion is going on lese majesty law, citizen experience that it is just hidden benefit of the government officials. Many times it is used as the most basic issue for major relationship between persons in the power and the ruled. The basic rights of the citizen are rights and liberties, equality before the law; the source of sovereign power, but the Thailand government system and polity are primarily constitutional monarchy although the country ruled by the democratic system of control with the monarch as head of state and republic. This lese majeste law gives the protections of irresistible, unavoidable

existence for economy, politics and Thai society. In this result, the action of the law is creating a black hole of silence in the center of the Thai political body. In this situation social and political speech is demoted to the bounds as whisperings and allusion.

In 2007 Thai military began the effort to fully control the Internet. After 2006 coup, the military led Surayud government passed the computer crime Act, while the Ministry of Information and communication Technology introduced the filtering the Internet content first time in 2002. The computer crime act 2007 was the first phase of state legalization to control the information on the Internet. This act has built extensive penalties for cyber-crimes and traced criminal obligation on any person those who allowed prohibited content to be spread, including the king of Thailand under the lese majesty law (Laungaramsri, 2016).

When this act came into the public domain, the law has been broadly analyzed for its encroachment of freedom of expression on the Internet. The outcome of the 2014 coup, Internet was taken under remarkable political pressure in Thailand. Because, social media was the only one tool remaining ground used by the Thai protesters to wage protest and involve in online activism against the coup d'état. The cyberspace similarly became the greatest effective compass when military government could use their political legitimacy, instigate cyber defamations against the opposition and operate civil emotion. In Thailand there were numerous coups d'état who had ruled, but recent coup has joint offline and online strategies of suppression, incorporating mass supported surveillance and try to secure its dictatorial rule.

They give an argument that Google released their transparency report in 2012. The Google search engine received message in the direction of Thailand ministry

of Information and Communication in 2011. The ministry requested to Google that they remove total 417 content that is related to mocking king (Liu, John and Sejin Kim, 2012). All these content and YouTube videos were apparently sarcastic and condemning the King in violation of Thai lese-majeste laws. Despite this only 307 content elements were completely detached by Google. On the other side 110 cases were completely removed. In another case, Thai online news website director Chiranuch Premchaiporn charged under sections 14 and 15 of the computer Crime Act. Because the director slowly removed ten message content on the news website which was ostensibly offensive to the monarchy. Due to this case the Thailand government gave her eight-month jail sentence and imposed a fine of THB20,000. The ruling judge Kampol Rungrat give their argument that the guilty verdict was based on one particular post which was left on the site for 20 days, on the other side they said she did not do their duty in routine and permissible the inappropriate posting to be on the website for too long. This statement was not factually right because director ultimately removed offensive remarks. Every day approximately thousand content has been posted it is imposable to examine whole content.

New media had the potential to enhance people's access to political information, facilitate wider-ranging political discourse, and foster participation. Initially, the public responded positively to the more accessible communication channels, calling in to political talk programs and participating in online town hall meetings. However, new media's authentic populist potential was undercut by the fact that the new political media system evolved haphazardly, with no guiding principles or goals. Commercial interests and those already holding privileged positions in politics and the news industry heavily dominated it. Public enthusiasm eventually gave way to ambivalence and

cynicism, especially as the novelty of the first phase of new media wore off. The new media trends established in the 2008 campaign have carried over to the realm of government and politics more generally. Social media have become a pervasive force in politics, altering the communication dynamics between political leaders, journalists, and the public. They have opened up wider avenues for instantaneous political discourse and debate. Research indicates that people's access to social media networks has a positive effect on their sense of political efficacy and tendency to participate in politics. However, there also has been backlash when social media discourse has become too nasty, and users have blocked content or dropped out of their social media networks. Social media allow people to efficiently organize and leverage their collective influence. Thus, political leaders are held more accountable because their actions are constantly probed on social media.

IV. CONCLUSION

Whereas the real names of Thai Facebook users are often illegible, their political preferences are not important. Conservative royalists typically liked and shared images of King Bhumibol and Princess Sirindhorn, especially around the numerous royal birthdays or state occasions. Former Prime Minister Thaksin supporters posted statuses featuring red themes supporting the holding of elections or satirizing the military or the judiciary, for example. Many Thai Facebook users have two accounts one is the neutral account using some approximation of the user's real name, which does not display any very overt political stance, and a fake name account on which the user posts more outspoken views. Most news appearing on social media is not original, citizen-generated content but the reposting of news stories and commentaries produced by ever more partisan newspaper and TV outlets. Increasingly, Thais share their political views on social media with like-minded

connections, evicting those who disagree from shared virtual space or not inviting them to join inner-circle Facebook groups where mutually reinforcing sentiments are freely exchanged. Technologies such as Facebook provide a surrogate political space and a mode of political participation. They are characterized by the use of improbable pen names, gossip, venomous personal attacks, and highly partisan stances on issues of the day. Central to their appeal are the ability use to multiple identities and the carte blanche that their façade of anonymity offers to those wishing to engage in acts of online defamation.

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