

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING ON POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN LOWER NORTHEASTERN REGION, THAILAND

Nalinee Thongprasert

Faculty of Business and Management, Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University,
Thailand

nthongprasert@hotmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to investigate the behavior of social networking in receiving political information and involving in politics of the university students in lower northeastern region and to examine the relationship of the reflection after receiving information through the social networking and the democratic and power-oriented consciousness of the respondents. The effect of the political consciousness on political involvement and monitoring of politician's work through the social networking are also the focus of the study. The research used a mixed-method of quantitative and qualitative approaches. A focus group was employed in the qualitative data collection from which 21 samples including chairman of the student were selected. The qualitative collected data were analyzed in order to that the results could be used to base the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was then utilized to collect the quantitative data from 427 sampled students in eight universities. The statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, Pearson's product moment correlation, and multiple regressions analysis were employed in data analysis. Receiving political information three to four times a week is found in mean frequency of the respondents. The behavior of the information recipients found not to voice their opinions and not to pass on the received information to other people on Facebook or other social networking is very close in proportion to those sharing their views and passing on the information to friends on the social networking. Only getting interested but not wanting to get involved in politics is the main reason of the samples. The reflection after receiving information results in most respondents saying they are able to understand, analyze, and identify facts of the received messages. And the ability in identifying of facts is related to the respondent's democratic consciousness while the inability in identifying of facts is relevant to the power-orientation. Hypothesis test indicates the democratic consciousness having relationship with the positive effect of political involvement and monitoring of politician's work whereas the power-oriented consciousness is found to be opposite in that the more the consciousness found to be power-oriented the less tendency to get involved in politics and monitoring of politician's work of the respondents exists.

Keywords: social networking, political consciousness, political culture

INTRODUCTION

In a democratic system, a political participation is very crucial to a development of democracy which is the political system with more emphasis on people. In this system people can express their needs and the potentate can serve by implementing them to the political policy.

A political participation has a verity of forms such as vote, campaign, group activities both legal and illegal acts. In a democracy the people must participate in a voluntary not sedition. For a voluntary participation is possible only when people have a democratic sense so they are

interested in monitoring political leaders use their power. The public expression of political participation can be expressed in a variety of channels. The channel known as public spaces that allow both public and the government discuss and exchange the ideas. This channel is influential factors to politicians in setting a state policy at both local and national levels. With the arrival of new technology, traditional public spaces have changed into a new online communication. In this type of space, information spreads fast and widely. Most popular Internet media that support a public space in communication are social web. Based on the statistics available (<http://www.it24grs.com/2012/Thailand-internet-yser-2011>), students make a considerable contribution in exchanging information. It leads to a social phenomenon known as 'online society'.

The objective of the present research was to study the use of social networking by university students of lower northeastern region in accessing information and a political activity. Attention was set on a relation and participation in a political activity in the wake of using the social networking. The research also studied a relation and an impact of political consciousness and a political participation via social networking. The research could be used as

a tool to enhance knowledge and understanding a political system suitable with a democratic system which had a constitutional monarchy.

METHOD

The study used a multi-method approach of a qualitative and quantitative research (Bryman, 1998). A qualitative approach focused on a group discussion as a guide to gain information to raise acquire an in-depth details. In-depth information obtained from a group discussion was used as a questionnaire divided into four parts: general information, use of media to receive and exchange information as well as a response following getting an access to information, questions on political consciousness in terms of political participation, monitoring politicians' performance, opinions and others.

The assumption of the research was that a reaction after information was received or exchanged was associated with a democratic political consciousness and an authoritarian one. The variables used in the research consisted of a response after the information was received and exchanged together with a democratic political consciousness and an authoritarian one. Statistics used in testing a hypothesis was Pearson's product moment correlation. The second hypothesis was that a

democratic and authoritarian political consciousness was related to and had an effect upon a political participation and follow-up of politicians' performance via social networking. Statistics used in a hypothesis test was a multiple regression analysis.

Research instrument was constructed and tested by compiling documents and relevant researches to a group discussion and a conceptual framework. Questions were made for a group discussion and tested for content validity. Information acquired from a group discussion was synthesized to be questions in a questionnaire and tested for reliability. Cronbach coefficient was equivalent to 0.89. The questionnaire derived was used to gather information from the 480 third and fourth year students who were members of social networking, 60 students were chosen from each university. The total of the questionnaire that was returned was 427 accounting for 89%. The research findings were as follows:

DISCUSSION

The majority of the samples were females representing 68.6% and males accounted for 31.4%. The subjects were aged between 18-25 years of age, accounting for 99.1. The correspondents were studying in the Faculty of Business

Administration (46.8%); Humanities (30.2%) and other faculties (8.9%). The majority of them had a monthly spending of more than 157.28 US\$ (26.9%); 23.7% of them had a monthly spending of 94.40 – 125.82US\$; 21.8% had a monthly spending of 125.85-157.28 US\$; 14.1% had a monthly spending of 62.94 - 94.37US\$ and 10.3% had a monthly spending of 31.45-62.91US\$.

The average of accessing political information from social networking of the groups under study was 3-4 times a week. Considering a behavior following getting an information, there was an equal proportion of those who did not express their opinions and those who did. The reason in explaining for not participating in a political activity was the subjects were just interested but did not want to participate in the activity. As regards the reaction or response following getting the information, the samples were mainly able to analyze and distinguish between facts of the information.

Result of Inferential Data Analysis to Test a Hypothesis

The first hypothesis

Knowledge and ability of university students of lower northeastern region to analyze and distinguish information derived from social networking were

related to a democratic and authoritarian political consciousness. The analysis result was shown in table.

Table 1. Analysis of Correlation Coefficient Values

Response to derived media	Political Consciousness	
	Democratic	Authoritarian
Understanding the media	-0.039	0.053
Not understanding the media	0.100	-0.093
Able to analyze	-0.048	0.005
Not able to analyze	0.014	-0.280*
Able to distinguish facts.	0.135*	0.054
Not able to distinguish facts.	0.011	-0.039
Able to analyze and distinguish but require time	0.054	-0.012

*Statistically significant at .05

From table 1, an analysis of correlation coefficient values between a response of the university students in lower northeastern region following getting the information via social networking and political consciousness found that the groups that could distinguish facts of information they were exposed to were related to a democratic political consciousness at a statistical significance of .05 ($r^2=0.135$, $p=.022$); the group that could not analyze the information obtained was related to an authoritarian political

consciousness at a statistical significance of .05 ($r^2=-0.280$, $p=-.017$).

The second hypothesis

A democratic and authoritarian political consciousness was related to and had an effect upon a political participation and follow-up of politicians' performance via social networking. To find out whether or not the variables were connected, the researcher synthesized a correlation of a democratic political consciousness and an authoritarian political consciousness; the researcher found that independent variables had a variance inflation factor (VIF)

equivalent to 1.00, which was less than 10. It indicated that independent variables had a relation without causing multicollinearity. The researcher had analyzed a multiple regression analysis by giving more

attention to politics news and monitored a political activity via social networking and by using a political consciousness as a predictor as seen in table 2.

Table 2. A multiple regression analysis by using a political participation and follow-up of a political activity through social networking as a criterion

Political consciousness	Students' role in political participation	S		
		Beta	t	p-value
Constancy	-0.313	0.165	-1.895	0.059
Democratic	0.810	0.065	18.819	0.000
Authoritarian	-0.108	0.051	-	0.012

F= 261.696 Adjusted R² =0.550

**statistically significant at .01,

* statistically significant at .05

From table 2, it was found that a democratic political consciousness of students in study was related to and had a positive effect on a political participation and on monitoring a political activity with a statistical significance of .01. An authoritarian political consciousness was related to and had a negative effect upon a political participation and follow-up of a political activity via social networking with a statistical significance of .05.

DISCUSSION

Based on a relation between a response of students under study to information in social networking and a democratic and authoritarian political consciousness, it was found that university students able to distinguish facts of information they received was related to a democratic political consciousness. They played a part in the process of idea exchanging and decision making. The

finding was consistent with a study conducted by Sombat Tamrongtanyawong (2523) and Josh Pasek and others (2006) who found that the Internet had potential to present data and information. It led to a popular political participation. The group unable to analyze the information developed an authoritarian political consciousness as the group viewed that political affairs did not concern them. Students in the group could not analyze information because they did not express an opinion or get involved in political participation.

An analysis of relations and an effect upon political consciousness in participating in political affairs found that the students who had a consciousness in democratic political affairs were more likely to pay attention to and participate in the political activity, and monitor politicians' activity. The explanation was that the subjects had a participatory political culture and appreciate a participation in political activities. Their aim was to control those authorized to exercise power in a right way. The researches that were conducted by Maleenee Somphocharoen (2547), Pandaree Chorum (2549), Hallvard (2008), Josh Pasek and others (2006) found that online social communication had an impact

on a participatory political consciousness or democratic culture.

CONCLUSION

The students who had an authoritarian political consciousness were in contrast with those who had a democratic consciousness. In other words, the more authoritarian political consciousness there was, the less a political activity was. The finding was in line with the study undertaken by Almond and Verba (1965) who explained that there was political culture in which people had a political consciousness and declined to take part in political activity. The populace in that culture was willing to acquiesce, obey and follow the law. The receivers of a message of this type were like the aid receivers who were supposed to revere and fear their patrons. It is a society that reflects an inequality between students and politicians. That was the key obstacle to expression and participation in political activities of students (Thongprasert, 2009). A growing concern was that the more students had an authoritarian political consciousness, the less their political activity was likely.

The following were the activities to be enhanced by the university. A forum was to be held to keep students informed of the rights, duties in a democratic system by using a social networking as a medium.

Instructors were advised to teach, and motivate students to take part in political activities and exchange a political opinion.

Students were to be encouraged to analyze the media especially online media to be cleverly selective of the information made available in the media.

Students were to be encouraged to be the informed groups able to analyze and correctly understand political information. They were to be advised to persuade their friends to take part in a democratic network, which can be another alternative to make best use of social networking to benefit individuals and society as a whole.

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