

The Use of Weblogs as a Tool for Thai Political Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Political weblogs are as diverse as political viewpoints are. In the period of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, several political crises occurred, such as opposition to the Amnesty Act, the constitutional amendment, and the anti-government protests. Remarkably, during this time, social media were used as a platform for political expressions. This study employed a content analysis method to explore twenty-nine Thai political weblogs established during the period of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's administration. At the time, the most prominent Thai political weblogger was Nidhi Eawsriwong. Not surprisingly, the Pheu Thai Party and the Democrat Party were the most frequently appearing political parties in these weblog's posts. Most contents in these posts were related to government protesters by the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) and the coup d'état. The purposes of writing such weblogs were to express feelings and thoughts about Thai politics and to provide political information to the general public. The findings from this investigation revealed two significant uses of Thai political weblogs: the communication media for political expressions and viewpoints (a safe online space for political engagement and participation), and vital sources for Thai political information and news (social narratives).

Keywords: Thai political weblog, political communication, social media, political participation, political engagement

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1. INTRODUCTION

A blog (short for weblog), a user-generated, frequently updated website containing entries and comments concerning certain topics displayed in reverse chronological order, is an online medium for the purpose of digital communication. Weblogs have gained popularity due to the fact that they are easy to use, are virtually free of charge, and the author(s) of the blog (blogger/weblogger) can simultaneously publish content to various audiences. Weblogs are also a flexible and effective tool compared to other forms of publications.

As a channel for mass communication, weblogs are able to rapidly communicate and spread information to the public. This feature therefore provides an opportunity for various entities to freely express their thoughts and opinions, and to exchange information. Particularly in politics, weblogs have the potential to create a larger number of political spheres (online communities of people with similar interests). This enables the public to easily access and communicate political information through commonly available devices such as tablets and smartphones.

Political weblogging is a key medium for political communication (Yaakop et al., 2018). Therefore, the public has an opportunity to participate in democratic processes and information sharing. In both developed and developing countries, weblogs have been widely used as a channel for providing and obtaining political information or news, and for expressing political viewpoints. Yaakop et al. (2018) stated that political weblogs are widely used in order to share information and to allow citizens to freely and openly express their emotions and thoughts in cyberspace. Consequently, the use of digital platforms for political campaigning has grown globally since 2004 (Bankole et al., 2012). Several political parties use weblogs as an important part of their political campaigns.

Therefore, researchers have shown particular interest in such political weblogs in terms of their contents and effectiveness for civic and political purposes. Studies show that, in 2004 in the United States, weblogs were largely used for political campaigns (Williams et al., 2005). Bankole et al. (2012) studied the impact and use of weblogs in political elections in African countries in 2009. These studies revealed that even though the use of weblogs for campaigning in South Africa was at its early stages, a large number of bloggers, including African politicians, journalists, and media personnel, took advantage of the power of weblogs and were engaged in a high volume of political talk. Moreover, the use of weblogs in Asia was also be-

ing studied. Li (2008) found that several Chinese political weblogs were used to express dissatisfaction with the Chinese government. The influence of weblogs in politics indicates a growing trend in Hong Kong. Waikeung (2018) examined how political bloggers in Hong Kong used their weblogs to participate in the political scene during the 2014 'Umbrella Movement'. During this investigation, 960 political weblog posts were analyzed for content. The results of the study revealed that bloggers in Hong Kong used their platform as a form of a "soapbox," where they expressed their commentaries, opinions, and views in respect to recent public issues. As of this point however, there has been no academic research pertaining to the use of weblogs for political purposes in Thailand.

1.1. Emergence of Thai Weblogging

Thai weblogging started in 2009, and the number of weblogs in Thailand has been flourishing since. At that time, there were a large number of active weblogs in existence, for example, 2,703,115 blogs on www.bloggang.com, and 700,000 blogs on www.dek-d.com, respectively (Thammanee Wong & Naktong, 2012). Another example is the Manager Online (www.mgronline.com), which is a news agency; however, they created their own weblog to allow ordinary people to become journalists. Similarly, the OK Nation Blog (www.oknation.net) promotes "citizen reporters" or "citizen journalists" by providing a hosting platform for everyone to report the news and to freely express their opinions online.

1.2. Need for the Study

Fundamentally, weblogging is very much related to democracy in order to facilitate political communication, discussions, and social mobilization, as well as collective civic actions (Sánchez-Villar, 2019), as this was also evident with bloggers in Hong Kong, who used weblogs to mobilize their readers to take political action (Waikeung, 2018). Obviously, weblogs provide the public with the opportunity and a platform to participate in democratic processes. As mentioned earlier, there has been no research in Thailand in regard to the use of weblogs for political purposes. Since Thailand is a democratic nation, the aim of this research is therefore to study the use of Thai political weblogs with four research questions: 1) What are the purposes of writing Thai political weblogs?; 2) Who are Thai political bloggers?; 3) Who and which political parties, political events, and organizations are related to Thai political weblog contents?; and finally, 4) How is the quality of content in Thai political weblogs? For the

purposes of this study, a content analysis was employed in order to examine Thai political weblogs in both Thai and English between 2011 and 2014, which coincides with the Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra administration. During this period, several remarkable political events had occurred, including the opposition to the Amnesty Act, the constitutional amendment, and the anti-government protests. Thai political weblog posts flourished significantly during this time, which provides a sufficient number of Thai political weblog posts in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the contents. Utilizing content analysis for the purpose of analyzing political weblogs provides valuable insight into changes and trends over time, and as well, it sheds light on patterns of interests and communication, preferences, attitudes, and behaviors, leading to conclusive outcomes pertaining to the sociology of the Thai political “blogosphere.” The objective of this article is thus to analyze the Thai political sphere in order to better understand weblog practices in Thailand.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media have led to significant social changes by being a driving force behind social phenomena, especially when it comes to political issues (Laowishaya, 2012). Social media can rapidly reach the masses and consequently, political attitudes and participation are cultivated in apparent and visible fashion. Thus, social media have transformed political communication patterns, including political campaigns, ballots, and dialogues. Social media can therefore create larger political spheres, which encompass all dimensions and actors in politics such as politicians, political parties, movement groups, and independent organizations, as well as the public, who may all obtain political benefits from social media.

2.1. Weblogs

Basically, a weblog is a journal available on the Internet, which is maintained by a weblogger, who posts entries into the weblog; this activity is called “weblogging.” Weblog entries are regularly updated in reverse chronological order and allow readers to leave comments. Webloggers can easily create weblogs and keep them current over time. The major characteristics of weblogs are that they are personalized, frequently updated, can link to other blogs and external websites, and can be easily published by a basic user interface. A weblog is a mix of text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, or even other media objects such as graphics, multimedia, and Adobe PDFs.

As a type of user-generated content media, webloggers may use their platform to write about any topic of interest. These interests can shift over time. Consequently, the topics of weblog posts range from individual diaries to political campaigns.

2.2. Political Weblogs

Over the past decades, weblogs have become computer-mediated tools for communication and for sharing and exchanging information and opinions (Herring et al., 2007). Politicians have employed weblogs to publicize their personal views, to discredit competitors, to campaign for their objectives, and to create political alliances, as well as to gain higher esteem in political arenas, and to convince audiences to follow and support their causes. Therefore as an end-user and a weblog follower, individuals can get more involved in the political process, and this provides the opportunity and an effective channel to receive political news directly from the source. Weblog followers can easily express their opinions about politics (as an online content creator), which may impose a significant impact on various dimensions of society. The nature of weblogs within the political arena has changed not only the way citizens produce, acquire, and process information, but it has also influenced the types of social movements and the manner in which individuals participate in political processes (Sánchez-Villar, 2019).

Therefore, many researchers have dedicated more time and energy to study political weblogs. McKenna and Pole (2008) found that webloggers generally write weblogs about policies of political parties. They often gather information from various sources on the Internet, and then use their skills to synthesize and analyze this information in their weblogs. Additionally, the public also use weblogs to communicate, exchange, and express their political viewpoints and opinions, as well as to address those issues relating to their local communities. Farrell and Drezner (2008) found that journalists often used an “A-list” political weblog as a news source. These A-list weblogs are those that provide the most relevant content or information, and as a result, they are the most popular weblogs to link to. Adamic and Glance (2005) analyzed the posts of 40 “Recommended weblogs” during the two months preceding the 2004 United States’ presidential election. They found that there were not only links from these recommended weblogs to other weblogs, but also these weblogs were linked to various news articles. Right-leaning webloggers mentioned Democrats more often, while left-leaning webloggers mentioned Republicans more often.

Moreover, political webloggers, similar to mainstream journalists, supported their positions by criticizing those political figures whom they disliked.

In fact, weblogs are important for political media (Sánchez-Villar, 2019; Waikeung, 2018; Yaakop et al., 2018; Seper, 2004, cited in Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005). As mentioned earlier, the ever-increasing importance of weblogs in political scenes, such as in Hong Kong, is undeniable. Waikeung (2018) examined how webloggers in Hong Kong used their platform to influence politics. Waikeung (2018) divided the function of political weblogs into five categories: 1) informing readers about political issues or events; 2) acting as a “transmission belt”: webloggers provide hyperlinks to other websites or quote other sources; 3) using their platform as a “soapbox”: webloggers express their observations and opinions on political issues; 4) mobilizing political actions: webloggers appeal to their readers to take political actions; and finally, 5) acting as a conversation starter: webloggers pose questions and invite readers to provide feedback. Sánchez-Villar (2019) analyzed the role of political weblogs and posited weblogs as communication tools and citizen journalism. Similarly, Yaakop et al. (2018) analyzed the contents of 193 political weblogs during Malaysia’s 2008 general election and concluded that political weblogs in Malaysia were indeed appropriate for delivering and disseminating information and for discussing issues that impacted the political landscape. Such scenarios have encouraged this study in order to understand the uses of weblogs in political arena in Thailand. The focus of this article is therefore on webloggers, the purposes for creating such weblogs, and the contents of such weblogs.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focused on analyzing Thai political weblogs in accordance with Krippendorff (1989) content analysis process. The unit of analysis was Thai political weblog posts. The content analysis focused on three categories of weblogs based on purposes of writing: expressing feelings and thoughts, disseminating political information (to inform readers about political issues or events), and sharing knowledge and experience.

First, the researcher sought relevant weblogs both in Thailand and outside, and then created a list of Thai political weblogs. The weblogs’ selection criteria were: 1) the weblog posts were published between 2011 and 2014; 2) contents of the posts were in both Thai and English; 3) the format of the contents could include text, images, or

animation; and finally, 4) the posts were hosted on reliable and reputable weblogs. In total, there were 29 Thai political weblogs with 520 posts.

Subsequently, the researcher created a code book based on the components of the weblog and by assessing the quality of weblogs based on factors (Chuenchom, 2014) including: Authority (webloggers’ name, expertise, qualifications, credentials, job positions, affiliations, contact information, relevance to topics), Credibility (number of posts, number of comments and originality), Content quality (word length, purposes of writing, related people and political parties, political events, organizations, reference/citation and subject headings).

Then, three librarians recorded the weblog posts’ details and read the contents of each weblog’s posts before categorizing them. Coding of weblog posts was processed independently based on the code book. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage, in order to answer the research questions. Finally, the librarians interpreted and drew inferences using descriptive statistics with the assistance of the researcher.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The content analysis revealed that most Thai political weblogs were in Thai language and consisted of text and images.

4.1. Research Question 1: What Are the Purposes of Writing Thai Political Weblogs?

Thai political webloggers used their platform to criticize, discuss, or express their feelings and thoughts regarding Thai politics as shown in Table 1.

From Table 1, it is evident that the vast majority of Thai political weblog posts were used to express feelings and thoughts about Thai politics (86.35%), followed by those to disseminate information (24.04%). Only 3.84% of Thai political weblog posts were to share knowledge and experience.

Table 1. Purposes of Thai political weblogs

Purposes	f	%
Expressing feelings and thoughts	449	86.35
Disseminating political information	125	24.04
Sharing knowledge and experience	20	3.84

4.2. Research Question 2: Who Are Thai Political Webloggers?

The Thai political bloggers with the most number of posts were Nidhi Eawsriwong (10.58%), Asia Provocateur (9.23%), and Watcharaporn (6.73%), respectively. Professor Nidhi Eawsriwong is a well-known academic in political science at Chiang Mai University, Thailand. He is also a columnist, similar to Asia Provocateur and Watcharaporn, as shown in Table 2.

Most Thai political bloggers (75.19%) were anonymous; they did not provide their name, expertise, qualifications, credentials, job positions, affiliations, contact information, or bloggers' relevance to topic. Thus, most Thai political bloggers were at the lowest authority level.

In terms of credibility, four Thai political weblogs, those with the majority of posts, included Botkwamdee (50.00%), Asia Provocateur (10.77%), Chaoprayanews (10.38%), and Fhamon-konmong (8.46%), respectively, as shown in Table 3.

Most of the posts on these weblogs contained no comments (92.70%). If there were any comments, anonymity was often used, and the purposes of the comments were generally to support (63.64%) the weblogs' contents. Thai political posts had low originality since most Thai political weblog contents were reposted from other sources (58.08%). Matchon Online and Matchon Weekly were the Thai political weblogs with the largest number of posts as well as of those posts that were republished.

Table 2. Thai political bloggers

Thai political bloggers	f	%
Nidhi Eawsriwong	55	10.58
Asia Provocateur	48	9.23
Watcharaporn	35	6.73

Table 3. Thai political weblogs

Thai political weblogs	f	%
Botkwamdee (http://botkwamdee.blogspot.com)	260	50.00
Asia Provocateur (http://asiaprovocateur.blogspot.com)	56	10.77
Chaoprayanews (http://www.chaoprayanews.com)	54	10.38
Fhamon-konmong (http://fhamon-konmong.blogspot.com)	44	8.46

4.3. Research Question 3: Who and Which Political Parties, Political Events, and Organizations Are Related to Thai Political Weblog Contents?

From Table 4, the persons mentioned the most in the contents of Thai political weblog posts were Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra (24.49%), Abhisit Vejjajiva (the opposition leader) (13.15%), Thaksin Shinawatra (the former Prime Minister) (11.34%), Suthep Thaugsuban (the leader of the protest and the secretary-general of People's Democratic Reform Committee, PDRC) (9.75%), and General Prayut Chan-o-cha (Head of National Council for Peace and Order, NCPO) (5.44%), respectively. The political parties most related to the contents on Thai political weblog posts at that time were the Pheu Thai Party (Yingluck Shinawatra and Thaksin Shinawatra were in this) (67.35%) and Democrat Party (Suthep Thaugsuban and Abhisit Vejjajiva were in this) (28.91%), respectively.

4.4. Research Question 4: How Is the Quality of Contents in Thai Political Weblogs?

Most Thai political weblogs (21.15%) had 501-1,000 words, which means that Thai political weblogs (70.38%) often had low content quality since most Thai political weblogs were reposts with no reference and citation (98.08%).

From Table 5, the subject heading of most Thai political weblog posts pertained to Political violence (22.88%),

Table 4. Person and political parties to whom Thai political bloggers are related

Person	f	%
Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra	108	24.49
Abhisit Vejjajiva	58	13.15
Thaksin Shinawatra	50	11.34
Suthep Thaugsuban	43	9.75
General Prayut Chan-o-cha	24	5.44
Political parties	f	%
Pheu Thai Party	198	67.35
Democrat Party	85	28.91

Table 5. Thai political weblogs subject headings

Subject headings	f	%
Political violence	119	22.88
Government, Resistance to	107	20.58
Coups d'état	52	10.00
Coups d'état—Thailand	50	9.62

Government, Resistance to (20.58%), Coups d'état (10.00%), and Coups d'état—Thailand (9.62%). This corresponded to anti-government events that were largely discussed in Thai political weblogs at the time, which were initiated by the PDRC from August 2013 to May 2014 (3.46%), and the anti-coup (2.69%), respectively.

5. DISCUSSION

It appears that Thai political webloggers, in this research, frequently attempted to deliver political information. Professor Nidhi Eawsriwong empowered the Thai political sphere with the most weblog entries, which corresponds to Shao and Wang (2017)'s assumption that those with strong online presence enjoy higher social status in the real world. Moreover, using weblogs allows such actors and webloggers to gain benefits through the use of social networks (virtual communities and their relationships), and through an established reputation, as they can identify and record the most recent news and public interests. Most Thai political webloggers are scholars, which is different from the research findings in other countries. In those countries, a weblog is used as a digital platform for political campaigning, and most webloggers are politicians, representatives of the council, and journalists (Bankole et al., 2012; Li, 2008). It is important to note that those political webloggers who are actually scholars or experts in politics can help increase authority, content quality, and credibility of weblogs (Chuenchom, 2014).

Having said this, a large number of Thai political webloggers in this study were anonymous. Being anonymous is a unique feature in an online environment (Yun et al., 2016). Anonymous webloggers aim to either promote or discredit certain individuals or the government. However, the public perceives these weblogs to have higher level credibility. Weblog readers often believe the contents in such posts, as subsequent events are generally consistent with the weblog's projections or predictions. According to a survey by Technorati (Goldsborough, 2008), webloggers are often willing to tell stories about topics of interest, to share expertise and experiences with others, and to meet and interact with those who share these interests. Similarly, Thai political webloggers, in this study, showed great passion for information sharing. However, they identified themselves as anonymous writers or commentators, probably for their own safety, as it could be a risky proposition to criticize the government or political figures. As a general rule, Thai people refuse to express their opinions or speak publicly of others, which is rooted in the Thai cul-

ture. Indeed, under Thailand's censorship system, several Thai political weblogs have been shut down since they spoke of "untouched issues," or due to the fact that their thoughts were considered to be harmful to the security of the country. Likewise, webloggers in Malaysia appear to use nicknames and do not want to disclose their identities, perhaps due to the fact that they also want their identities to be hidden, for safety and other factors (Yaakop et al., 2018).

The content analysis of Thai political weblogs revealed that Thai political weblogs can be used as a source for Thai political news and information (Social Narrative), and furthermore, they may be used as an effective tool for communicating political expressions and viewpoints (a safe online space for Thai political engagement and participation).

5.1. Source of Thai Political News and Information (Social Narrative)

Thai political webloggers disseminate political information on their blogs, which can be seen as a convergence of important real-world political events and webloggers' interests. During the administration of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, the 36th Prime Minister of Thailand (5 August 2011-7 May 2014), several political phenomena occurred. Obviously, the contents on Thai political weblogs changed according to these political events. Hence, if one would sort through Thai political weblog posts of this period, it would become apparent that the timelines of such posts were consistent with those important Thai political events, 50 percent of which were re-posts from other sources. The most republished source was Matichon, a news agency with the main objective to convey news to the public. Obviously, Thai political weblogs serve as a tool for online journalism to communicate political news, situations, and phenomena in cyberspace. Huang and Lu (2017) explained that traditional mainstream media established new distribution channels by creating their own weblogs in order to expand their audiences, as weblogs became increasingly popular in people's life. Yun et al. (2016) emphasized that weblogs quite commonly embed news articles from traditional news organizations. Wallsten (2005) found that media coverage and weblog postings were also correlated. It is important to note that political weblogs facilitate and extend the reach of political news, which was previously provided by traditional mainstream media. Moreover, weblogs have become digital public spheres with the objective to improve citizens' ability to obtain and access daily political information and to

make political decisions. In fact, weblogs encourage civic engagement since they allow Thai people to freely access the media and to obtain information about Thai political events and issues. Additionally, Nelson et al. (2018) emphasized that weblogs could be used as an “alerter” of real-world political events that are generally not covered by the press or newspapers.

The Internet plays a major role in providing information. As a channel for continuous dissemination of information in unlimited quantities, and as a cost-effective non-stop option for transmitting information, the Internet offers individuals the right and opportunity to access information in an equitable manner. Accordingly, this helps to promote informed citizens, an important basis for strengthening democracy (Charoenwongsak, 2007). There is no doubt that journalism has been profoundly impacted by the existence of weblogs. The blogosphere can thus perform appropriate functions relating to participative journalism. The information functions and creation of public opinions make weblogs more pluralistic and qualitative (Sánchez-Villar, 2019). Indeed, weblogs have the capability to disseminate fruitful, relatively accessible, user-friendly information to a large number of readers. Also, they can provide feedback or comments (a two-way communication) rather than a space in an opinion column or a letter to the editor, as in conventional journalism. In addition, weblogs provide the opportunity to publish the latest information at a greater speed and offer the ability to link to various other information sources. Hence, weblogs can be “influencer platforms” for important citizen journalism, information nodes, and for content amplification. Emerging as news information sources and alternative tools for analysis of news stories, weblogs are “citizen-based” journals. Weblogs offer a wider range of news and information, and can help journalists to become aware of new stories, or to initiate stories.

Thai political weblogs are mostly written by scholars. Indeed, sharing political knowledge and experiences is one of the features of Thai political weblogs, which may offer a wider perspective and deeper insight on public interests. Typically, bloggers and weblog readers are dynamically involved in the process of information exchange. Not only do weblogs help to disseminate information, and access and manage content, but they also facilitate interaction, discussion, and collaboration. Moreover, weblogs can be useful for knowledge creation, as each weblog serves as a link that connects to different communities and helps in developing cross-disciplinary connections. Accordingly, analysis of the scope of knowledge in Thai political

weblogs should be the focus of future research in order to discover whether or not Thai political weblogs are “political knowledge weblogs.” Political knowledge weblogs are essential in people’s daily lives in a knowledge-based society.

5.2. Communication Media for Thai Political Expressions and Viewpoints (A Safe Online Space for Thai Political Engagement and Participation)

The analysis of bloggers’ writing purposes indicated that 86.35% of Thai political weblog posts pertained to political expression of thoughts and opinions relating to public concerns. Thai bloggers discussed Prime Minister Yingluck’s government policies such as “the rice subsidy scheme” and the Constitutional amendments. The bloggers also raised issues of public concern including the anti-coup movement and the massive flooding in 2011. Obviously, weblogs are digital public spheres for expressing opinions; especially, weblogs provide a buffer zone for political critique. Yaakop et al. (2018) stated that people were able to pass on political messages without government control. Freedom of expression is a basic human right and therefore, Thai political weblogs are considered online political spaces and critical tools for everyone to promote political communication, engagement, and participation. Moreover, weblogs allow users to report political news with no boundaries as “citizen-based media” or citizen or grassroots reporters (Duong, 2017; Thamaneewong & Naktong, 2012), and to discuss and help to make decisions on current political issues. Online political engagement is likely to have the most immediate impact during a political crisis, and weblogging has emerged as one of the most important tools for mobilization and governance. In an information society, weblogs can be applied as means for information communication, and can function as a platform to support discussions in the political arena and among a variety of people with wide-ranging interests throughout socio-political systems (Nyblade et al., 2015; Sánchez-Villar, 2019; Sinpeng, 2014;). Bloggers act as information sources, so that readers can freely contribute contents to weblogs and discuss issues of specific interests, whereas the broader public recognizes weblogs as a space to voice their opinions and perspectives at no cost. Certainly, the blogosphere enhances the ability for political communication, which is in the dynamic nature of weblogs to perhaps positively impact democratization of the public sphere.

Noticeably, weblogs positively influence public politics. Political weblogs provide an accessible online platform for anyone to express their political opinions and feel-

ings, share experiences, and to start a conversation much more easily, no matter who they are and regardless of age, gender, and social status. The public has an opportunity to be both communicators and receivers, and to participate in democratic processes and information sharing. Application of technology can improve the quality of democratic systems, and foster civic and political engagement amongst citizens by reducing the gap between institutions and citizens, and by encouraging readers to take different types of political actions. Hence, political weblogs help to promote democracy. Remarkably, Thai political weblogs are an invaluable source of insight into people's opinions toward important Thai political events.

6. CONCLUSION

Thai political weblogs are accessible information channels that enable open participation in electronic public spheres. Weblogs facilitate political communication in the Thai political arena. Thai political weblogs are considered to be safe online spaces for expressing Thai political opinions and viewpoints, and a vital source for Thai political news and information. Moreover, political weblogs are digital public spheres, where the public can become reporters, communicators, or content and opinion creators. The research results support the idea that weblogs are one of the most effective communication tools in an information society. Indeed, political weblogs provide democratic discussion spaces, escalating a level of citizen engagement and participation regarding public issues. Any individual can be engaged in deeper and more open discussions of public interest and in exchanging information. Political weblogs undeniably provoke a political nature with a social reach and influence at no cost. Weblogs are public spheres where citizens, government, and information are interconnected. In order to become a more open and pluralistic information society, the credibility and quality of contents to inform and participate should be recognized, since online public opinions logically shape opinions in the real world.

Thai political weblogs are still in their early stages. Most Thai political bloggers are not politicians who use weblogs as a tool for public relations, for discrediting opponents, for self-campaigning and creating a positive attitude towards their own group, or for showcasing their movement to ensure people feel close to them. Thai political weblogs did not have any other forms of political communication, for example, political campaigns, ballots, and political dialogues during the period of Prime Minister

Yingluck's government. It is apparent that the government, Members of Parliament, and other political representatives have not yet fully taken advantage of the power of weblogs to disseminate information and policies. However, political weblogs have already changed the pattern of public information. Moreover, news and information that people receive through these weblogs can be a foundation for social power and may change Thai politics in drastic ways. This study recommends that Thai political parties effectively employ weblogs as a tool for their public relations. Political entities can practice by building social relationships and communicating their messages using these tools in order to strengthen their bonds with the public and their constituents. Furthermore, Thai political parties and representatives can employ weblogs as a platform for the creation and dissemination of contents for a particular group of audiences. The use of technological applications can improve the quality of the Thai democratic system and foster greater Thai civic and political engagement in order to reduce the gap between institutions and citizens, resulting in a more empowered, healthy, and transparent democratic system.

In order to be good sources of information for public opinion, for public and private events, and for people in communities with similar interests, bloggers as well as readers should contribute value-added weblog contents by 1) providing links to other information sources; 2) building networks with real personal endorsements; and 3) increasing weblogs' credibility using critical and analytical skills to provide trustworthy, honest, and bias-free exchange. Thus, it could be concluded that weblogs are appropriate for political communication and transparent discussions of public issues and citizen journalism. They can create and provide more diverse information and open opinions, contributing to a wider perspective and deeper insight in political contexts.

The analysis of contents of Thai political weblogs enables information service providers to improve the quality of political information and to service users more effectively. In fact, lists of Thai political weblogs and Thai political bloggers are significant sources of political information. Also, the contents of Thai political weblog posts are like archives and record historically significant moments in Thai politics, which can be a notable Thai political learning source, especially for those captured during political crises in Thailand. Thai political weblog databases should be then developed. In addition, Thai political weblogs of past periods should be added to such databases. These databases may improve the quality of po-

litical information services. However, it is critical that the quality of Thai political weblogs be evaluated in terms of authority, credibility, or bias.

In order to better understand weblogs as a digital platform and information source for politics in a knowledge-based society, it is recommended to study the political information and knowledge in weblogs more intensively, and to pay close attention to biases and the actual exchanges on such political weblogs. Since weblogs positively contribute to information-citizen relationships, it is critical that research is done to determine the influence of weblogs on Thai politics, and furthermore, to assess sociopolitical impacts of weblogs on users' attitudes, participation, support for political events, and decision-making, which can be determined by examining various Thai political spheres.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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APPENDIX. List of Thai Political Weblogs

1. Archive-it (<http://wayback.archive-it.org>)
2. Asia Provocateur (<http://asiaprovocateur.blogspot.com>)
3. Boringdays (<http://www.boringdays.net>)
4. Botkwamdee (<http://botkwamdee.blogspot.com>)
5. Chaoprayanews (<http://www.chaoprayanews.com>)
6. Downmerng (<http://downmerng.blogspot.com>)
7. Drphichai (<http://drphichai.blogspot.com>)
8. FACT – Freedom Against Censorship Thailand (<https://facthai.wordpress.com>)
9. Fhamon-konmong (<http://fhamon-konmong.blogspot.com>)
10. Hi-Thaksin (<http://hi-thaksin.weebly.com>)
11. ilaw (<http://ilaw.or.th/node>)
12. iTUKnowledge (<http://ituknowledge.blogspot.com>)
13. Kanj 2010 (<http://kanj2010.blogspot.com>)
14. Manaotoon (<http://manaotoon.blogspot.com>)
15. Matichon Online (www.matichon.co.th/)
16. Mblog (<http://mblog.manager.co.th>)
17. Mr-som (<http://mr-som.blogspot.com>)
18. Nation TV (<http://oknation.nationtv.tv>)
19. Newake (<http://newake.blogspot.com>)
20. OKnation blog (<http://www.oknation.net>)
21. Peera Panasupon (<http://www.peerapanasupon.com>)
22. Politics and Government (<http://53011321092g12.blogspot.com>)
23. Prasong.com (<http://www.prasong.in.th>)
24. Sermsak (<https://sermsak.wordpress.com>)
25. Somchai (<https://somchairs.wordpress.com>)
26. Thai Society Today (<http://luck507.blogspot.com>)
27. Thamrongsak Petchlertanan (<http://thamrongsakpetch.blogspot.com>)
28. Warotah (<http://warotah.blogspot.com>)
29. Whatsoevermization (<http://nandamization.blogspot.com>)