วารสารวิชาการคณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ สาขามนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์
ปีที่ 8 ฉบับที่ 2 (กรกฎาคม-ธันวาคม 2567)
ISSN 2586 – 9450 (Print) / ISSN 2697 – 4290 (Online)

REVIEWING MEDIA IMPACT IN THAI POLITICS: PARASOCIAL INTERACTION AND AUTHENTICITY

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Received: 02-08-67 Revised: 09-10-67 Accepted: 19-12-67

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้นำการวิจัยในอดีตมาศึกษา เพื่อตรวจสอบผลกระทบของการเปิดรับสื่อ การปฏิสัมพันธ์กึ่งสังคม ต่อความจริงแท้ทางการเมือง และประสิทธิภาพทางการเมือง โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสร้างแนวทางเบื้องต้นที่ช่วยเสริมสร้างความเข้าใจว่า สื่อมีอิทธิพลต่ออมิติของตัวแปรที่กล่าวมาข้างต้นอย่างไร บทความนี้เน้นนำเสนอบทบาทของการเปิดรับสื่อในการหล่อหลอมทัศนคติทางการเมือง และความสำคัญของการปฏิสัมพันธ์กึ่งสังคม ในการส่งเสริมความไว้วางใจต่อรัฐบาลและบุคคลในสื่อ พบว่า ปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อการรับรู้ความเป็นของแท้ทางการเมือง ได้แก่ ความเป็นธรรมดา ความสอดคล้องกัน และความรวดเร็วทันที ซึ่งถูกส่งผลกระทบจากการนำเสนอในสื่อ นอกจากนี้ ยังเน้นถึงการกระตุ้นของสื่อดั้งเดิมและสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ ต่อการมีส่วนร่วมทางการเมืองและประสิทธิภาพทางการเมือง บทความนี้ มีการสรุปโดยเน้นถึงความจำเป็นในการศึกษาในอนาคต เพื่อทำความเข้าใจว่า พลวัตรของตัวแปรเหล่านี้ทำงานอย่างไร โดยเฉพาะในภูมิทัศน์สื่อที่พัฒนาในประเทศไทย รวมถึงผลกระทบต่อกระบวนการประชาธิปไตย โดยมีข้อมูลสนับสนุน

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Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol. 8 No. 2 (July-December 2024)
ISSN 2586 – 9450 (Print) / ISSN 2697 – 4290 (Online)

Abstract

This article builds upon prior studies to explore the impact of media exposure on parasocial interaction (PSI), political authenticity, and political efficacy. The aim is to create preliminary models that enhance our understanding of how media influences these dimensions. It highlights the role of media exposure in shaping political attitudes and the significance of PSI in fostering trust in government and media figures. It found that factors contributing to perceptions of political authenticity are ordinariness, consistency, and immediacy, which are influenced by media portrayals. Additionally, it highlights the motivating effect of traditional media and online social media on political engagement and efficacy. The article concludes by stressing the need for further research to understand how these dynamics operate within Thailand's evolving media landscape and their implications for informed democratic processes.

Keywords: Media Exposure; Parasocial Interaction; Political Authenticity; Political Efficacy; Political Communication

ISSN 2586 – 9450 (Print) / ISSN 2697 – 4290 (Online)

Introduction

Considering political communication, the relationships between politicians and media consumers have been studied. As prior studies have found, activities conducted by political parties are related to public opinion (Ibenskas & Polk, 2022; Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2021). The use of online social media is linked to the disclosure of politicians' personal lives (Lee et al., 2018). Moreover, media figures, both politicians and non-politicians, have influence on people's political attitudes (Tan-intaraarj, 2021). Because of the importance of public figures' appearance in the media, studies about interactions between media consumers and public figures need to be reviewed.

The study indicates that the creation of interpersonal attractiveness through media fosters interactions between media consumers and public figures (Ashraf et al., 2023; Fazli-Salehi et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Tan-intaraarj & Pornsakulvanich, 2021). This phenomenon is known as Parasocial Interaction (PSI), which describes the one-sided connections viewers form with media personas (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Such interactions align closely with communication between media consumers and politicians, suggesting that media consumption can facilitate relationships with public figures (Patllollu, 2023). Furthermore, media exposure shapes perceptions of political authenticity (Luebke, 2021; Luebke & Engelmann, 2023).

The connection between PSI and political authenticity is significant, as PSI influences how media consumers perceive a politician's genuineness (Um, 2022). Luebke and Engelmann (2023) outline key components of political authenticity—ordinariness, consistency, and immediacy—that are often reinforced through PSI. This interplay suggests that when media consumers feel a personal connection to political figures, their perceptions of authenticity may be enhanced, thereby affecting their political efficacy. Understanding these relationships is essential for comprehending the broader impact of media on political engagement.

Regarding Thailand general election 2023, political parties employed various media, particularly online social media, to disseminate policy-related information and articulate their party's positions. Data collected between March 20 and April 10, 2023, indicated that the Phak Phuea Thai (Pheu Thai Party) exhibited the highest level of online messaging activity, with an average of 70 messages per day. These messages predominantly emphasized the presentation of all three prime ministerial candidates within the party (PPTVHD36, 2023), highlighting the evolving role of digital platforms in political communication and engagement. According to Thai PBS (2023), it was found that the branding of politicians was increasingly tied to their use of online social media. Political parties managed to establish a distinct identity through their online presence, create a personal

brand for their party leaders, and make themselves more accessible to the public, ultimately leading to the cultivation of a dedicated fan base. These findings highlight the importance of studying how people connect with political parties through social media. It shows that online platforms help politicians and parties build their image, connect with the public, and gain loyal supporters.

The purpose of this article is to examine how media exposure affects PSI, political authenticity, and political efficacy, with the goal of developing preliminary models that can help us gain a deeper understanding of how media shapes these dimensions. It emphasizes the need for further research to refine and validate these models, ultimately laying the groundwork for future studies focusing on the interactions between media consumers and political parties in Thailand.

Exploring the Dynamics of Media Exposure in Political Participation

Media exposure varies from minimal attention to full engagement (Slater, 2004; de Vreese & Neijens, 2016). Motivations for exposure include surveillance, decision-making, discussion, participation, reinforcement, and entertainment (McCombs & Becker, 1979). Consumers can select news aligning with their beliefs (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020), However, in political communication, political polarization can result from biased news in traditional media (Chang & Park, 2021; Rothschild et al., 2021). Populists may view certain media as hostile (Schulz et al., 2020) and seek alternative sources due to perceived gaps in traditional media (Schwarzenegger, 2023). Online social media can boost political interest, engagement, and knowledge (Knoll et al., 2020; Thorson et al., 2021). In brief, the reasons people consume media, the risk of political division, and the growth of alternative sources all show how media and politics are closely connected today.

The Dynamics of Parasocial Interaction, Media Exposure, and Political Influence

The interaction between viewers and political parties through various media is characterized by a one-sided interaction, where viewers engage with media by consuming news related to political parties. Considering this communication context, it aligns with the concept of PSI. PSI refers to the engagement that viewers have with individuals in the media, where the interaction is one-sided and the media creates an illusion of interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956). According to Personal Construct Theory, individuals have their own thoughts, which they construct, and they attempt to understand the world through those thoughts (Delia et al., 1982). Thus, human understanding is primarily derived from thought.

ISSN 2586 – 9450 (Print) / ISSN 2697 – 4290 (Online)

Recent studies show that the more time you spend with media, the closer this bond becomes, making it feel like these media figures are part of your real life (Bond, 2018; Liu, 2023; Patllollu, 2023), just like how you get closer to people you know. Moreover, the study of PSI is grounded in interpersonal communication research (Choi et al., 2019; Fong et al., 2023; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Shahid et al., 2023; Tan-intaraarj & Pornsakulvanich, 2021). According to Uncertainty Reduction Theory, communication reduces relationship uncertainty and fosters intimacy (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In this context, media exposure is viewed as a communication variable, while PSI represents intimacy (Fong et al., 2023; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Tan-intaraarj & Pornsakulvanich, 2021), indicating that PSI aligns with interpersonal communication.

According to prior research, Liu (2023) discovered that digital media consumption by individuals aged 18-35 in China during the COVID-19 pandemic nurtured parasocial relationships (PSR) and increased trust in the government. This is in line with Bond's (2018) study on LGBTQ+ youth, which highlights similar PSR with media figures and their use as political references. Political news websites are influential sources of media consumption, strengthening the ties between content consumers and political figures (Patllollu, 2023). The internet is essential for political influence, as it can greatly cut the costs of social orientation campaigns while respecting citizens' dignity in a recognizable way (Sinpeng 2020).

In today's diverse media landscape, media exposure influences PSI (Bond, 2018; Liu, 2023; Patllollu, 2023; Shen, 2020; Tan-intaraarj & Pornsakulvanich, 2021), which adds complexity to the connection between media and this phenomenon, influenced by various factors. However, excessive media consumption can lead to waning interest or shifts in focus (Tan-intaraarj & Pornsakulvanich, 2021), making the relationship with media PSI intricate and contingent on multiple variables.

Factors Shaping Political Authenticity in Media and Politics

The meaning of authenticity contradicts things that are fake or misleading (Carù et al., 2017; Lindholm, 2008). The perception of authenticity, according to Baker (2017), plays a significant role in shaping the audience's feelings towards a person portrayed in the media, and this, as demonstrated by Nah (2022), can result in a stronger affinity for that individual.

Authenticity is vital in both marketing and politics. In marketing, it's about how a brand looks and how well its advertisements work (Shoenberger et al., 2020). In influencer marketing, it's important for the influencer to be real (Dekavalla, 2020), but talking too much about sponsors can make them seem less real to the audience, as found by Audrezet et al. (2020). In politics, how

authentic politicians seem depends on how people see them, shaped by the information they get from the media (Luebke, 2021). Being consistent in their words and actions shows political authenticity (Jamieson & Waldman, 2003), and it helps if they consistently and openly display their authenticity (Luebke & Engelmann, 2023).

Viewers can engage in PSI with public figures through media (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Bond, 2018; Haobin et al., 2021; Jarzyna, 2021; Liu, 2023; Tan-intaraarj & Pornsakulvanich, 2021). The perception of authenticity via media is influenced by the observation of various traits displayed by public figures through these platforms. The perception of political authenticity can be categorized into three factors as follows (Luebke & Engelmann, 2023):

Ordinariness

Perceived ordinariness in politicians implies that these politicians have political authenticity (Valgarðsson et al., 2021). Popularity among the masses is believed to be related to political authenticity (Holtz-Bacha, 2022). Minor imperfections and a lack of perfection indicate a higher level of political authenticity (Enli, 2015). Therefore, being ordinary is one of the factors studied in this research and contributes to political authenticity. So, examining how being ordinary can assist future research in understanding political authenticity.

Consistency

Political authenticity relies on consistency, where politicians maintain their behaviors over time, express their views, emphasize stances, and avoid contradictions (Friedman & Kampf, 2020). Using the same way to talk helps people see that what the politicians say is real. Even if companies or groups talk about politics in their way, keeping the same traditional style makes people think it's real (Balaban & Szambolics, 2022). Acting the same and not changing shows honesty (Luebke, 2021). So, examining the role of consistency in future research may contribute to a better understanding of political authenticity.

Immediacy

Not avoiding different problems indicates that a politician is not controlled or following a specific strategy, which enhances the perception of political authenticity (Rosenblum et al., 2020). Pillow et al. (2018) explain that speaking without preparation directly reflects being oneself. The more politicians appear unemotional and devoid of feelings, the lower the perception of political authenticity among people (Gershon & Smith, 2020). Hence, examining the impact of immediacy in future research could enhance the understanding of political authenticity.

ISSN 2586 – 9450 (Print) / ISSN 2697 – 4290 (Online)

Additionally, media exposure influences the perception of political authenticity since people do not know politicians on a personal level, and viewers evaluate politicians based on the characteristics they see in the media (Lee & Min, 2020). Prior research indicates that people assess political authenticity based on political parties and are influenced by politicians, particularly if they are candidates in an election. (Pillow et al., 2018; Stiers et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to Um (2017, 2022), the study shows that PSR, especially when well-known figures endorse political advertising on Instagram, fosters the perception of authenticity, and this influence extends to candidates who receive support from influential individuals.

Moreover, the perception of authenticity facilitates PSI (Rubin et al., 1985). The more viewers perceive genuine authenticity from media figures, the greater their effort to engage in PSI (Rubin & Perse, 1987; Giles, 2002). Um (2022) found that PSI leads to a heightened perception of authenticity regarding messages from celebrities endorsing brands through Instagram in political communication. If a favored celebrity supports a political candidate, the parasocial relationship between the viewer and the celebrity can also lead to a positive attitude toward the candidate (Um, 2017). Additionally, Gong (2023) discovered that the characteristics of influencers created through videos aimed at fostering parasocial relationships contribute to a perception of authenticity. In summary, the authenticity perceived in media figures fosters PSIs, leading viewers to connect more positively with them, which can enhance their attitudes toward political candidates they support.

Media Impact on Political Efficacy and Trust

From previous studies, there has been research on political efficacy along with political trust (Akinola et al., 2022; Boulianne, 2019). Boulianne (2019) found that in the context of deliberative democracy, political trust is positively related to political efficacy. Moreover, according to Hoewe and Sherrill (2019), watching politically related TV programs can influence viewers to engage in various political activities, such as seeking political information, participating in political events, and voting. They also found that television programs can foster PSR and create experiences that enhance political efficacy, political interest, and political participation. Their findings are consistent with Dunn and Nisbett's (2014) explanation that maintaining PSR with politicians correlates with increased political efficacy.

Conceptual Overview for Media and Political Interaction

This academic article explores the interaction between media figures, particularly politicians, and media consumers, drawing on established a preliminary model in political communication. One of the core concepts examined in PSI, which refers to one-sided relationships where viewers form a perceived connection with media personalities without any direct reciprocal interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In political contexts, PSI is critical as politicians increasingly rely on media to build personal relationships with voters (Patllollu, 2023), creating a sense of familiarity and trust even in the absence of direct communication.

Through media exposure, the perception of political authenticity also becomes significant. Autenticity, as defined by Luebke and Engelmann (2023), comprises three dimentions: ordinariness, consistency, and immediacy. The presentation of these traits through media can enhance politicians' credibility and trustworthiness in the eyes of the public, affecting their political engagement and PSI.

Moreover, studies have demonstrated that increased media engagement, whether through traditional or digital platforms, can enhance political efficacy, encouraging people to participate in political activities such as voting, attending rallies, or engaging in political discussions (Groshek & Krongard, 2016; Hoewe & Sherrill, 2019).

In the specific case of Thailand's 2023, general election, digital media played a crucial role in fostering PSI, political authenticity, and political efficacy. Political parties utilized online platforms to connect with voters, presenting candidates and their policies in ways that encouraged a sense of closeness and personal engagement. The rise of social media also allowed parties to craft and project authenticity, creating opportunities for meaningful interaction with the public (Thai PBS, 2023).

This conceptual overview provides a foundation for understanding how media influences political interactions, focusing on the dynamics of PSI, political authenticity, and political efficacy. These concepts are essential for analyzing the evolving relationship between media consumers and political figures, particularly in the digital age. Further research could refine these ideas, developing a deeper understanding of their impact on political engagement.

Discussion

The discussion explores the intricate relationship between media exposure, its various motivations, and the consequences of the evolving media landscape. Media exposure can range from paying little attention to being fully engaged, and people do it for different reasons: keeping

ISSN 2586 – 9450 (Print) / ISSN 2697 – 4290 (Online)

an eye on things, making decisions, chatting, taking part, getting reinforcement, or just having fun (Slater, 2004; McCombs & Becker, 1979).

Regarding PSI, the concept of PSI is significant. It refers to one-sided connections with media personalities, blurring the lines between the virtual and real world. These interactions can enhance the bond with media figures, somewhat like forming one-way friendships. However, overindulging in this can lead to disinterest (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The type of media used plays a crucial role in shaping these interactions. Online social media platforms, in particular, excel in facilitating genuine connections and trust (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Haobin et al., 2021).

Perceptions of authenticity are subject to individual perspectives, with factors like ordinariness, consistency, and immediacy playing essential roles. The media's portrayal of politicians significantly influences these perceptions, and PSIs fostered through media consumption contribute to shaping the authenticity perception (Lehman et al., 2019; Graf, 2022).

In the examination of the influence of media on political efficacy, a belief in one's ability to engage in political activities and impact outcomes, television and online social media serve as powerful motivators for political engagement, fostering various political actions and contributing to enhanced efficacy, interest, and engagement. Given the changing media landscape in Thailand and the impact of cultural and political factors, further research is needed to understand how these platforms influence the political efficacy of Thai citizens. In conclusion, this discussion underscores the dynamic role of media in shaping political attitudes and behaviors, particularly in the context of Thailand, and emphasizes the importance of conducting further research to fully grasp the nuances of media's impact on political engagement and the democratic process in this specific region.

Future research should explore PSI in political communication across emerging digital platforms. As media evolves, studies could investigate how different platforms shape PSI between political figures and audiences. Additionally, research on political authenticity and its impact on voter trust and engagement would provide valuable insights. Developing quantitative models to assess these interactions and their effects on political behavior could be beneficial. Comparative studies across different political systems, particularly post-2023 Thai elections, would further enhance understanding of how cultural norms influence media-driven political relationships. Moreover, to encourage civic involvement and critical thinking, it is suggested to create specific media plans. Lastly, promoting positive and open political discussions through various media sources can greatly support informed democratic processes.

Conclusion

This article investigates how various studies have examined the influence of media exposure, PSI, and the authenticity of political figures, and their combined impact on political efficacy. It emphasizes that media exposure plays a significant role in shaping individuals' political attitudes and behaviors. Previous research has highlighted the impact of media consumption on various aspects of political participation, demonstrating how online social media can amplify political interest, engagement, and knowledge (Knoll et al., 2020; Thorson et al., 2021). Furthermore, the concept of PSI emerges as a vital aspect of this relationship. PSI represents the one-sided interactions viewers have with media personas, creating a sense of connection and trust. Previous research, such as Liu's (2023) study on digital media consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic, has shown that PSI fosters trust in government and media figures. This concept is crucial in understanding how media exposure influences individuals' perceptions of political authenticity and efficacy.

The author reviewed the factors that lead people to perceive politicians as genuine. This includes qualities like being ordinary, consistent, and immediacy, which all contribute to the belief in authenticity (Luebke & Engelmann, 2023). So, it is also essential to highlight how people see politicians in the media, as it affects this perception. In short, comprehending the connection between media exposure, PSI, political authenticity, and political effectiveness is crucial for understanding how media shapes political views and actions.

ISSN 2586 – 9450 (Print) / ISSN 2697 – 4290 (Online)

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