

The Influence of Digital Media on Political Attitudes and National Security

Grissana Jannit and Natnichar Kleebbuabarn

Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, 1-U-Thong Nok, Dusit, Bangkok, Thailand

E-Mail: Grissana.ja@ssru.ac.th, Nusnichar.kr@ssru.ac.th

Abstract

The rapid growth of digital media has significantly reshaped political communication and public engagement in Thailand, raising concerns about its implications for political attitudes and national security. This study examines the effect of digital media exposure on political attitudes and how these attitudes influence perceptions of national security risks among Thai citizens. Using a mixed-methods explanatory design, quantitative data were collected from a nationwide survey of 400 social media users and analyzed using regression and structural equation modeling techniques. The results show that digital media exposure and perceived information credibility significantly shape political attitudes, which in turn strongly predict perceptions of national security risks, including misinformation, political instability, and public order concerns. Exposure to online misinformation further amplifies these perceived risks. Qualitative interviews support the quantitative findings, highlighting information overload, political polarization, and concerns over national unity. The findings underscore the dual role of digital media as both a catalyst for political engagement and a source of potential security challenges, offering important implications for digital governance, media literacy, and policy development in Thailand.

Keywords: Digital media, Misinformation, National security, Political attitudes

1. Introduction

1.1 Principles and Rationale

The rapid expansion of digital media has significantly transformed political communication, information exchange, and public engagement worldwide. In Thailand, the proliferation of social networking platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and LINE has reshaped how citizens receive political information and participate in public discourse. According to the Digital 2024 Thailand Report, over 85% of Thais actively use social media for news consumption, making online platforms one of the most influential political communication channels in the country (Tilleke & Gibbins, 2024). This shift has weakened the traditional gatekeeping role of mainstream media and created a decentralized, participatory, and fast-moving information environment.

Digital media has also contributed to new patterns of political attitudes and behaviours in Thailand. Studies show that exposure to online political content is closely associated with increased political awareness, political efficacy, and willingness to participate in political activities, especially among younger generations (Sinpeng, 2021; Tapsuwan, 2023). The 2020–2021 youth-led political protests demonstrated the power of social media as a tool for

mobilization, narrative framing, and coalition building. Platforms such as Twitter and TikTok became spaces where political messages circulated rapidly, shaping public opinion and elevating issues such as constitutional reform, democratic governance, and civil liberties (Chalakorn & Streicher, 2022).

However, the rise of digital media also poses challenges for national security. The speed and volume of online information increase the risk of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and politically manipulated content. Research indicates that polarizing or false political information spreads quickly on Thai-language social media, influencing attitudes and contributing to social fragmentation (Jalli, 2021). These dynamics introduce pressures on state institutions as they attempt to manage online risks without undermining democratic freedoms. Consequently, the Thai government has strengthened digital governance measures through legislations such as the Computer Crime Act and the Cybersecurity Act, aimed at combating information threats, cybercrime, and destabilizing online behaviour (Techakittiroj & Charoensuk, 2022).

Therefore, understanding the influence of digital media on political attitudes and national security in Thailand is essential for both academic inquiry and policy formulation. As digital communication continues to expand, examining this relationship can provide insights into how political attitudes are formed in digital environments and how these attitudes shape or challenge the stability of political institutions and national security frameworks.

1.2 Research Objective

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the patterns and intensity of digital media usage among Thai citizens and their exposure to online political information.
2. To investigate the relationship between digital media exposure and political attitudes, including political trust, political efficacy, and political participation.
3. To analyze how online political information, misinformation, and digital activism contribute to political polarization and collective behavior in Thailand.

2. Literature Review

The literature collectively demonstrates that digital media is a powerful yet ambiguous force in shaping political attitudes and national stability. This synthesis informs the present study's integrated methodological approach, combining attitudinal analysis with digital-content and policy perspectives.

2.1 Digital Media and Political Communication: Theoretical and Meta-Analytic Foundations

Over the past two decades, digital media has substantially reshaped political communication by lowering information barriers, enabling peer-to-peer political expression, and creating new channels for citizen participation. Meta-analyses consistently show a small-to-moderate positive association between digital media use and political or civic participation, though the magnitude varies by platform type, political context, and measurement strategy (Boulianne, 2020). Scholars emphasize the conditional nature of these effects: while online platforms can facilitate engagement and democratic deliberation, they can also contribute to fragmentation

and ideological segregation depending on how they are designed and governed (Tucker et al., 2018).

2.2 Platforms, Youth, and Political Socialization in Thailand

Studies focusing on Thailand highlight social media's critical role in political socialization among young people, especially during the 2020–2021 pro-democracy protests. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok served as key infrastructures for narrative building, information dissemination, and coordination among student groups and activist networks (Boonyarattanasoontorn, 2021; Sinpeng, 2021). Research indicates that Thai hashtag activism often functions more as a discursive space for meaning-making and identity formation than merely as a mechanism for mobilizing offline protest, revealing a complex interplay between online expression and street-level collective action (Sinpeng & Niemczak, 2022).

2.3 Digital Exposure and Political Attitudes: Trust, Efficacy, and Polarization

Exposure to online political information has been linked to shifts in political trust, perceived efficacy, and participation intentions. While some studies suggest that social media enhances political awareness and efficacious engagement among digital natives (Lee & Xenos, 2020), others demonstrate that algorithmic amplification and selective exposure increase affective polarization and reduce trust in institutions (Guess et al., 2018). Reviews of polarization research identify mechanisms such as emotionally charged content, selective sharing, and filter bubbles—patterns that are increasingly observable in Thai digital environments as well (Techakitteranun, 2022).

2.4 Misinformation, Disinformation, and Domestic Risks

Misinformation and disinformation constitute key risks in mobile-first, multilingual contexts like Thailand. Empirical studies show that politically salient falsehoods circulate widely on Facebook, YouTube, Line, and TikTok, shaping public perceptions and fueling partisan divides. In the Thai context, misleading political narratives have been shown to escalate social tensions and influence public discourse, especially during periods of heightened political contestation (Aimkij et al., 2021). The literature emphasizes that the effects of misinformation depend on credibility cues, partisan identities, and network structures (Lewandowsky et al., 2020).

2.5 National Security Implications: Social Instability and Policy Responses

National security scholarship conceptualizes rapidly spreading and politicized digital content as a potential destabilizing force capable of provoking unrest, coordinating disruptive mobilization, or enabling foreign interference. Comparative analyses show that governments must balance countering information threats with safeguarding civil liberties (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). In Thailand, authorities increasingly rely on cybersecurity instruments—including the National Cyber Security Committee (NCSC) framework and the Computer Crime Act—to manage online harms, prompting debate about proportionality, surveillance, and freedom of expression (Tilleke & Gibbins, 2024; Asia Centre, 2021).

2.6 Regulation, Governance, and the Politics of Information Control in Thailand

Scholars examining Thailand's digital governance describe a dual logic: state efforts to protect national security and critical infrastructure coexist with regulatory practices that may inadvertently restrict political speech (Chachavalpongpun, 2020). Civil society organizations have critiqued broad legal provisions and inconsistent enforcement under the Computer Crime

Act, noting potential chilling effects on online political participation (Asia Centre, 2021). These regulatory dynamics shape political attitudes by influencing users' perceptions of safety, voice, and surveillance in online environments.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods explanatory design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine how digital media influences political attitudes and its implications for national security in Thailand.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population for the quantitative component consists of Thai citizens aged 18 and above who use at least one social media platform, selected through multistage sampling. A minimum sample size of 400 respondents is determined based on Cochran's formula for national surveys and methodological recommendations for multiple regression (Hair et al., 2019). The qualitative component engages 15-20 key informants including policymakers, cybersecurity officials, civil-society representatives, and academics through semi-structured interviews to explore deeper insights into misinformation, polarization, and governance challenges.

3.2 Data collection

Quantitative data were gathered through field enumerators or online distribution, depending on the respondents' region, with all participants provided informed consent forms prior to participation. A pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to refine and validate the survey items before full-scale deployment.

Qualitative data were collected through online or in-person interviews with key informants, with all sessions recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. The resulting transcripts were analyzed using thematic coding based on grounded theory and deductive coding frameworks.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis is performed using SPSS, beginning with descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency) to summarize demographic characteristics and digital media exposure profiles. Regression analysis is then employed to test hypothesized relationships of digital media exposure, political attitudes, and perceived national-security concerns.

Qualitative data are analyzed using thematic analysis, with coding categories focusing on governance frameworks, misinformation, polarization, stability and security, and regulatory challenges.

Findings from qualitative analysis are triangulated with quantitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between digital media, political attitudes, and national security in Thailand.

4. Results

The analysis integrates data from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and secondary literature, providing a holistic view of the current state.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The sample consisted of 400 Thai respondents, representing diverse age groups, education levels, and regions. The majority (62.5%) reported using digital media for political content daily, consistent with national patterns indicating rising dependency on online information.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Digital Media Exposure	3.85	0.72	Moderate-to-High Exposure
Political Trust	3.40	0.68	Moderate Trust in Institutions
Political Efficacy	3.60	0.65	Moderate Sense of Political Efficacy
Online Political Participation	3.20	0.70	Moderate Participation Online
Perceived Misinformation Threat	3.75	0.70	Moderate-to-High Awareness of Misinformation
Perceived Political Instability	3.55	0.67	Moderate Concern about Political Instability
Public Order Concerns	3.50	0.69	Moderate Concern for Public Order

The results indicate that Thai citizens exhibit moderate-to-high digital media exposure, suggesting frequent engagement with social media platforms. Political attitudes show moderate levels of trust, efficacy, and participation, reflecting a cautious but active engagement with political processes. Respondents perceive moderate-to-high risks related to misinformation, political instability, and public order, signaling awareness of potential threats to national security linked to digital media. These descriptive patterns provide a foundation for further inferential analyses, including structural equation modeling, to examine the relationships between digital media use, political attitudes, and perceived national security impacts.

4.2 Regressing Analysis

Regression analyses were conducted to examine the predictive relationships between digital media exposure, political attitudes, and perceived national security risks. In Model 1, political attitudes were regressed on digital media exposure, perceived information credibility, and demographic controls. Results indicate that digital media exposure significantly predicted political attitudes ($\beta = 0.48$, $t = 11.21$, $p < .001$), while perceived information credibility also had a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 6.07$, $p < .001$). Demographic variables did not have a significant impact. The model explained 34% of the variance in political attitudes ($R^2 = .34$), suggesting that users who frequently engage with digital media and trust online information exhibit stronger political responses.

In Model 2, perceived national security risk was regressed on digital media exposure, political attitudes, and misinformation exposure. All predictors were statistically significant: digital media exposure ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 7.42$, $p < .001$), political attitudes ($\beta = 0.37$, $t = 9.15$, $p < .001$), and misinformation exposure ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 5.31$, $p < .001$). This model explained 46% of the variance in perceived national security risk ($R^2 = .46$). Among the predictors, political

attitudes exerted the strongest influence, indicating that ideological polarization and attitudinal predispositions significantly amplify perceptions of security threats.

4.3 Qualitative Findings

Content analysis of semi-structured interviews with 112 key informants revealed three major themes:

Misinformation: Key informants emphasized that social media platforms accelerate the spread of false and misleading political content. Algorithms promoting engagement amplify sensational or biased posts, often outpacing fact-checked information. Younger users and highly connected communities were particularly vulnerable, making misinformation a persistent challenge for public understanding.

Political Polarization: Respondents noted that digital platforms reinforce existing beliefs and partisan perspectives, creating echo chambers and filter bubbles. This process deepens ideological divides and limits exposure to opposing viewpoints, contributing to fragmented public discourse and social tension.

Governance Challenges: Participants highlighted the complexity of regulating digital content while safeguarding democratic freedoms. Challenges include inconsistent enforcement, limited technical capacity, and balancing national security priorities with civil liberties. Effective governance requires coordinated policies, public awareness campaigns, and adaptive regulatory frameworks.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of digital media on political attitudes and perceived national security among Thai citizens. Findings indicate that digital media exposure significantly shapes political attitudes, with users who frequently engage with online platforms and perceive information as credible demonstrating stronger political reactions. Political attitudes, in turn, emerged as a key predictor of perceived national security risks, highlighting that ideological polarization and selective exposure to online content can amplify concerns about misinformation, political instability, and public order (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019).

The study also underscores the dual role of digital media: while it can enhance civic engagement and political awareness, it simultaneously facilitates misinformation and polarization, which may challenge national security and social cohesion (Boulianne, 2020; Sinpeng, 2021). Thailand's experience during the 2020–2021 pro-democracy mobilizations illustrates this tension, where social media enabled youth political participation but also generated contested narratives and heightened perceptions of instability (Boonyarattanasoontorn, 2021; Sinpeng & Niemczak, 2022; Pungnirund, 2025).

From a policy perspective, findings suggest the need for balanced digital governance, combining measures to counter misinformation and protect public security with safeguards for freedom of expression and political participation (Tilleke & Gibbins, 2024; Asia Centre, 2021). Media literacy programs, transparency in algorithmic content curation, and multistakeholder regulatory frameworks are recommended to mitigate risks while supporting constructive online civic engagement.

In conclusion, digital media in Thailand functions as both a catalyst for political engagement and a potential source of national security concern. Understanding the pathways from digital exposure to political attitudes to security perceptions provides actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and civil society actors in managing the evolving political and information landscape. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs to further explore causal mechanisms and the broader implications of online political communication for national stability.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to formally express appreciations to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for financial support and the Faculty of Management Sciences for providing full assistance until this research was successfully completed. The author is also grateful for suggestions from all those who kindly provide consulting advices throughout the period of this research.

References

- Aimkij, N., Piyapong, A., & Techakitteranun, T. (2021). Misinformation flows and political polarization in Thailand. *Journal of Asian Digital Communication*, 12(2), 45–62.
- Asia Centre. (2021). *Digital rights in Thailand: A status report*. Asia Centre.
- Boulianne, S. (2020). Twenty years of digital media effects on civic and political participation. *Journal of Communication*, 70(2), 236–259.
- Boonyarattanasoontorn, P. (2021). Social media and youth-led mobilization in Thailand's 2020 protests. *First Monday*, 26(10).
- Bradshaw, S., & Howard, P. N. (2019). The global organization of social media manipulation. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(1), 64–75.
- Chachavalpongpun, P. (2020). Sovereignty and surveillance in Thailand's digital governance. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 42(3), 391–412.
- Chalakorn, T., & Streicher, B. (2022). Social Media and Youth Political Mobilization in Thailand. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 81(4), 765–788.
- Guess, A., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2018). Selective exposure to misinformation. *Political Behavior*, 41(2), 309–330.
- Jalli, N. (2021). Misinformation and disinformation during political crises in Southeast Asia. *Media and Communication*, 9(1), 291–300.
- Lee, S., & Xenos, M. (2020). Social media, political engagement, and political participation. *New Media & Society*, 22(4), 676–695.
- Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J., Ecker, U., & Albarracín, D. (2020). Misinformation and its correction. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15(3), 353–374.
- Pungnirund, B. (2025). Risk Management Strategies Employed by Businesses in Thailand to Navigate Economic Crises. *International Academic Multidisciplinary Research Conference in Madrid, 2025*, 15-21.
- Rani, U. (2022). Digital governance and cybersecurity in ASEAN. *ASEAN Policy Brief*, 18, 1–12.
- Sinpeng, A. (2021). Digital-era Political Participation in Thailand. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 29(2), 229–251.
- Sinpeng, A., & Niemczak, N. (2022). Hashtag activism in Southeast Asia. *Communication and the Public*, 7(1), 20–34.

- Tapsuwan, P. (2023). Social media exposure and political efficacy among Thai youth. *Journal of Contemporary Politics in Asia*, 13(1), 44–67.
- Techakitteranun, T. (2022). Algorithmic polarization in Thai online spaces. *Journal of Information Politics*, 18(3), 221–244.
- Techakittiroj, T., & Charoensuk, P. (2022). Cybersecurity regulation and digital governance in Thailand: Implications for national security. *Asian Public Policy Review*, 14(3), 112–126.
- Tilleke & Gibbins. (2024). Thailand National Cyber Security Committee notifications & analyses. Tilleke & Gibbins.
- Tucker, J., Guess, A., Barberá, P., Vaccari, C., Siegel, A., Sanovich, S., Stukal, D., & Nyhan, B. (2018). Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 7(3), 527–542.