Social Media Use in Negotiating Gender Identity among Young Thai Women

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาว่า ผู้หญิงวัยรุ่นอายุ 18 ปี ในกรุงเทพมหานคร ใช้สื่อสังคม
ออนไลน์เพื่อต่อรองและแสดงอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศอย่างไร ค่านิยมและวาทกรรม
สาธารณะแบบดั้งเดิมเกี่ยวกับเพศหญิงในประเทศไทยยังคงกำหนด ควบคุม
และกดทับการแสดงออกซึ่งอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศของผู้หญิงทั้งในพื้นที่ออฟไลน์และ
ออนไลน์ งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษากระบวนการปรับตัว การต่อรอง
หรือการต่อต้านวาทกรรมดังกล่าว ผ่านการแสดงออกอย่างมีชั้นเชิงหรือกลยุทธ์
ที่หลากหลายและเป็นอิสระบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ อีกทั้งชนชั้นทางสังคม (social
class) อาจเป็นมิติทางสังคมที่มีความสัมพันธ์กับวิธีการแสดงออกอัตลักษณ์ทาง
เพศบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ ดังนั้นงานวิจัยจึงคัดเลือกผู้ร่วมวิจัยที่เป็นผู้หญิงวัยรุ่น
ที่มาจากต่างภูมิหลังทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคมทั้ง 3 ชนชั้น ได้แก่ ชนชั้นล่าง
(lower class) ชนชั้นกลาง (middle class) และชนชั้นสูง (upper class) เพื่อ
ศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างชนชั้นทางสังคม การแสดงออกอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศ
และการใช้สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ งานวิจัยใช้วิธีตรวจสามเส้าด้านวิธีรวบรวมข้อมูล
(method triangulation) โดยใช้เครื่องมือการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพทั้งหมด 3 เครื่องมือ
ได้แก่ การสนทนากลุ่ม การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก และชาติพันธุ์วรรณนาออนไลน์ เพื่อ
ให้เข้าใจเชิงลึกเกี่ยวกับการปฏิบัติกิจวัตรประจำวันด้านเพศของผู้หญิงผ่านการใช้
สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ งานวิจัยวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพผ่านการวิเคราะห์แก่นสาระ

(thematic analysis) และอ้างอิงข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพไปพร้อมกับการวิเคราะห์การ
สร้างความหมาย (meaning-making) ผ่านมุมมองสัญศาสตร์บนกิจกรรมของ
สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ เช่น การโพสต์รูปภาพนิ่ง ภาพเคลื่อนไหว การแชร์สถานะ การ
คุยผ่านคอมเมนต์ เป็นต้น กล่าวโดยสรุป การศึกษาชาติพันธุ์วรรณนาออนไลน์
ทำให้ได้รับข้อมูลเชิงลึกเกี่ยวกับการแสดงออกอัตลักษณ์ด้านเพศในชีวิตประจำวัน
ของผู้หญิงวัยรุ่น ที่อาจตอบสนอง ต่อรอง หรือต่อต้านแนวคิดสตรีแบบดั้งเดิม
ในประเทศไทย

คำสำคัญ: สื่อสังคมออนไลน์ ผู้หญิงวัยรุ่น วัฒนธรรมวัยรุ่น อัตลักษณ์ทางเพศ
ชนชั้นทางสังคม ชาติพันธุ์วรรณนาออนไลน์

Abstract

This study explored how 18-year-old women in Bangkok used social media to negotiate and express their gender identities online. In Thailand, prevailing cultures and traditional public discourses on hetero-normative sexualities potentially affect, control and constrain young women's gender performance offline and online. The study interrogated processes of adaptation and resistance to traditional mainstream discourses through the consideration of social media as an alternative and flexible space for young women to negotiate diverse and autonomous gender performances. A gap was identified in terms of the ways in which identity was tactically managed and constructed within different class structures. To investigate these, young women were recruited from three socioeconomic backgrounds: lower class, middle class and upper class. Data were gathered through focus groups, interviews and online ethnographies, such as posted pictures, shared contents and comments on profiles, and interpreted through a multimodal and social semiotic lens to gain deeper understandings of women's classed and gendered social media practices. By examining and cross-referencing qualitative data and the construction of online profiles deriving from different social backgrounds, insights were yielded and a snapshot of the everyday identity work of Thai young women captured as they responded to and resisted traditional forms of feminine conduct.

Keywords: social media, young women, youth culture, gender identity, social class, online ethnography

Literature Review

With the complexity of the relationship between young women's gender performance and their social media use, the study aimed to offer explanations regarding social media use in negotiating gender identity, by focussing on the process of girl's adaption and/or resistance to the political social norms and values of femininity in Thai culture. Specifically, the study focused on the complexity of how young women interact, contradict and/or resist dominant culture regarding women's discourses derived from offline relations. The study ultimately elucidated a deeper understanding of the link between online and offline interactions of girls' cultural communication in terms of gender matters. Importantly, a class differentiation of girls was identified as a research gap in terms of the ways in which gender identity was tactically managed and constructed within different class structures. Hence, the issue of class structure in Thailand will be discussed to provide a picture of how Thai society is structured in a complex hierarchy by the "*sak di na*" (ศักดินา) system–"dignity marks" (Thongsawang et al., 2020). Also, how this complex Thai class structure affects and/or relates to youth's gender performance online.

By various definitions and concepts, gender identity is defined–in sociocultural disciplines–as a complex internalisation of cultural systems of meaning and subject to variation across cultures and historical periods (Butler, 1990; Mead, 1949). Gender identity is "a sense of oneself as a man, woman or some other gender" (Jenkins, 2018). In the same way, gender identity is each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body

–which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means–and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Gender identity is thus perceived as personal, social and cultural aspects that individuals can perform diverse choices of qualities through symbols within a particular context. Though social institutions still back up the dominant discourses of women, individuals can accept, deny and/or compromise such discourses through an alternative and flexible space–social media. Importantly, gender identity is arguably objectified by dominant culture of institutions –which de Certeau (1984) calls these as "producers" or "strategies" enacted through structures of power in society. However, gender identity is considered a politically social battle between dominant and subordinate cultures–arguably linked to class struggle according to the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1989). De Certeau (1984) proposes the term "walkers" in the city where individuals use their own "tactics" to resist the suppressive social norms and values. It can be seen that gender identity is one of the underlying lenses which are spotlighted by society since it is a classic case of resistance and power according to a framework of cultural studies, e.g., resistance through rituals in youth culture (Hall and Jefferson, 2006). In short, I highlight that gender identity is a process of social and cultural adaptation and/or resistance to class structure within a given society. Crucially, social media is discussed as flexible space where users can adapt and negotiate their gender identities through multiple symbols and rituals. This discussion is enriched by many scholars and previous studies' findings. It is argued that social media can promote girls' autonomy and agency in the

negotiation of desired identities since the online platform allows users to interact and communicate without corporeal cues, such as appearance and voice. Marwick (2013) highlights this kind of disembodiment that young users–who are liberated from the limitations of the body–can optionally choose any gender images or identities to be presented. In the same way, Boonmongkon et al. (2013) argue that even though the traditional discourse on women's chastity still influences women's gender performance, they can tactically create desirable images of gender identity and can exert their autonomy in expressing their sexuality with more freedom on the manageable platforms. Similarly, the finding from Songsamphan's study (2008) also indicates that even if young Thai women still cannot escape the influences of conservative discourses in offline interaction, they have more opportunities to express themselves independently in gender respects through the use of social media due to its affordances in terms of networking, features and functionality.

In the twenty-first century, various Thai scholars still assert that young Thai people are struggling to deal with traditional forms of female values and mainstream discourses in femininity (Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). Although empirical studies consider that the proliferation of social media, which impacts young people's lived experiences, can offer more opportunities to express non-normative gendered practices and sexual desires, there are still debates that these young people cannot abandon traditional public discourses that are derived from their offline culture, particularly those rooted in family cultures (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). I will advance these debates seeing the potential changes in young women's gender performances in both the online and offline worlds. Thai scholars propose that there are four key traditional public discourses

regarding femininity that have been put more pressure on women than on men in Thai culture: (1) *rak nuan sanguan tua* (to preserve chastity), (2) *ka la the sa* (contextual sensitivity), (3) motherhood and wifehood and (4) dutiful daughter.

Firstly, the "*rak nuan sanguan tua*" (to preserve chastity) is a traditional form of female value, demanding that young women should maintain virginity until marriage (Klausner, 2000; Songsamphan, 2008). Within the Asian countries, this kind of normative discourse would be the strictest value of femininity that influences how young women negotiate their gender offline or online (Klausner, 2000). In Thailand, the "*rak nuan sanguan tua*" (รักนวลสงวนตัว) discourse is highly produced and reproduced through adult culture and many public spheres in society (Klausner, 2000). Thai main social institutions such as family, school, religion and media always reinforce such women value and become as a mainstream public discourse that still puts pressure on women until present (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). Importantly, to maintain virginity until marriage life is one of the most conservative discourses that directly impact young women's gender negotiation. This kind of discourse has been arguably related to the cultural dichotomy whereby Thai women are categorised as good (*kon-dee*) or bad (*kon-chua*) (Songsamphan, 2008). The given categories of good and bad qualities imply that if young women perform their selves and gender identities conforming to conventional works from their parent's discourse and society, they will be categorised as "good" women. In contrast, if they are performing vice versa to the normative discourse, they will be categorised as "bad" women. Specifically, sex before marriage is deemed a "bad" example. By contrast, by maintaining virginity until marriage, they will

be seen as "good" women (Songsamphan, 2008). In short, it can be seen that the "*rak nuan sanguan tua*" (to preserve chastity) discourse is dominant culture that impacts on how young women embody sexual politics in society.

Secondly, the "*ka la the sa*" (กาลเทศะ) discourse or "contextual sensitivity" is the common sense of self-presentation linked to values of "times and places", particularly in adult culture, such as wearing a dress, doing makeup, speaking in public and performing a gender image (Thaweesit, 2004; Jackson and Cook, 1999; Van Esterick, 2000). Specifically, young Thai women have long fostered the idea that sexual matters must be kept private, and sex has become a strongly prohibited subject for open discussion due to the discourse of the inappropriate and distasteful nature of sexual expression in public areas (*The Guardian,* 2012). "Sex is still considered 'dirty' and adults seldom discuss openly with each other, let alone with their kids" (UNDP and USAID, 2014). According to the Department of Health (2015), Thai children seldom learn about sex from either parents or teachers, and when they do learn about sex at school, it is always restricted to the context of biology, and rarely touches upon the emotional and sexual desires related to this subject. However, the parent and educator's inability to teach and converse about sex is arguably not at fault as they too grew up in the same culture that frowns upon talk of sex (*The Nation Thailand,* 2014). In short, it can be seen that school and family tend to be main institutions which empower this particular discourse as it is continuously reproduced through the educational programme, e.g., sex education, since high school or lower than that. I would highlight that these two institutions play significant roles in young Thai women's

identity both gender identity and sexuality, such as how to wear a dress, how to speak, how to think, and how to feel.

Thirdly, due to the existing patriarchal society in Asia, especially in Thailand, the motherhood and wifehood discourses still influence gender roles among young Thai women. Although there is more openness that the reality of women's lived experiences is often contradictory to, or even incongruent with, sexual hegemonic discourses, the discourses of femininity in Thailand, such as motherhood and wifehood, still shape women's lives in terms of gender practices (Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). Motherhood and wifehood are considered as key gender roles of women in Asian counties. In Thailand, according to the ideological discourses of being a "good" woman, women are expected to tolerate marital problems for their children's sake; in addition, they are expected to remain married until death (Suriyasarn, 2014). It is evident that the burdens of maintaining a married life and ensuring the welfare of the offspring have often fallen heavily on women rather than men (Xu et al., 2011). This can be parallel to dominant discourses on womanhood: that is, women should not be in the surrounding of adultery and promiscuity (Thaweesit, 2004; Suriyasarn, 2014). Even though polygamy and promiscuity have been discouraged for both men and women, it is women who are expected by society to follow the rules strictly (Suriyasarn, 2014). Also, the normative discourses in Thai society have been reproduced in the same theme of gender stereotype: referring to women as a figure of motherhood and being submissive, subordinate and dependent, while men as superior, active, dominant and independent (Thaweesit, 2004). For instance, there exists a notion that men are considered the family's main provider, while women are expected to

take on a supportive position by handling household responsibilities (Falk, 2008). Many scholars argue that Buddhism plays a vital role in Thai patriarchal culture, which places men's social power higher than that of Thai women (Xu et al., 2011). Thai men are eligible for ordination while women are primarily limited to participating in merit-making rituals and domestic work around temples (Jackson and Duangwises, 2016). This gender hierarchy has been adopted as a practical norm in social relations in the private and public spheres in Thailand (Xu et al., 2011). Following through these pieces of evidence, although the motherhood, wifehood and other girlhood discourses have gradually become less influential in the present day due to globalisation and diversity in society, their influence on gender roles and sexual relations remains intact (Falk, 2008).

Lastly, the parental discourse of "dutiful daughters" in Thai families is another influential traditional discourse that still has an impact on how young women perform their self and gender identities. Angeles and Sunanta (2009) suggest that family obligation is one of the influential norms in Thailand, especially when female children need to satisfactorily fulfil their family obligations in many ways. The latest study in Thailand argues that family obligations are the daughter's duty to satisfy the parent's expectations; particularly, the qualities of gratitude such as the quality dutiful, submissive, docile and successful in education are the highest values in Thai families (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). Specifically, many Thai families expect their daughters to present their sexual identity in line with the heterosexual norm due to the patriarchal culture. Although parents may be not much distressed about their children being lesbian or other non-normative identities, non-binary

children still experience a sense of failure that they are not "good" daughters, since they cannot gain their parent's acceptance and satisfy their expectations (Doungphummes and Sangsingkeo, 2020). In short, children thus endeavour to have a series of interpersonal strategies and negotiations to ease their parents' concerns about their well-being and fulfil their family obligations by being "dutiful daughters".

To sum up, it is crucial to understand how traditional public discourses regarding gender influence young Thai women's belief, attitude, and behaviour in terms of the performance of gender identity. As mentioned, although previous Thai scholar argues that teenage users use the online sites to constantly make a public declaration regarding their life stories, perform their gender identities, as well as express their sexual desire and emotion through their profile pages, there are still controversies in whether social media reinforce traditional dominant discourses in Thai culture. Crucially, since Thailand still exist "*sak di na*" (ศักดินา) ("dignity marks") social system, this causes Thailand to form a complicated structured hierarchy which can lead to the social tension and class oppression between privileged and underprivileged classes (Thongsawang, 2020; Keyes, 2014). All things considered, it is worthwhile to study the relationship between social media's roles and the negotiation of gender identity of youth living in the strongly patriarchal society in Thailand. Importantly, there is still lack of study explored gender negotiation online in terms of the implication of different class structures in Thailand. I thus aim to fill in the gap by addressing social class differentials as the significant implication in the ways in which young people negotiate their gender identities in an online environment. The research gap identified helps to contextualise the research

question: **how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** In short, the study aimed to answer the question of how young women from different class backgrounds used social media sites to negotiate their gender identity.

Theoretical Framework

The study aimed to interrogate processes of adaptation and resistance to traditional mainstream discourses through the consideration of social media as an alternative and flexible space for young Thai women in negotiating and communicating diverse and autonomous gender performances. At the same time, the relationship between youth's gender performance online and their social class was also explored. Thus, the study conceptualised the theoretical frameworks into three themes: (1) Identity and Gender theories; (2) Discourse and Power theories; and (3) Social Class and Capital theories. Each theme of the frameworks featured a body of works by cultural and post-cultural theories, and some of the feminism theories. To brief these, Goffman's dramaturgical model (1959) talks about how individuals present their selves and identities according to how they are observed by audiences from front and backstage. As in theatrical performance, there is a front region where the "actors" (individuals) are on stage in front of the audiences. This is where the positive aspects of the idea of self and desired impressions are highlighted. There is also a back region or stage that can also be considered as a hidden or private place where individuals can be themselves and get rid of their role or identity in society. Butler's gender performativity (1990) discusses that "gender is

performative, which is produced through millions of individual actions"
(1990: 83). It is argued that gender is best seen as a way of doing
the body in performance which individuals can have "self-selection" to
perform—this can be applied in many situations in online spaces; for
instance, young users can select pictures to post so as to represent
their desirable images through manageable profiles with many choices
of editing, filtering, hiding and/or removing. McRobbie's post-feminism
concept (2009) highlights the idea that post-feminism is the illusion
of girls' choice and agency. McRobbie views that to obsess in beauty
products such as wearing make-up, high heels and thongs, re-establish
patriarchy, heterosexual norms and normative femininity to society.
According to Foucault (1990), institutions' discourses are recognised
as "experts" in producing "truth" in society (p. 308). It is considered
that "discourses produce knowledge and knowledge is always a weapon
of power; thus, power and knowledge are joined together to produce
reality in society: it produces the 'truths' that people live." (Foucault,
1990: 318). According to Bourdieu (1970), social class and capital play
the role of positioning individuals in terms of cultural tastes, manners,
and practices in any field. Bourdieu (1970) argues that families pass
cultural capital to their children and such cultural capital is a way of
distributing power in society. All things considered, these frameworks
were applied to serve as the analytical background in understanding
girl's represented identity in online spaces. I will address further on
how each theme of the theoretical frameworks were applied.

The first theme, Identity and Gender, is to discuss what Goffman
(1959) talks about in the presentation of self in everyday life: how
individuals manage their impression for social interaction, and how they

present their selves on the front and the backstage according to the dramaturgical model. This framework was applied to understand how young women present their gender identities through social media sites as the metaphor of the front and the backstage. When several scholars adopt Goffman's front/backstage framework to the Facebook setting, there are different interpretations. For example, Tufekci (2008) and Lewis et al. (2008) think of Facebook as the backstage related to the concept of privacy, while Farquhar (2009) views Facebook as a frontstage where users perform to their audience and present contents that can be viewed by all of them. However, I suggest that social media environment can be considered as the frontstage and the backstage simultaneously, without division. Importantly, due to each technological functionality, social media can be the frontstage—where users can present their desired images of themselves through posting diverse contents, participating in multiple activities, and presenting their ideal self—and the backstage—where they can interact with their selected audiences and retain their offline lives with many features of hiding, filtering and removing. According to what Butler (1990) proposed the term of "gender performativity", this framework can help to understand the ways in which young Thai women express their gender identity online through performance of self such as through a dress, action, props, etc. At the same time, post-feminism by McRobbie (2009) is a useful framework for understanding how post-feminism is undermining the progress made by the first and the second waves of feminism. Third-wave of feminism seems to allow young women to gain "choice", "agency", "right" and "empowerment" through political engagement and politically civic affairs through spreadability of social

media (Snyder, 2008). Nevertheless, McRobbie (2009) critiques with this, she views that girls are still limited in their agency due to the adoption of neoliberal values and consumerism–such as to obsess with beauty goods and culture–which these can call the patriarchy and heterosexual norms back to society.

Secondly, Discourse and Power were applied as the second theme of theoretical frameworks to understand how the "truth" of sexuality was created through the discourse and power in society which was the main concept by Foucault's theory (1998). We can see that many Thai institutions, such as family, school, and media, and religion, which we call these "experts", termed by Foucault, produce and reproduce dominant discourse and value of women which shape an understanding to young people, for example, sex and gender are taboo topics to speak in publics; they are prohibited from talking about and disagreeing with sexual discourses that their parents adhere to (Thaweesit, 2004). After we understand how the truth or the knowledge of sexuality was formed in society, the creation of subculture and resistance in youth culture by Hall and Jefferson (1993) from Birmingham's CCCS was applied to understand the subversion through social media platforms by young women. In arguing that popular culture is a site of struggle, Hall and Jefferson (2006) suggest the idea of resistance and subculture in youth culture as a way to rebel against the dominant culture. Youth culture is an ideological means of resistance to the standards and values of the dominant culture. Moreover, as Hall and Jefferson (2006) put forward, as youth cultures form coherent social worlds of family, neighbourhood, and school in life, the youth are struggling with the power and privilege between the superordinate and subordinate

social classes. I thus consider that Hall and Jefferson's classical consideration of power and dominant culture in British society is similar to the dominant culture of institutions in Thai society. Thereby, youth potentially find alternative spaces to challenge these to express their dynamics and creativity through the subculture (rituals) online.

Lastly, the third theme is to discuss theories about Social Class and Social Capital. This sort of theoretical framework was applied to understand the background of how social class in society emerged, how social capital played a significant role in the impact and judgement of individual's tastes, beliefs and behaviours, as well as how family and education positioned the children's cultural capital. These social class and capital theories relied on classical Bourdieu's Class and Capital (1970) and de Certeau's Strategic and Tactic framework (2010). Based on Bourdieu's work in 1979, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste,* class and capital are "natural" assets that family pass to their children: a whole range of social and cultural behaviours of children such as belief, manner, aesthetic, gait, dress and accent is accumulated and transferred by over generation. Even though the social capital of children is positioned by their family according to Bourdieu, they can have their own *strategic* or *tactical* ways to resist those conventional objects from their parent's discourse or adult culture according to de Certeau. The kind of strategic and tactical resistance can be applied by the work of de Certeau (2010), *Walking in the City* concept. Briefly, "the city" is generated by the *strategies* of governments, corporations and institutional bodies who produce things like maps that lead or control people the city–as a metaphor that social norms and discourse have been set by adult or parent's culture. However, walkers (individuals or

youths) at street level moves in ways that are *tactical* and never fully determined by the plans of organising bodies, taking shortcuts despite the strategic grid of the streets. This de Certeau's strategic and tactical concept can be applied to understand that even though gender rules, values and discourse that still exist in Thai culture, youths have been never wholly determined by those rules due to their tactical and creative ways.

Moreover, a classical concept of class by Marx and Weber is also useful to apply to understand the social class in Thailand. They consider class "as a social category pertaining to individuals or groups sharing comparable behaviours, characteristics and way of life" (Weber, 1978). This implies that class is "regarded as a collectivity that acts in pursuit of the common interests" (Weber, 1978). In the same way, a traditional Marxist theory suggests that class is mainly discussed by the terms of economic and resource opportunities: it is much about quantitative materials possessed by individuals such as income, car, land and property. Marx (1867) distinguished one class from another on the basis of two criteria: ownership of the "means of production" and control of the "labour power" of others. He states "society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat" (Marx, 1867).

In my operational model of Thai social class definition, the Thai elite group, called the upper class, seems to partly resemble Marx's bourgeoisie and partly the aristocratic class, which has effectively disappeared in the Western model. Due to the existence of traditional aristocracy in Thailand, it is likely that members of the upper class grow,

live and work in this aristocratic system in Thai society. At the same time, part of them is the bourgeoisie in Marx's term: the people who own the means of production and manage a distribution of economic opportunities and resources. The Thai middle class seems like Marx's bourgeoisie as well, but some of them might have mixed social origins due to the emergence of the new urban middle class, whose roots are found in the lower class. This newly urban Thai middle class has emerged by educational expansion and advancement of professional careers, which allow them to possess the cultural and intellectual hegemony and political power more than they could achieve in the past (Funatsu and Kagoya, 2002). Lastly, the lower class, or the so-called cosmopolitan/urban peasants in the Thai context (Keyes, 2014), can be defined as a class corresponding to Marx's proletariat: the people who do not own the means of production, but sell their own labour power to then be compensated by the state and society. This is like the case of Thai students studied at the opportunity expansion school, which is fully funded by the Thai government. Thus, as hypothesised, the lower class tends to resist the oppressive nature of the more powerful groups in society, owing the subordination to the bourgeoisie, through their subculture on social media they have created.

Methodology

As the study aimed to explore the social media use in negotiating gender identity among young Thai women, the ethnographic research methodology was adopted to investigate the research's objectives. Due to the nature of the ethnographic study, qualitative methods were used to investigate how young women negotiated and performed their gender

identity on social media. To gain in-depth understandings of how they negotiated their gender identity online, and how they adapted and/or resisted traditional forms of female values through social media platforms, I adopted three research methods to collect the data: (1) the focus group; (2) the in-depth interview; and (3) the online observation (online ethnography), respectively.

Participants and Recruitment

The participants were 18-year-old Thai women who used social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and studied in upper secondary schools (Grade: Matthayom 6) in Bangkok. They were recruited by using a purposive snowball sampling method. To clarify the process, I contacted school teachers through the help of existing acquaintances to acquire permission before I had arrived in Bangkok. In this stage, the permission letter to the gatekeeper (school director) was also sent to gain consent before starting any data collection. After that, the participants were recruited from different social classes and different secondary school levels in Bangkok. The girls who came from high calibre private and well-known public high schools were considered the upper class (UC), while the middle class (MC) participants consisted of young women who attended other public high schools and/or public colleges. Lastly, the lower class (LC) participants were girls who studied in opportunity expansion schools, such as temple schools, which are financially supported by the government. These young women with different social backgrounds were classified based on the socioeconomic status (SES) of their parents: parent's income, education and occupation. According to Goldthorpe's concept of social stratification, the socioeconomic

status (SES) of individuals is associated with occupation, education and income indicators through a prestige-score ranking (1992). Thus, I applied Goldthorpe's original class scheme in the West (1992) with a minor revision to social classes in Thailand, which categorised into three class schemes: lower class (LC), middle class (MC) and upper class (UC). Here is the detail of schematic tabulation of social classes in Thailand (Table 1).

Table 1 A revised version of the class scheme in Thailand (with additional adjustments to better suit the situation of the research's context), emerging from the classical work of Goldthorpe (1992), the standard scheme in the West, and Hsiao (1999), a class scheme in Asia

Occupation	Income (Thai baht)	Education	Class Scheme
"Aristocracy" (royal, king, elite), e.g., professional, technical, administrative, executive managerial workers and government officials	> 50,000	Upper than Bachelor (Master to Doctoral)	Upper
"Bourgeoisie"—the newly rich-urban middle class in Thailand, e.g., small to medium proprietor, white collar in private company and artisan with and without employee	20,000 - 50,000	Secondary education to Bachelor	Middle
"Proletariat", e.g., labour worker	< 20,000	Below than secondary education	Lower

Data Collection

The study adopted three qualitative methods to collect the data. Firstly, the study started by conducting the focus group which based on a homogeneous group of girls, such as closeness, intimacy and similarity in habits, lifestyles and personalities as girl gangs. As the nature of "homogeneity" is to have something in common, called "like-mind people", this makes them feel more comfortable talking to each other and also more likely to talk openly (Ivanoff and Hultberg, 2006). Thus, participants in the focus group study shared some of the social and cultural backgrounds or had similar lived experiences or some combination of these. Then, the study collected the data through the in-depth interview. The purpose of the qualitative research interview is to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees, as expressed by their own words (Kvale, 1996; Dilley, 2004; Rubin, 2005). I applied the semi-structured formats since it can allow the interviewer (me) to delve deeply into participants' social and personal matters in terms of gender, which I could organise around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between myself and the participants. The main themes of questions were structured and scoped by the literature review, such as participants' attitude and perception regarding public discourses of women, womanhood, family values related to gender and their social media use linked to their everyday's life gender matter. Lastly, with methodological triangulation, online ethnography was adopted as the third method to collect the data. This approach seems to be the appropriate choice for a study exploring lived cultures on social media

and is used by numerous social media scholars, from boyd and Heer (2006), to Marwick and Boyd (2011) and Baker (2013). Particularly, boyd (2006, 2007, 2008, 2014) conducted multiple online ethnographic studies on social media including Myspace, Twitter and Facebook, to understand the teenage user's practices on these sites. The online ethnography enables in-depth analysis of users by the observation of the ways that they share, post and update on their social media pages. This can provide an understanding of meanings that they have made on the platforms. From the researcher's point of view, the key benefit of online ethnographic research is its ability to allow me to gain insights through first-hand observations of behaviour (Hair and Clark, 2003). According to Baker (2013), Facebook as ethnographic resource positions the platform to serve three functions: "as a communicative medium, as context and as data" (Baker, 2013: 132). These functions are valuable references for the study which aims to unravel the meanings underlying choices online that participants have selected and made in creating their gender identities.

To conduct online ethnography with participants' social media profiles, I newly created Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts with my UCL credentials as a researcher and provided detailed information about the study on my researcher profile page. Due to security, anonymity and confidentiality, it would be beneficial for both me and participants to use these newly created accounts in conducting the research only for the purposes of trustworthiness and prevention of ethical harassment. Before starting any data collection, the study was obtained ethical approval which all ethics policies and processes were used with reference to the ethical guidelines from the British Sociological Association

(BSA), Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by reading the relevant documents and other terms of service of Social media, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Overall, I reached out to the same thirty participants, who were fully informed by the research information sheets and the consent form. Once I obtained their fully informed consent, I sent them friend or following requests on social media accounts to access their profiles, and observed their activities online such as posted pictures, shared videos, comments and shared status on the profiles.

Data Analysis

The study applied thematic analysis to initially conceptualise themes for qualitative data. Then, multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996 & 2006) was another supportive approach to analyse the visual and textual data for online materials on social media such as posted pictures, shared contents, comments, retweeted contents and other online texts. As an ethnographic study, the multimodal semiotic framework is a valuable tool that helps understand how representational structure, interactive structure and compositional structure in media texts represent gender meanings made by participants. The aim is to understand that how young Thai women use social media to perform and/or construct their gender meanings through their cultural communicative practices and modes of communication analysed by the lens of sign systems (Burn and Parker, 2003). I thus consider that the multimodal discourse analysis grounded in social semiotics is a valuable resource for the study's analytical process as it can conceptualise the complex array of semiotic resources which are used to create meaning

of the participants' data, as well as provide insights into how visual and textual communication in the participants' online profile represents gender meanings that they create.

To conclude, by the use of triangulation, the data analysis was conducted systematically by cross-referencing three data types: the focus group, the interview, and social media data. The focus group and in-depth interview data featured spoken language and non-verbal language from both audio and video records; and the online ethnographic data focussed on still and/or moving images. All the different types of data were conceptualised by cross-referencing through thematic analysis, then I referred to the multimodal metafunctions framework: representation, interaction and composition (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996 & 2006) as deemed relevant to strengthen the argument. In the meantime, both reviewed pieces of literature and theoretical frameworks also served as an analytical background to explain and contextualise the key themes that grew into the research findings.

Findings

According to Bourdieu (1970), each social group possesses its cultural norms, values, tastes and practices based on its family's social and cultural capital. I thus develop the arguments for each class of participants to answer the research question: **how is social media used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds?** The findings and arguments are based on the themes that have emerged by cross-referencing the data from the triangulation: the focus groups, the interview, and online ethnographies. I will start to discuss an overall picture among three groups of participants. Then, themes for each

group of participants will be discussed through each subheading, LC, MC and UC, respectively.

Social Media and the Different Uses among Three Groups

To brief an overall picture, the evidence show that the LC and MC participants are the social groups that explicitly and implicitly resist Thai dominant discourses of women through tactical uses of social media, Twitter and Instagram. In the meantime, the UC participants seem to be the only group that negotiate their normative identities of girls: to be successful students and to be dutiful daughters according to their family values. The UC participants tend to be the social group that adopt and/ or accumulate their social and cultural capitals and strategically display these through their social media profiles, Facebook. According to the de Certeau's tactics/strategy metaphor in *Walking in the City* (2010), I offer an interpretation that the UC participants with the privileged background are *strategically* deploying the resources of their social group in terms of education, gender and power to realise the advantages of their class, while the participants with underprivileged background (LC and MC) are *tactically* deploying resources to critique and challenge the current societal structure and dominant values. There are many explicit cases where the LC and the MC participants build their subcultures in a creative and dynamic manner to rebel against heteronormativity. These are shown in the '*Both*' role-plays, hashtags on Twitter and the gender-switching cosplay activity on Instagram. In contrast, the UC participants use social media to communicate the embodiment of their social prestige and capital, as we can see in their use of social media in the sense of academic display rather than of sexual curation.

The distinction between the LC and the MC groups is that LC participants were less comfortable and confident during the interview than the MC participants were. Bourdieu's class framework (1979) can help understand this observation. It is argued that youth cultures are formed by the lived social world of families, neighborhoods and schools. Schools and labour markets are the institutions that connect working-class families and communities to the larger society and within these communities, the LC participants develop relationships to respond to power relations and the dominant culture. The LC participants seem to find it more challenging in dealing with power relations and dominance in Thai society, compared to the other classes. This is why they are the group that seems less confident when they speak in the interview and they rather reluctant to write their own tweets to express themselves by using their authentic points of view. Instead, they make tactical use of borrowed resources such as retweeted texts from others and they play their furtive activities online, such as the "*Both*" activity and the specific hashtags used in their Twitter communities.

In contrast, based on the interview data, the language that the MC participants used suggests a confident and rhetorical tone. For example, Top said that "I think *rak nuan san guan tua* is the most long-standing tradition…I think that it is the underlying one shaping our expression of gender". This excerpt shows the ability to think in abstract terms and express their understanding of society in an abstract way. Furthermore, the MC participants' resistance to traditional forms of female values appears to be more explicit and their uses of language come across like a set of rhetorical questions, such as "why do we need to do this? And why should we believe this? It can be reliably assumed

that due to their academic achievements and the status from their parents as the middle class, they may be more comfortable with that kind of language because it is the kind of language that their parents, who might be teachers or academics, can teach to their children and might have some experience in senior roles in industry's leading sectors.

In terms of social media implication and utilisation, many media scholars advance theoretical frameworks and empirical studies to understand the new role of social media as a part of a relationship and emotional management, also as a social context for personal and moral responsibility, such as a theory of polymedia (Madianou and Miller, 2012), media ecologies (Horst et al., 2010; Ito et al., 2010), mediation (Couldry, 2008; Livingstone, 2009), and the field of personal connections and digital media (Baym, 2010; Broadbent, 2020; Gershon, 2010). These frameworks show dynamics of how each user applies different platforms not only by dimensions of technical functionality and affordability such as availability, temporality, storage capacity, reproducibility, materiality, mobility, reach and so forth, but also by implications for the ways of interpersonal communication which constituting the social relationship. Specifically, Madianou and Miller (2012) propose a new theory of polymedia, a shift from a focus on the qualities of each particular medium as a discrete technology, to an understanding of new media as an environment of affordances which inextricably linked to the ways of interpersonal relationships. In other words, Polymedia is how users exploit these affordances in order to manage their emotions and their relationships: they consider the consequences such as social, emotional or moral implication to use that selected platform. Thus, it could be said that how each user adopts different platforms is linked

to many layers of meanings, functions and consequences both external relationship such as economic and political factors and internal relationship such as social, cultural and interpersonal qualities.

To apply these with three classes of participants, I consider that there are internal factors linked to the ways in which the subordinate class (LC and MC) use Twitter and Instagram to resist dominant discourses of women. Undeniably, Twitter is frequently used as public space to critique social issues–as we can see many new social movements started by the hashtag on Twitter and become viral, like #METOO. Twitter is anonymously used by LC participants who use the avatar profiles, while the MC participants use Instagram to voice and express explicitly their ideas both sexual and non-sexual related matters on their open profiles. This is not only because the LC participants have more layers of oppressiveness in terms of social, economic, educational and political factors than other classes, but also because they have a lack of confidence and emotional and moral implication. They need to find a safer space to implicitly speak the "dangerous" matters in society.

As Twitter can afford them safe spaces, for example they provide hashtag and retweet functions without needs to provide personal information, this can help them for interpersonal communication and for connecting with their specific communities that are trusted and experienced by their private group. This discussion can be supported by previous study's finding. Vickery (2015) asserts that Twitter affords young users for anonymous, disconnected disclosure and more private interactions than other platforms. Interestingly, the previous findings show that non-dominant youth users–the working classes in Texas, US

–are the active users who adopt such private and anonymous social media rather than other social groups (Vickery, 2015). This lends support to the finding that the LC participants as the subordinate group in Thai society use Twitter with anonymous disclosure to negotiate their desired identities of gender and sexual fantasies which are niches and interest-driven communities on Twitter.

Meanwhile, the MC participants seem to use Instagram with more confidence and assertiveness. This is not only because they possess more cultural and intellectual hegemony, or get better political, educational and opportunities in industry-leading careers (Funatsu and Kagoya, 2003), but also because Instagram provides them both public and private spaces where allow many media forms such as texts, still and moving images posted on IG stories. Also, they can create private groups on Instagram where they can access, interact and share their emotions and relationships with their friends. For example, as cosplay role play activity requires both still and moving images to represent the desired identities the MC participants create both private and public group to enhance their unconventional aspiration such as sexual fantasies, relationships and emotions with their social group through the play of such cosplay activity. Thus, it could be said that different platforms serve different characteristics of usage in terms of both technological affordances, and emotional, moral and interpersonal qualities of the users. Since the UC participants is the only group who adopt social position and capital from their parents and still accumulate these through social media, Facebook. I found that Facebook is used as a display of academic success and dutiful daughter which are girlhood and women discourses in Thai upper family. Interestingly, the UC participants are

the only social group that maintain their social relationships of family, cousin, relative and teacher in high school on their Facebook account. This finding can be supported by Van Dijck (2013) who argues that, due to technological functionalities, Facebook makes social interactions more visible on the feed since users can post, share, engage with friends through mechanical algorithm, while other platforms, like LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram are spaces to share more personal information in brief posts on a more regular basis. Because of these features and application, the UC participants seem to explicitly use their open profiles of Facebook and reveal their selfie picture, school name, personal information and etc. Not only because of their status as a superordinate class, but also because of social, emotional and moral implication of their social group, they need to show off and still adopt their social and cultural capital—which these seem to conform social norms and values of their parents. To sum up, we can understand that different structural categories such as gender, age or socioeconomic status of the users might be key factors related to their social media usages, such as type of platform and frequency of use. However, I argue that there are further internal dimensions related to their uses such as social, emotional and moral implication which related to certain kinds of relationship. As argued by Madianou and Miller (2012), Polymedia means not just that certain kinds of media become seen as more or less appropriate to certain kinds of relationship. Most relationships create a particular configuration of media that works best for their particular communicative needs. Hence, we can conclude that how each class of participants adopt different platforms can show dynamics in terms of both technological and internal qualities—as Madianou and

Miller (2012) suggest that particular person has chosen any particular medium as a social act–something that is found to be fundamental in actually constituting that social relationship.

Safe Spaces for Playful Subversion

Subversion acts against the dominant culture in Thailand appear in the LC group. They seem to be the group that radically resists Thai popular culture by building their subcultures on online platforms using creative and productive strategies. I propose that the process of negotiation of their gender identity is illustrated by their non-normative practices in subculture online. For example, they produce creative hashtags on Twitter for their own in-group understanding, such as "*Re-Tweet-Fav*", "*Re-Tweet-DM*" and "*Re-Tweet-Follow*", which are hashtags created for flirting purposes or finding sexual partners online. Cannon et al. (2018) provides an additional and useful concept to help understand that when the LC participants are involved with digital media practices, they are mobilising their new literacy skills. Cannon et al. (2018) suggest three themes as the new features of new literacy: dynamic, playful and productive literacies. The LC participants seem to possess these skills since they have the creativity to produce what they want to portray through the hashtags on the Twitter platform. They also organise their creative activity online called "*Both*" (a role-play sexual activity) on Twitter to negotiate their sexual orientation and to perform their fluid identity, especially for the LGBTQ+ users. Thus, it can be said that they have critical thinking skills to perform their playful identities through their practices on digital media. As it is argued that productive literacy is about the digital making practices of young learners,

I observe that the LC participants are literate in producing those creative media texts, such as hashtag contents and visually role-play images in the "*Both*" activity–these are viewed as "media crafting, critique and artistry" (Cannon et al., 2018). In short, I argue that they use social media to resist Thai popular culture by building their subcultures via such creative, productive and playful methods online.

According to Songsamphan (2008), sexuality is not just about people acting or performing their gender identities through their cos-tume, furniture, speech or expression of their physical appearance; rather, it implies individual's sexual relationships, sexual desires, sexual fantasies, sexual preferences, as well as having actual sex. I highlight that there is explicit evidence showing that the LC participants use their Twitter accounts not only for negotiating gender identities, but also for negotiating elements of sexuality. For instance, Ploy, Yok, Pawee, Jang, Nui, Pooh, Phat and Taew had the same experiences of using hashtags for flirting and/or building sexual relationships on their Twitter. Specifically, Ploy said in the interview that:

> *#Re-Tweet-Fav, #Re-Tweet-DM, and #Re-Tweet-Follow* are the hashtag patterns that we use to invite others for further interactions and of course that those interactions are mainly for building a sexual relation.

Ploy gave some sample phrases that she used with the hashtags, "I'm friendly, please follow me back *#Re-Tweet-Follow*", "I'm a lonely girl. If you are, please DM me *#Re-Tweet-DM*", "I'm not a playgirl. If you like, please Fav me *#Re-Tweet-Fav*". Even though these are just sexual fantasies in the online context, not in the offline physical world, it potentially infers to the ways in which they request those sexual

relationships through their productive and creative ways (hashtags) for sexual purposes. In short, these hashtags can be deemed as a kind of sexual courtship in which the LC participants engage to build their sexual relationship and express their desires for sexual attraction online.

The "*Both*" role-play activity on Twitter is another concrete example showing how they use social media to negotiate their sexual desires and aspirations. They use images of Korean artists as their profile pictures to negotiate not only their gender identity, but also their sexual orientation, particularly for lesbian users. The excerpt from Pawee's interview reveals that:

> *Both* is created for fans' online interaction: it is not only for updating, communicating and engaging with artist's works among fandom members, but it is also mainly for sexual purposes.

This implies that the "*Both*" role-play activity on Twitter is used purposively as a sexual courtship to build sexual relationships and fantasies online. Importantly, the LC participants revealed in the interview that it was possible to shift from sexual fantasies online, such as chatting or video calling, to sexual relations in the offline physical world, such as dating and having actual sex, if that relationship developed successfully.

As Pawee was one of the "*Both*" members in the Twitter community, the insight from her interview reveals that she seriously engages in this role-play activity to find her sexual partner, a quite successful attempt to develop the relationship in the offline physical context. Thereby, it can be assumed that while the LC participants negotiate their gender identities on their profiles, they have some tactical ways on Twitter to negotiate their sexuality as well. As sexuality

is defined as being more complicated than gender identity, the LC group appears to use Twitter to express their sexual desires, sexual emotions, sexual fantasies and sexual orientation through many creative ways as discussed. Particularly, the "*Both*" activity on Twitter is symbolised as a cultural form of playful subversion which mostly happen in lesbian relationships and other non-binary relations.

From this argument, a classical Marxist framework in terms of the ideological superstructure and economic base can be used to understand the LC participants' expression of gender and sexuality. In classical Marx's definition, the superstructure refers to the cultures, ideologies, norms and identities that people inhabit, while the base implies to the production forces, the materials and resources that generate the goods society needs (Marx, 1867). I suggest that the LC participants are challenging their parental norms and patriarchal norms, which can be referred to as a symbolic or ritual strategy that resists the ideological superstructure. Also, as supported by Birmingham Centre's theory and Gramsci's hegemony theory, they are simultaneously challenging their bodies and actual actions through forms of sexual expression, which may take place physically.

To explain this, based on what the LC participants revealed in the interview, the focus group, and posts on Twitter, it is likely that they are not just negotiating their gender identities through forms of symbols and rituals such as dress code, hairstyle, acting, props and music, but they are also negotiating them one step further—that is sexuality through forms of sexual action and expression. The distinction of meaning-making between symbols (or rituals) and physical practice (or body action) must be explained. For example, their gender identities

have been displayed through rituals such as the subculture of the "*Both*" role play, hashtag activity and cosplay performance in the online environment, but they carry these sexual matters over into the offline world through their actual bodies, actions and identities.

To sum up, I argue that the negotiation of both gender and sexuality on social media by the LC participants is a cultural form of playful subversion to the patriarchal values, norms and ideologies in the superstructure of Thai society, manifested through their symbols and rituals. At the same time, they also challenge these norms and ideologies through their real bodies, actions, and biological identities which may also in turn challenge their Monday morning feeling in the economic base in Thai society. Remember that, youth subcultures (rituals) are interpreted as a response (symbolic resistance) primarily to class oppression (Hall and Jefferson, 1993). In other words, even though the dominant classes possess the power to enact the rules and mobilise "common sense" through the ideology of daily routine in people practices as argued by Gramsci (1971), these rules and common sense can be resisted by subclasses and youth subcultures. This theoretical position is in line with what I argue for the LC participants' resistance to gender normativity in Thai cultural hegemony even if they are subordinate to the bourgeoisie and the parental class.

However, the findings in this thesis suggest that the ambiguity of the girls' objectification is always my concern. I note that to understand their everyday life concerning gender and sexual negotiation within class differentiation, we need to conceptualise this through a more nuanced lens that allows room for ambiguity. It seems to me that McRobbie's theoretical position does take into account the ambiguity

for girls' practices in the matter of gender online. A more complex and nuanced lens is thus needed to understand girls' represented identity, agency and playful subversion in contemporary feminism. In my opinion, living in many contested definitions of postmodern aesthetics, we have seen opportunities for playful subversion in individuals' everyday life practices, especially in youth culture. While subversion aims at a clear break with power in society, playfulness seeks to transform this radical oppression into a space for individual freedom. We can see that it is not a fixed relationship between class and gender negotiation. The LC participants seem to use social media as the safe spaces to subvert gender normativity with playfulness, even though they are subordinate to the bourgeoisie class and ruling members of society.

Pleasure, Empowerment and the Negotiation of Identity

The evidence derived from this study suggests that the MC participants are the social group making up the highest diversity of gender performance on social media. They are active users who confront their struggles for sexual autonomy online. Social media is used to not only allow them to perform their diverse and/or alternative gender identities but is also used to resist gender normativity in Thai dominant culture. One of the explicit pieces of evidence is the popularity of cosplay activity showing how they perform their non-normative identities online.

Cosplay originated from *manga* Japanese comics, cartoons and animation and has become popular in Asian girls, including young Thai women (Keenapan, 2001). They can switch their gender identities, for example from female to male, male to female, or others, according to their preferences through many alternative ways, such as through costume,

hairstyle, make-up, props, speech and characters. A previous study's finding shows that cosplay activity, especially in queer performers, can be considered as "pleasurable resistance" (Joel, 2011). The author argues that cosplay can be seen as a sense of agency in expressing pleasure since cosplayers can play with dressing, make-up and other props through the imitation of characters. While they are playing with these with pleasure and agency, they are resisting gender normativity in the dominant culture. It can then be inferred that the MC participants engage with cosplay activity in the form of pleasurable resistance. They adopt cosplay costumes, manners, speeches and characteristics to represent their dynamic and diverse gender identities, which are unconventional practices in Thai dominant culture.

To support this argument, there is a detailed picture collected from the data showing how they represent their identities through multimodal texts of cosplay activity posted on social media. Through the cosplay displayed online, Natty represents herself as the "actor" who performs an action (kissing) in the picture, while the other girl to the right seems to be the "goal", who is the receiver of the action–according to the multimodal metafunctions framework (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Especially, other modes of communication such as her eye contact with the viewers and her confidence with a smile on her face support the idea that she demands agreement from the audiences: she wants her audiences to believe and agree with her intimate relationship. Thus, these communicative modes, such as facial expression, gaze, eye contact and left-right placement in Natty's picture can help to understand the meaning of resistance against gender normativity in Thai culture. Moreover, speech is one of the crucial

resources to produce *intensity* in multimodal communication (Jewitt et at., 2016), as reflected in the excerpt from Natty's interview that:

> Gender is an individual's own judgment; we thus need to have the freedom to decide our gender because this is 2020!" *[intensive expression by raising the volume suggesting strength and confidence].*

Natty seemed to emphasise her main point by raising her speaking volume to show the confidence she had. Thus, the spoken utterance infers that she tried to challenge the state's ideology in terms of gender norms and the stigma to talking about gender in Thai culture.

Importantly, institutions' discourses are recognised as "experts" in producing "truth" in society according to Foucault's concept of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1990: 308). It is argued that "discourses produce knowledge and knowledge is always a weapon of power, thus, power and knowledge are joined together to produce reality in society: it produces the 'truths' that people live" (Foucault, 1990: 318). This framework helps to understand that social constructions regarding gender norms and discourses in Thai society are internalised by the group of institutions in that society. Importantly, individuals' dynamic and unique subjectivities become more focused than forces of external discourse and power in society due to a shift in Foucault's consideration. Thus, individuals are increasingly able to negotiate lifestyle choices within diverse discourses and their own created discourses. This is in line with the cases of the MC participants, especially in the case of Natty, who performed diversity in gender through her own actions online and spoken discourses in the interview setting.

Even though the state's ideologies in gender values are constructed

by the bourgeoisie, who is the ruling capitalist class and controls the state in Thai society, I maintain that it is the parents, not the youth class, who conform to this social type. Hall and Jefferson (1993) from Birmingham's CCCS argue that "youth" is a kind of class fragment, resisting the conventions of their parental group. This can strengthen the argument that the MC participants are another class separated from their parents and they subvert their parents' norms and culture, even though their parents are the bourgeoisie owning the power to enact the norms in the Thai ruling class. Crucially, through the use of social media, they have more choices to perform their alternative images of self and gender identity and, at the same time, to resist common sense in female values as well as gender normativity in Thai culture.

To sum up, I argue that the MC participants use social media as a form of pleasurable resistance to gender normativity in the Thai state's ideology. Even there is massive tension between different forces such as being subordinate to the elite class and to their parental class, they can balance this tension by creating pleasurable things online to negotiate their gender identity. Thus, the creative resistance on social media can be considered as pleasurable tension which potentially features characteristics of subversiveness, ambiguity and pleasure. As discussed in the literature review, Boonmongkon et al. (2013) propose that social media can be seen as novel social spaces offering opportunities for young women as active users to deal with their struggles for sexual autonomy. They view autonomy in young women as "active agents", implying that girls can express love, responsibility, intimacy and sexual desire on social media with more freedom (Boonmongkon et al., 2013).

This finding is in line with that of another Thai scholar, who argue that young women exert a level of agency in negotiating the performance of gender identities online (Fongkeaw and Fongkeaw, 2016). In short, my study confirms these previous findings as well as advance the concept of class implications. I argue that the MC participants are the social group who achieve a certain level of sexual autonomy and diversity through their uses of social media when compared to the other social groups. Importantly, the emergence of the new urban middle class in Thailand leads to the overlap and shared common practices between the lower and the middle classes. This newly ascending Thai middle class seems to gain more cultural and intellectual hegemony and political power more than they did in the past. To sum up, although the new middle class appears to possess more power to set norms and rules in Thai society, at the same time, they are defined as the bourgeoisie who owns the means of production and manages a distribution of economic opportunities and resources in Marx's framework; the youth, on the other hand, is seen as another class fragment resisting the parental class and norms as argued by Hall and Jefferson (1993).

The Social Uses of the Online "Masquerade"

While the LC and MC participants seem to use social media as a site for resistance against dominant structures, the UC participants appear to demonstrate a different pattern of usage. According to Gullette (2014), the Thai upper class are those who work with symbols as exemplars of high status: high professional occupations, high educational obtainment, high income, and living in urban life. Vorng (2012) notes that they can be called "*hi-so*", or high-cultural standing, which draws from Western

concepts of "high-society". Also, the social status of the UC group covers occupational prestige, lifestyle, education, family names, home location, privileges of attending private tutoring schools and/or universities, having exclusive condos, going to elite shopping malls, and having office buildings (Jackson, 2004).

Based on this information, as the UC participants are considered as the privileged group in Thai society, they seem to comply with values, norms, manners and practices in accordance with their social group and their parents, when they engage in online activities and social interaction on social media. I observe that the UC participants adopt such a social position and capital from their parents, and still accumulate these through the status they display on social media rather than the display of gender-related matters. Especially, they considerably show off their social and cultural capital in terms of educational and social prestige in online sites. It should be reminded that social prestige is the relation to one's authority, respect and influence in society and individuals want to gain this kind of prestige to accumulate their social and cultural capital. Importantly, families pass cultural capital to their children and such cultural capital is a way of distributing power in society, as Bourdieu argued (1970). Thus, cultural capital plays the role of positioning individuals in terms of cultural tastes, manners and practices in any field (Bourdieu,1970). It can therefore be understood that the UC participants' negotiation of their social prestige through social media is a function of accumulating and/or maintaining their power in society. This accords with both Marx and Bourdieu's frameworks asserting that the more capital you have, the more powerful you are. In short, I propose that social prestige and cultural capital are the key

social values that the UC participants desire to keep and negotiate in the reinforcement of their status, authority, respect, and influence, not only in the offline setting but also in the online setting.

The UC participants use social media to negotiate their social prestige and cultural capital in the attempt to remain dutiful and obedient to their parents and to be academically successful students. This kind of negotiation is considered as the strategic management of social media privacy; at the same time, as they display and mobilise a certain level of literacy in new media practices. Facebook is the platform frequently used by the UC participants. They are the only group that keep socialising with their family, parents, relatives and school teachers on their Facebook account. This emphasizes the idea of the new role of social media as a medium of the social acts of individuals—especially the social relationship constituted by their interpersonal, emotional and moral qualities (Madianou and Miller, 2012). Furthermore, the UC participants seem to post their everyday life's matters on Facebook profiles related to the dominant family values: to be a dutiful daughter and to be an academically successful student—as we can see from the evidence of wearing a school uniform and post about their academic success and pictures with their parents and families. As obedient uniformed school students, the UC participants showed markers of conventional binary identities at work. For instance, wearing a blue skirt represents a female identity while wearing blue shorts reinforces a male identity. Additionally, other accessories can also stress a conventional female identity, such as a blue or white bow tie, which represents a girlish or sweet identity. In short, these clothing and accessories in school uniforms are suggested as the dominant costumes which reinforce heteronormativity

and gender normativity, particularly the gender binary and normative femininity which effaced markers of fluid sexual identities. Moreover, based on the interview data, they mostly echo their parent's discourses and obediently follow what their parents said, for example:

> I think that when we grow up as adults, social media posts can affect us in some ways, especially in the situation of job applications when we are first jobbers. My father told me that many companies nowadays monitor what you post online: they scan for posts that contain any negative points of view on any matters that might impact society or not. So, it is difficult to speak about social and political issues are difficult in the public space (and social media are largely a public space to me) since we don't know who will dramatically agree or disagree with this.–said Mew.

This spoken evidence supports the notion that the UC participants were concerned about their social images and benefits of work opportunities in the future, as negative comments might destroy their social prestige and cultural capital. Crucially, it seemed that they were more likely involved with excessive anxiety than just a typical concern over their privacy and surveillance from parents. Thus, I suggest that the UC participants use social media as an exhibition of their social prestige by manipulating their knowledge of privacy management and new media literacy skills.

In terms of privacy management, Twitter was also another platform used by the UC participants, who controlled their privacy by using anonymous identities. This was in contrast with the LC participants, who used Twitter for political engagement and for speaking

socially risky and dangerous issues. In addition to the notion that the UC participants manipulate social media to accumulate their social prestige and educational capital, they have little critique or involvement in gender politics and civic affairs on social media because it is harmful to or can diminish their prestige and advantages. This shows a lack of critical, social and cultural skills in the framework of new media literacy.

As reviewed, critical, cultural, creative and playful skills are important features of new media literacy in the twenty-first century (Jenkins, 2009; Burn and Durran, 2007; Cannon et al., 2018). Jenkins (2009) asserts that new media literacy should be seen as social skills, as ways of interacting within a larger community. Similarly, Burn and Durran (2007) also suggest that new literacy implies cultural competence: it is about new kinds of cultural communicative practices. According to my analysis, both the LC and the MC participants are literate to produce creative media texts, such as hashtag texts, visually cosplay images, and the 'Both' role-play activity online. On the other hand, the UC participants seem to lack this set of new literacy skills, since they have a limited level of productivity in digital making practices and the creativity to perform playful identities in the lived experience of digital culture. Interestingly, the UC participants seem competent and literate in terms of networking skills in participatory culture, since there is a concrete example showing that they show strong allegiance to the fan community in which they seriously engage. They collaborate with the global fan members of BTS to protect their artists on Twitter. For example, Jinny tweeted that "please retweet this if you think that BTS was accused of Fake news by other bands' fan groups. Now many journalists have shared this fake news which has spread a

misunderstanding about BTS". On the flip side, they appear less literate than the other groups in terms of critical, creative and playful skills which are the social skills and cultural competencies in new media literacy as I discussed above. Therefore, by placing the three groups of participants in comparison, the participants with underprivileged classes (the LC and the MC) have emerged as the groups with a serious and active engagement in politics and civic affairs–which these can show new media literacies in terms of critique, cultural and creative skills to fight for their autonomy and rights. In contrast, the participants in the privileged class (the UC) are likely to lack of critiques to society since they adopt the position and acquire advantages, and resources from their parents.

In my operational model of Thai social class, I conclude that the UC group seems to partly resemble Marx's bourgeoisie, and partly the aristocratic class. The youth (the UC participants) seem to accept the privileges of their parental group, rather than resist them. However, it is an unexpected finding that the UC participants use social media to comply with their parents' norms and class, contradicting the practices of the other two groups of participants. As argued that the youth is another class segment that differs from the parental class, a reasonable assumption is that the UC participants could present their covert resistance through their symbols and rituals via their private accounts online. This kind of hidden resistance through subculture online can be found behind a metaphor of a masquerade ball where they wear masquerade masks to attend a posh event that is held with specific cultural preferences and identities. Even though all classes of participants masquerade to some extent in terms of online performance and fluid

digital representations of self, for the UC in particular, the metaphor is feasibly of more relevance, as there is a sense of the instrumental show of opulence–which is a specific characteristic of the carnival aesthetics. We perceive that masquerade masks are worn delicately by the prosperous class at balls which are held for members of the upper classes for entertainment and celebrations. Thus, my point of view is that the masquerade masks symbolise the strategy to hide one's identity. Meanwhile, they can use different colours to express their freedom of speech and voice their emotions and opinions without being subject to judgement. Social media is thus a place allowing everyone to hide their identity while affording them the freedom of self-presentation, like in the case of the UC participants who may show their conformity as well as covert resistance to their class.

Discussion

According to the research question, **how social media is used in negotiating gender identity by young Thai women from different class backgrounds,** I first suggest that social media plays a significant role in offering an alternative space for both resisting the dominant culture and accumulating cultural capital and social prestige by young Thai women. The evidence obtained from this study confirms a previous finding that the power of the audience is significant in terms of determining what is socially acceptable to post (boyd, 2010). Marwick and boyd (2011) suggest that social media can be understood as channels contributing to a sense of "context collapse". This creates the difficulty for users to manage their self-presentation on profiles due to the diverse audiences collapsed in one site that assembles parents, teachers,

colleagues and friends However, due to its networking functionality and its technological affordance, each social media platform allows different styles of privacy management for users to deal with multiple audiences as well as with the matter of social interaction on manageable profiles. As consistently argued, the role of social media is to provide opportunities for the participants to both resist the prevailing culture and to accumulate capital and social prestige. I found that each class of them had their strategies of either resisting the dominant culture or conforming to the values or cultural norms of their social group. Not only have I confirmed the findings from previous studies, but I have also aimed to advance the field from the perspective of social class implications related to gender performance online in youth culture. I argue that class and gender are not separate structures, but affect each other. According to intersectionality framework, women's oppression in society is intersecting with many layers of different forms of oppression, such as race, gender, class, nationality, citizenship, religion and body type (Crenshaw, 1989). In other words, intersectionality is used to denote how race, class, gender and other systems combine to shape the experiences of many by making room for the privilege. This can be linked with the three classes of participants in this study.

Firstly, since the LC group of participants is defined as corresponding to Marx's proletariat, their class relates to how they resist Thai dominant discourses due to the many layers of different forms of oppression, such as their low economic status, their limited skills, and their developing living areas. Importantly, as Hall and Jefferson argue that youth are subordinate to their parental group, it seems that the LC participants are doubly subordinate: they are not only subordinate to the

bourgeois class in Thai society, but they are also subordinate to their parental group. These double layers of subordination have an impact on how the LC participants feel and act with regard to the resistance of Thai dominant culture–as we can see in many cases from the LC participants' profiles. Similarly, even though the MC group seems to be more like Marx's bourgeoisie, it is the parents who comply with social values and discourses, not the youth themselves. The youth operates as a kind of another structure, with its own subordinate characteristics as Hall and Jefferson argue. The youth class is thus considered to be within the intersectionality argument, which is another significant factor in gender negotiation as well. Lastly, the UC group appears to partly resemble Marx's bourgeoisie, and partly the aristocratic class in Thai society. They seem to accept the privileges of their parental group, rather than resisting them due to the social identities and advantages they possess such as wealth, education, skill and residency in urban areas of Bangkok, the capital city. Although they might be deemed a separate group that differs from their parental group, their social class as the elite still confines them in various ways. Their education, their parents' work positions, and their occupational status intersect to influence how the UC participants feel obliged to comply with the educational capital and social prestige of their class.

To sum up, class and gender are related to each other; plus, the youth is a third structure that has its own subordinate characteristics–I hence advance the argument that intersectionality works across these three structures. However, as I discussed the nuanced and ambiguous practices of the youth's everyday gender negotiation, we are faced with a kind of unstable equilibrium that cannot be understood in a

clear-cut way. The intersectionality offers room for a dynamic and unstable gender performance. The youth seems to be doubly subordinate, especially the working-class youth, which is a form of disadvantage to them, but there is still room on social media to provide them with the opportunities to free themselves from the constraints imposed by their social class. Therefore, even there is compound oppression in one's class, there is still a place left for the operation to compensate for such oppression and to allow for dynamism and diversity. I thus argue that class, gender and the youth are not defined and bound by a fixed relationship between one another; it is rather about how each of them maintains the massive tension of their class and how they perform their subjectivity through their own discourses and subcultures online.

Conclusion

My study contributes to the knowledge in the area of gender studies and youth cultural studies by providing new ways of understanding the nature and significance of novel social phenomena related to young people's everyday gender negotiations. In particular, the study fills in the gap by addressing social class differentials which have not been explored before in Thailand. Previous Thai scholars consider young Thai women to be constrained from performing their gender by mainstream discourses in Thai dominant culture even though social media offers more opportunities to break free of these (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). To fully understand this, I would argue that it depends on the complexity of class and cultural affiliations of a group of young women. Arguably, groups with privileged backgrounds realise their cultural resources and advantages of their class in a range of ways: gender, power and education.

By contrast, the non-dominant groups, or the disadvantaged classes, potentially challenge or oppose these due to the nature of class oppression. Remarkably, social media plays a significant role in providing alternative spaces for the participants who come from a range of backgrounds to create and display their self-determined identities. The social class of the participants is an underlying factor that determines how they conform, interact, resist, or deal with mainstream public discourses and dominant cultures in contemporary Thailand. Consequently, a conclusion can be drawn that girls' represented identities regarding gender in both the online and offline contexts, should be understood in a nuanced and ambiguous conceptualisation, taking into account not only class difference and cultural affiliation, but also the mutability of girl's subjectification and their own constructed discourses.

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