

Communication Behavior and Political Participation of People in Bangkok Nisakorn Paiboonsin

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Abstract : The purposes of this study were to investigate: 1) political information exposure to mass media; 2) political participation of people in Bangkok metropolitan area; 3) a relationship between political information exposure to mass media and political participation; and 4) difference between demographic characteristics of people in Bangkok metropolitan area with political information exposure to mass media and political participation. In this survey study, the sample consisted of 400 people aged 18 years and over. The research used a randomized two-step (Two-Stage Sampling) by sampling stratum (Stratified Sampling) in the selection of district from all 6 groups of Bangkok, one district from each group. Then, a simple random method (Simple Random Sampling) was used to collect data from each defined district. The questionnaires were administered and the statistical package program was used to analyze the data for frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviations, t-test, Pearson correlation coefficient and one-way ANOVA.

The results revealed that: firstly, political information exposure was mostly exposed via television because it included motion pictures and sound which were most reliable. Secondly, political participation of people in Bangkok metropolitan area was in low level. Thirdly, there was no significant difference between political participation and political information exposure to mass media of people with different gender and occupation, whereas there was a significance with different age, income and education levels. The relationship between political participation and political information exposure to mass media was statistically significant. Finally, political participation of people in Bangkok was mostly done to exercise their voting rights by the elected representatives, followed by checking eligibility list of voters before the election, and persuade the others to exercise their voting rights, respectively.

Keywords : political information exposure, political participation

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1. Introduction

The political participation is the process to allow people participate in government tasks in various forms and levels such as express opinion toward political issues, referendum, campaigning activities, voting for selecting their representatives to work in parliament in both government and assize. These activities are basic rights exercising of citizens who being governed by democracy which create understanding in their roles, rights and raising awareness to involve in political activities which mainly concerned about common good rather than personal benefits. (Boonbongkarn, 2002) Therefore, it is interested to explore how political system influences media and communication in Thai society where is governed by constitutional monarchy.

Two-ways Flow communication in both mass media and social networks seem to benefit all actors; government, political parties, citizens and other beneficial groups. Because it is open floor for expressing their point of views, protesting and searching for alternative information sources. Obviously, people in Thai society communicate to government with one way or another. However, the most popular method is using internet. Accordingly, they transformed themselves to be cyber users then create communication with state through websites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, VDO Link, Phone-In etc.. and this cyber space is another way to claim and tell their sides of the story which may or may not be similar to mainstream media. Hence, all actors who support opposition and government party use information as weapon to attack each other in this 'War of Information' as there is no absolute true, but depend on audiences' view. The changes in social networks is vital to democratization in Thai society because at first it did not begin with this step but one-way or/and Top-down communication, thus, changing in communication method brings about increasing of Virtual Political involvement.. From this reason, social network can be influencer to all group ages and genders. (<http://mediamonitor.in.th>) In another word, mass media and social networking are quite important in engaging people to exercise their rights which is fundamental philosophy of democracy, then leads to development in terms of policy planning to fit in social context where governs by democratic form of government with the King as Head of State.

1.1 Theory and concepts; Political Participation

The basic philosophy of political participation is referred to basic rights of citizens according to state's policy and laws. The citizens freely exercise and involves in their rights to participate in government's missions in national and local levels. However, some activity of rights exercising may turn to be violent and out of control, afterward shifting from legal activity to illegal such as throwing objects, physically assaulting, using violence and carried weapons during protesting and being harmful to the others, which are against the laws.

On the other hand, the political participation may occur freely or being dominant by some beneficial groups. There are cases that people involved in protesting to raise their voice and asking to restore their rights while there are dominant groups who beneficial to movement try to blind people and convince them to create movement for personal benefits. This case likely to occurs in

3rd world countries and developing countries where people does not have deep understanding in democracy system, misunderstanding in situation, and being bribed. However, all activities as mentioned concerned to be 'political participation' in democracy.

Characteristics of political participation

Norman H. Nie and Sydney Verba (1971) categorize forms and activities of political participation into 4 categories:-

1. Voting is an activity to empower citizens over their leader because the policy shall be improved to meet society's demand for popularity voting. In fact, result of the vote cannot reflect popularity of leaders due to constituencies are not directly voting him/her, but vote for member of his/her political party, as indirect democracy voting system.

2. Campaign Activity is participation of citizen in level of campaigning before election and this performance is making citizens being over power to leader. Due to their involvement plays significant roles in gaining votes from other voters in society.

3. Citizen Activity is decision making of citizens to contact with government units and/or representatives which is concerned to be personal action. Likewise, it is possible to set up time, objectives and specific tasks of government that person wants to be involved within identified circumstances.

4. Co-operative Activity is forming up groups for creating social space to benefit their political movement. The priority of establishing group is solving problems that state cannot have reaction with or/and ignore to manage. This social movement has more influence to government's attention than Citizen Activity because it contains a lot of people rather than just one person.

1.2 Theory and concept; Uses and Gratification

The theory and concept of uses and gratification have been implied to study mass media and audiences to observe the result of communication. The analysis method is based on perception of audiences toward agenda in message, on specific channels and level of satisfaction after receiving it. Moreover, audiences are having different expectations and objectives in receiving messages so it is resulted in different levels of gratification.

The gratification of mass media can be divided into following patterns:-

1. Orientation Gratification is having expectations to use information from messages to support or refer in decision making which is called 'Decisional Utility'. The activity in this state is monitoring content of information, so called 'Surveillance' which leads to making decision for voting.

2. Social Gratification is using received information to communicate with members in their personal networks i.e. talking with someone for convincing something.

3. Para-Social Gratification is referencing the people in media as main sources of information. According to this concept, media people have influences to reliability of information and being taken as role models then result in terms of changing behavior of audiences.

4. Para-Oriental Gratifications is using information for entertainment and emotional retreatment e.g. consume media for entertainment and getting away from unsatisfied factors.

The role of media in presenting political news is raising awareness of people. Therefore, continually presenting is educating audiences in terms of understanding and raising awareness in on-going and complex political issues. The political issues cannot be understood from common senses, therefore, it is necessary to repeatedly present from various aspects to provide deeper understanding of audiences. With the higher expectation, viewers can contribute their knowledge until reaching the level of making judgment, arguments, with aim to add better attitudes toward government and opposition performance. To emphasize, media can be an influencer for convincing audiences to have reaction and express opinions in political issues e.g. public hearing, criticize government and opposition, involving in local government projects, involving in public space etc. (Parama Satawetin, 1997) As previously mentioned, mass media is important for country development as mirror to reflect performance of all groups in society, especially political institution.

2. Research Method

This survey included 400 people in the Bangkok metropolitan area by using questionnaires as the method. And then data was analyze by administered and the statistical package program through frequency, percentage, means, standard deviations, t-test, Pearson correlation coefficient and one-way ANOVA

3. Data analysis and findings

3.1. Mass media and New Media exposing of audiences

The media exposing are different in each group of audiences based on their education levels. The survey group with higher education as in undergraduates and post-graduates levels has the highest level of media and New Media exposing when compare to lower education level groups; primary, junior high school, high school and vocational school.

According to McNelly et al, (1968 as cited in Yubol Benjarongkij,1999) claims people with high education was convinced to expose media because of their professional position, incomes and responsible. For this reason, they have to learn and seek for qualified information from media so it is increasing their chances to expose to it which relevants to survey's finding that the highest level in media and New Media exposing found among research population with higher education.

3.2. Levels of political participation

According to survey's finding, the population age group of 24 – 47 shows the highest participation in political activities, meanwhile, the age group of 18-23 shows lower level of involvement. This result relates to a research which was conducted in National Institute of Development Administration by Chonthicha Meesang (2001) found different age of students have different revels of political participation. Moreover, Milbreath (1960) claims people in older group age is participated in such activity more than younger group. Another key point, research

population groups in diploma, undergraduate, and post-graduate levels have more participation in political activity than population groups with lower education background. As Klapper (1960) states population with high education is a good receiver from having various ranges of knowledge leads to deeper understanding in content information.

Lastly, incomes differentiations among groups bring about different forms in political participation. Evidentially, the group who gains 15,001-35,000 Baht as monthly salary holds the position in participation more than people with lower incomes under 10,000 Baht. In this case, Klapper (1960) explains the incomes of each audience groups is a persuaded factor to their media expose behavior in terms of seeking information from more channels.

3.3. Expose behavior to mass media, New Media and political participation

The channel which audiences expose the most is television, then follows with newspaper and radio. The television is the most popular because nature of media in delivering motion pictures with voice files, highly frequency, and widely broadcasting in real time which create credibility to it. Furthermore, it allows watchers to understand situation easier when compare with other channels. This finding relates to Satien Cheyprabut (1991) claim mass communication such as television has complexity in accessing, but less limitation in time and space to reach receivers. In like manner, Klapper (1960) found they interpret message according to their personal background; attitudes, beliefs and experience. However, television is the most wanted media and most reliable for audiences.

4. Political participation

From research findings, all population groups have low level in overall participation with political activities. Nevertheless, activity that holds the highest involvement level is Member of the House of Representative election, follows with senate election. On the other hand, Bangkok governor election is the local activity that survey groups participate the most, then follows with Bangkok council members and district council members voting. Norman and Verba (1971) state voting makes voters are more powerful than leader because candidates, political parties have to improve policy in order to maximize their votes. Frequently, voting in every level is accounted as official political participation.

- Checking eligibility of voters and convince the others to vote is in moderate level.

- Following up political situation from mass media, New Media and personal media is in low level. However, most of them follow via using television, then follow up the newspaper, radio, political criticism magazines.

- Likewise, research population follows New Media in low level. However, the internet was the most popular media among all, then cable TV and satellite TV.

- Moreover, the personal media gains the low interests from audiences as well as mass media and New Media.

Evidently, convincing the other voters to election significant appearing the highest frequency among research population, following with participating in candidate's orate via media channels, joining orate in public places, signing in to support or oppose some mission, inviting others to protesting, joining protesting by themselves and joining in political meeting, as answers are being categorized in order from the most to lowest frequency.

Certainly, the reasons of lower level of political participation are not interested in political issues, too busy for keeping up, not considering political news being useful. Another point in ignoring expose to political news is political bias and unbalancing of news agencies, then being bored, stressful and annoyed.

5. Research assumptions

Assumption #1

The differentiations of characteristics among Bangkok folks are bringing about differentiations in media and New Media expose behaviors. It was statistically significant at 0.05 level among audiences from different education backgrounds leads to different in exposing which supports supposition. Yet, the other factors such as gender, age, incomes and occupation do not show distinctive in expose behavior to media and New Media.

Assumption #2

The differentiations of characteristics among Bangkok folks are bringing about differentiations in expose behavior to media and New Media and leads to various levels in participation with politics. As previously mentioned, the education levels of population is vital factor in exposing, as well as appears to have statistically significant at 0.05 level in participation in political activities of survey group which is similar to supposition. Nonetheless, other factors do not show any statistically significant in explaining political participation among them.

Assumption #3

The differentiations of characteristics among Bangkok folks are bringing about differentiations in political participation. The finding shows statistically significant at 0.05 level in different age groups differently participate in political activities. The age group of 24-47 involves in such activity more than the age group of 18-23. Almond (1960) argues the more people are older, the more participate they involve in political movement.

Equally important, survey groups with education background above diploma level seem to have more participation in political activities as showed statistically significant at 0.05 level which supports supposition, while the survey groups from lower level of education background does not present the same level of participation.

Additionally, incomes levels are another factor to differentiate target groups in having different involvement with political activities, as to be statistically significant at 0.05 level which supports supposition. The survey groups with incomes 15,001-35,000 Baht per month apparently to have more involvement in political activities than the lower incomes groups of under 10,000 Baht per

month. It illustrates by concept of Almond (1960), the people with economically wealthy background pay more attention in political issues and news than the poorer groups.

Assumption #4

The relations between expose behaviors to media, New Media and involvement with political activities among Bangkok folks. There is no relation between expose behaviors media, New Media affect involvement with political activities among population groups. The discovered causes in less access to political related information are survey groups do not interest in such issue, no available time to keep up, unbalancing facts of news agencies. In addition, they think political issues are a game of power and fighting for specific beneficial groups.

Assumption #5

The relations between political related information and expose behaviors to media, New Media are found to increase level of political participation. It is perfectly shows statistically significant at 0.05 level which similar to supposition and can be implied that the more audiences have exposing to political related information, the more they participate in political activities. In another way, less exposing to political related information may reduce participation in such activities among audiences.

6. Conclusion

This research highlights the channel which audiences expose the most popular is television and expose behaviors to media, New Media are found to increase level of political participation, media expose behaviors of Bangkok folks which relates to participation in political activities. Mostly, research population involve in national and local election which are considered to be a formal participation activity. Thus, the education and schooling are needed for raising awareness and providing deeper understanding in democracy among target groups who are Thai citizen.

Acknowledgements

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