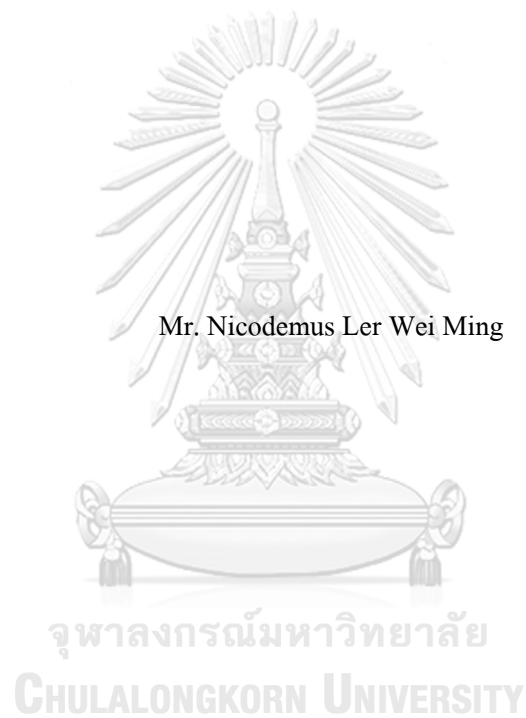


Influencers and Hashtags: Thai Youth Identities in Social Media



Mr. Nicodemus Ler Wei Ming

An Independent Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Thai Studies

FACULTY OF ARTS

Chulalongkorn University

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งานวิจัยฉบับนี้ศึกษาอัตลักษณ์ของวัยรุ่นไทยในปัจจุบันซึ่งแสดงให้เห็นผ่านกิจกรรม
ออนไลน์และอินฟลูเอนเซอร์ อีกทั้งศึกษาผลกระทบต่อสังคมไทยที่จะมีต่อไปในอนาคต วิธีการ
วิจัยคือการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาในสื่อสังคมออนไลน์เฟซบุ๊กและทวิตเตอร์ของอินฟลูเอนเซอร์ 2 คน
ได้แก่ นางสาวนุภา คณาธิรกุล (มิลลิ) และนายพริษฐ์ วัชรภูมิ (เพนกวิน) ร่วมกับปฏิสัมพันธ์
ของวัยรุ่นที่มีต่อเนื้อหานั้น ๆ งานวิจัยฉบับนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อแสดงให้เห็นถึงอัตลักษณ์ของ
วัยรุ่นไทยที่แสดงออกผ่านการมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ต่ออินฟลูเอนเซอร์ในสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ คำถามใน
การวิจัยคือ อะไรคือประเด็นสำคัญที่อินฟลูเอนเซอร์กำลังตระหนัก วัยรุ่นไทยมีปฏิสัมพันธ์
อย่างไรกับอินฟลูเอนเซอร์ เพราะเหตุใดปฏิสัมพันธ์ที่เกิดขึ้นจึงเป็นไปในทิศทางที่ดีหรือทิศทาง
ที่ไม่ดี และวัยรุ่นไทยกล่าวถึงอัตลักษณ์ของตนเองในปัจจุบันอย่างไร

ผลการศึกษาพบว่าวัยรุ่นไทยในปัจจุบันใช้เวลาในโลกออนไลน์มากกว่าวัยรุ่นในอดีต
อันเนื่องมาจากการขยายตัวของสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ ดังนั้นกิจกรรมในสื่อสังคมออนไลน์จึงมีส่วน
ช่วยในการรวมพลังของวัยรุ่น อีกทั้งสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความคิดและพฤติกรรมของวัยรุ่น ไม่เพียง
เท่านั้นแฮชแท็กกลายเป็นสัญลักษณ์ในการรวมพลังในสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ และอินฟลูเอนเซอร์ได้
กลายเป็นบุคคลในอุดมคติของวัยรุ่นไทยในปัจจุบันประกอบกับแสดงให้เห็นถึงคุณลักษณะอัน
พึงประสงค์ของวัยรุ่นไทยในอุดมคติ การตอบสนองและการมีปฏิสัมพันธ์ต่ออินฟลูเอนเซอร์
แสดงให้เห็นว่าวัยรุ่นไทยในปัจจุบันเป็น “คนรุ่นใหม่” ที่ตระหนักถึงประเด็นทางสังคม หาก
ไม่ได้รับความยุติธรรมในสังคม วัยรุ่นไทยในปัจจุบันก็ไม่เกรงกลัวที่จะโต้ตอบและพร้อมจะทำ
ให้สิ่งนั้นถูกต้อง

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Nicodemus Ler Wei Ming : Influencers and Hashtags: Thai Youth Identities in Social Media. Advisor: Asst. Prof. TUL ISRANGURA NA AYUDHYA, Ph.D.

This paper examines how the identities of the Thai youths today are reflected and manifested in their online activities and through influencers, and what impact will it have on the Thai society going forward in the future. It analyses the social media content that are primarily drawn from Danupha “Milli” Khanatheerakul and Parit “Penguin” Chiwarak’s Twitter and Facebook account. This paper aims to show how the Thai youth’s identities are expressed through their interaction with the influencer’s post. This paper asks: What are the key issues that are of concern to influencers? How did the Thai youths react to them? Why are the reaction positive or negative? What does it say about the identities that the Thai youths identify with today?

This paper argues that the Thai youths today are spending more time online than ever, resulting in social media becoming an extension of their daily lives. Hence, social media activity is the collective power of the youths on the platform and is a real reflection of their ideas and behaviors, while the hashtag has become a symbol of that collective power on social media. Influencers have then become the ideal persona for the youths in Thailand today and would provide some insights to what are the desirable characteristics that constitutes the ideal Thai youths today. Through their interaction with influencers, it can be seen that the Thai youths today see themselves as a separate generation that is aware of social issues. Hence, they are burdened by social justice and will not hesitate take action to make the situation right.

Field of Study: Thai Studies

Student's Signature

Academic Year: 2022

Advisor's Signature

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Nicodemus Ler Wei Ming

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Introduction

On 17 April 2022, 19-year-old Thai rapper, Danupha Khanatheerakul or better known as her stage name, Milli, took the stage in California and became the first solo Thai artist to perform at the world-famous Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. The teenage rap sensation captured the audience with her witty rap songs, edgy outfit, and concluded her performance by eating a bowl of mango sticky rice. The performance was a massive success and social media exploded with discussion as the hashtag, #MilliLiveAtCoachella, began trending worldwide wide over 1.39 million tweets¹. Back in Thailand, a mango sticky rice craze swept the country as demand for the dessert continue to grow after the performance. In an interview conducted by The Standard, it was found that the orders for mango sticky rice on Robinhood, a Thai food delivery platform had increased by 5 times after Milli's performance². This illustrates the impact that prominent online figures have and possibly explain the rapidly growing influencer marketing industry in Thailand, which is valued to be at 2.1 billion baht at the end of 2021, according to Mindshare, a leading marketing, and media network under media agency Group M³. Influencers are prominent online figures "who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic"⁴ and as

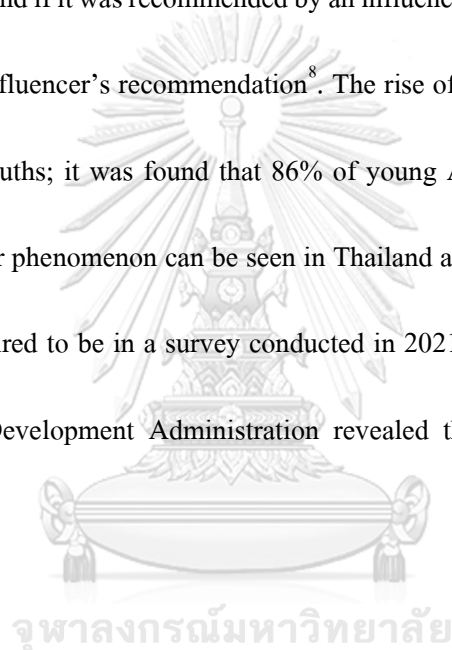
¹ "Milli's sticky rice and mango stunt grabs world's attention", para. 2, Bangkok Post, April 18, 2022. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/arts-and-entertainment/2296042/millis-sticky-rice-and-mango-stunt-grabs-worlds-attention>

² T. Chankisen, "MILLI Effect: มิลลิทิกิน 'ข้าวเหนียวมะม่วง' บนเวที Coachella แค่ 1 คำ ทำยอดขายสั่งซื้อบนเดลิเวอรี่เพิ่มขึ้นกว่า 5 เท่า!", para. 3, The Standard, April 18, 2022. <https://thestandard.co/milli-effect/>

³ "มายด์แชร์แนะให้แบรนด์ให้อิสระกับอินฟลูเอนเซอร์ในการสร้างสรรค์คอนเทนต์", para. 6, Mindshare, October 19, 2021, <https://www.groupmthailand.com/insightm/home/view/MindshareThinkTankInfluencerMarketing>

⁴ W. Geysler, "What is an Influencer? – Social Media Influencers Defined", para. 6, Influencer Marketing Hub, July 27, 2022. <https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-an-influencer/>

such “disproportionately impact the spread of information or some related behavior of interest”⁵. With a significant number of followers who are highly engaged with their social media activities, these followers “trust their recommendations and are interested in their daily activities, the products they buy, the causes they support”⁶. This is evident in a survey conducted by communications consultancy firm, Vero, where 66% of respondents⁷, aged 16-23 years, mentioned that they were more likely to trust a brand if it was recommended by an influencer they trust, and 40% bought new products based on an influencer’s recommendation⁸. The rise of social media has also altered the career aspirations of youths; it was found that 86% of young Americans now aspire to become influencers⁹. The similar phenomenon can be seen in Thailand as “YouTuber” ranked as the top 3 career that children aspired to be in a survey conducted in 2021¹⁰, while a poll conducted by the National Institute of Development Administration revealed that youths preferred to be self-



⁵ E. Bakshy, J. M. Hofman, W. Mason and D. J. Watts, “Everyone’s an Influencer: Quantifying Influence on Twitter”, (p. 66), *Proceedings of the Forth International Conference on Web Search and Web Data Mining, WSDM 2011*, Hong Kong, China, February 9-12, 2011

⁶ M. Anhalt, “*Influencer Marketing for Non-profits*”, Whole Whale. Accessed on 22 October 2022, <https://www.wholewhale.com/tips/influencer-marketing-for-nonprofits/>

⁷ The study consisted of a survey of Thai Millennials (ages 24-35) and Gen Z (ages 16-23). Participants and only qualified for the study if they were regular followers of influencers.

⁸ D. Wells “*Influencers Rule in Thailand*”, (para. 6), Vero, September 10, 2022. <https://vero-asean.com/influencers-thailand/>

⁹ M. Townsend, “*Influencer Nation: 86% of Young Americans Want to Become One*”, (para. 2), Bloomberg, November 6, 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-05/becoming-an-influencer-embraced-by-86-of-young-americans>

¹⁰ “*Adecco Reveals Its 2021 Children Survey Results: ‘Doctor’ Remains Thai Kids’ Dream Job While ‘BLACKPINK’ Becomes Their Best-loved Idol*”, para. 2, Adecco, January 4, 2022, <https://adecco.co.th/en/knowledge-center/detail/children-dream-career-survey-2021>

employed in the digital age¹¹, which reflects the changing thought-world and behavior of this generation of Thai youths.

Youth can be described as “the part of the life course between childhood and adulthood”¹², it is not easily understood as it represents a period of transition, which is subjective and unique. However, as youths experience “a profound amount of change in all domains of development – biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional”¹³, studies have found and narrowed down eleven major characteristics¹⁴ that youths in general possess¹⁵. Nevertheless, despite possessing these similar characteristics, it is noteworthy to mention that the youths of each generation identify themselves and are perceived by others differently. This can be seen in a study conducted by Pongsakorn Chaoumdee entitled: “Photographs and Middle-Class Teenagers Lives in Bangkok from the 1960s to the 1980s”¹⁶ (2017), where youths in the 1940s were considered a “docile body”¹⁷ where etiquette and decorum was of utmost importance, while youths in the 1950s were recognized

¹¹ “เด็กและเยาวชนไทยในยุคดิจิทัล”, NIDA Poll, National Institute of Development Administration, January 11, 2019, Available at: <https://nidapoll.nida.ac.th/data/survey/uploads/FILE-1598058760714.pdf>

¹² G. Jones, “*Youth*”, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009, p.2

¹³ National Academy of Sciences, “*The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US), 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK545476/>

¹⁴ This includes includes (i) Rapid Physical/Biological Changes, (ii) Appearance-Consciousness, (iii) Sexual Attraction, (iv) Cognitive Development, (v) Career-Consciousness, (vi) Emotional Conditions, (vii) Flight on Imagination, (viii) Hero Worship, (ix) Hobbies, (x) Sex-Role Identity, (xi) Strong Impact from Peer-Group

¹⁵ S. Deeksha, “*11 Major Characteristics of Adolescence | Child Development. Psychology Discussion.*” Assessed on: 21 October 2022, <https://www.psychologydiscussion.net/child-development/11-major-characteristics-of-adolescence-child-development/1111>

¹⁶ P. Chaoumdee, “*Photographs and Middle-Class Teenagers Lives in Bangkok from the 1960s to the 1980s*”, 2017, Master’s Thesis, Chulalongkorn University

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 81

as being in “a troubled age”¹⁸, where they could be easily influenced. In the 1960s to 1970s, Thai youths considered themselves anti-establishment, anti-capitalist and believed in social debt as the more relaxed political and social climate¹⁹ resulted in public debate and protest, which exposed them to new ideology. This demonstrates how youth identity can be affected by external factors, such as political, economic, sociocultural, and technological, and manifests itself differently. One of the major changes to the external environment that made a significant impact on the youths today is the rise of social media in 2004²⁰, due to the advancement of technology cause by the digital revolution in the 1980s. Today, “Thailand’s internet penetration rate is at 77.8 percent of the total population”²¹ while the number of Social Media users is “81.2 percent of the total internet-user population”²². The most popular Social Media applications in Thailand are Facebook and YouTube, while “other platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, LINE, and most recently, TikTok”²³ are also gradually becoming popular. Youths approximately spend 12 hours a day²⁴ using the internet and remain the largest users of social media in Thailand with 74.8 percent of social media users aged

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 58

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 61

²⁰ It can be argued that the beginning of the Social Media age was when Myspace hit 1 million users in 2004, prior to that, there were other social media sites such as Six Degrees, Friendster, and Hi-5, which did not manage to gain as much traction.

²¹ S. Kemp, February 15, 2022, “*Digital 2022: Thailand. Datareportal*”, para.10, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-thailand>

²² Ibid, para. 19

²³ Statista Research Department, “*Social media in Thailand - Statistics & Facts*”, Statista, June 28, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/topics/8194/social-media-in-thailand/#dossierKeyfigures>

²⁴ Statista Research Department, “*Average duration of daily internet use in Thailand 2021, by generation age group*”, Statista, April 20, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129529/thailand-daily-duration-of-internet-use-by-age-group/>

18-24 years²⁵. Hence, the online world and social media are elements that play a major role in shaping the lives and representing the identities of the Thai youths.

Identity is defined as “the set of qualities that make one person or group different from other”²⁶, scholars have gone on to include that it is the “dynamic configuration of the defining characteristics of a person”²⁷, implying that it is not the entire aspect of a person but selected characteristics. Hence, online identity is “the configuration of the defining characteristics of a person in online space”²⁸. It has been argued that the online identity is not a representation of the real identity as physical identity is inherently linked to the body²⁹ and “people can portray themselves differently from what they are in an online context”³⁰. However, as individuals began to spend more time online, it has become “harder to fake it online when you are being observed for a longer period of time”³¹. In fact, recent studies have shown that “there are psychologically meaningful links between users' personalities, their website preferences and Facebook profile features”³², and how Tweets can be used as a way to accurately predict and provide insights to the

²⁵ Statista Research Department, “Distribution of social media users in Thailand in 2021, by age group”, Statista, June 7, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1294505/thailand-distribution-of-social-media-users-by-age-group/>

²⁶ Merriam-Webster Dictionary. s.v. “Identity” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity>

²⁷ D. D. Ruyter and J. C. Conroy, “The Formation of Identity: The Importance of Ideals”, *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 28(4), p. 510, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1050582>

²⁸ H. W. Kim, J. R. Zheng, S. Gupta, “Examining knowledge contribution from the perspective of an online identity in blogging communities”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 27, p. 1761, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.03.003>

²⁹ J. S. Donath, “Identity and deception in the Virtual Community”, *Communities in Cyberspace*, Routledge.

³⁰ H. W. Kim, J. R. Zheng, S. Gupta, “Examining knowledge contribution from the perspective of an online identity in blogging communities”, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 27, p. 1762, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.03.003>

³¹ T.C. Premuzic, “How different are your online and offline personalities?” *The Guardian*, September 24, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/sep/24/online-offline-personality-digital-identity>

³² M. Kosinski, Y. Bachrach, P. Kohli, D. Stillwell, and T. Graepel, “Manifestations of user personality in website choice and behaviour on online social networks”, *Machine Learning*, Vol. 95(3), p. 357, 2014

user's personality³³. Daniel Miller goes on to further argue that “social media should never be considered as a place or world separated from ordinary life³⁴” but rather as an extension of another “place where we live and where everyday life happens³⁵”. Like Miller, this paper agrees that social media has become inseparable from the user and argues that it is a real reflection of the user's ideas and behavior.

This research article examines the rise of social media and the extent of how it has been adopted in Thailand. As “human behavior changes more when we dabble with technology especially with social media³⁶”, this paper will explore how social media has significantly altered the mindset, behavior, social norms and concepts of the Thai society, creating a brand-new group of youths, who are active on social media, that identify themselves differently from the previous generation, and a sense of solidarity amongst them in modern society. As established above, since a majority of Thai youths today aspire to be influencers, this implies that influencers are the ideal persona for the youths of Thailand today and hence would be a good representation of how the Thai youth view themselves, or at least provide some insights to what are the desirable characteristic that constitutes the ideal Thai youth today.

³³ D. Quercia, M. Kosinski, D. Stillwell, and J. Crowcroft, “Our Twitter Profiles, Our Selves: Predicting personality with Twitter”. In *Proceedings - 2011 IEEE International Conference on Privacy, Security, Risk and Trust and IEEE International Conference on Social Computing, PASSAT/SocialCom*, 2011, p. 180–185

³⁴ D. Miller, “*Social Media in an English Village*”, London, UCL Press, 2016, p. 2

³⁵ Ibid, p. 2

³⁶ P. Jain, “*Social Media: Impact on Human Behavior and Society*”, LinkedIn, November 21, 2018, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/social-media-impact-human-behavior-society-piyushi-jain/>

The advancement of technology has also led to the rise of a new genre of primary source. Social media “empower individuals to share their voice in a media-centric model³⁷” and social media such as Twitter has been considered by the US Librarian of Congress James H. Billington to have “extraordinary potential for research into our contemporary way of life³⁸”. Therefore, this paper has selected two different Thai influencers as case studies to gain insights into the Thai youth identities, which in the context of this study, are collective and generational identities that this group of youths express together on the social media platform. Firstly, in the space of popular culture, Danupha Khanatheeraku, who is better known as her stage name Milli, a 19-year-old Thai rapper and singer. Milli has more than 913.3K followers on Twitter³⁹ and 2 million followers on Facebook⁴⁰. Milli is well-known for boldly speaking her mind and her non-conformance to the norms. In her own words, Milli mentioned in an interview with NME that she does not aim to represent conventional ‘Thainess’ but to represent who she is as a Thai person⁴¹. Furthermore, her strong belief in social justice is often bluntly reflected in her music and social media posts. For instance, in response to the police use of tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets to disperse protestors near the Government House, Milli tweeted “*I still need democracy Don’t be an idiot*

³⁷ V. Coleman, “*Social Media as a Primary Source: A Coming of Age*”, Educause Review, December 6, 2013, <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2013/12/social-media-as-a-primary-source-a-coming-of-age>

³⁸ M. Raymond, “*Twitter Donates Entire Tweet Archive to Library of Congress*”, Library of Congress. April 15, 2010, <https://www.loc.gov/item/prn-10-081/>

³⁹ D. Khanatheeraku, [@millimdk]. Tweets [Twitter profile] Accessed on October 22, 2022, <https://twitter.com/millimdk>

⁴⁰ MILLI. Home [Facebook page]. Facebook. Accessed on October 22, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100044389129163>

⁴¹ C. Poomsawai, “*MILLI: ‘I’m not here to represent conventional ‘Thainess’. I’m here to represent who I am as a Thai person’*”, para. 11, NME, May 19, 2022. https://www.nme.com/en_asia/features/music-features/milli-interview-coachella-2022-mango-sticky-rice-debut-album-3228135

III⁴². This tweet received the warm support of youths, with many of them cheering her on in the replies. Eventually, when the issue escalated and legal actions was threatened against Milli by the government supporters, the youths rallied their support for her with the online #SaveMilli movement. Next, in the political space, Parit Chiwarak, also known as Penguin, is a 24-year-old political activist from Thammasat University. He was also one of the protest leaders via the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration during the 2020 anti-government protest in Thailand. Penguin has 301.5K followers on Twitter⁴³ and 388K on Facebook⁴⁴, where he communicated with youths actively over the course of the protest. Penguin has managed to inspire the youths during the 2020 protest with tweets such as “let this end in our generation⁴⁵”, which was retweeted more than 3,000 times, and hence, the protestors were made up of mainly students and young people⁴⁶.

This paper is an examination of how these collective identities of the Thai youths today are reflected and manifested in their online activities. This article asks: What are the key issues that are of concern to influencers? How did the Thai youths react to them? Why are the reaction positive or negative? What does it say about the identities that the Thai youths identify with today? In order to answer these questions, this paper is divided to two parts. It starts with the new characteristic

⁴² Twitter (@millimdk), July 19, 2021, Accessed on October 22, 2022. <https://twitter.com/millimdk/status/1417024641244090370?s=20&t=K5058IO0CoWPoia7fiDxaw>

⁴³ P. Chiwarak, [@paritchi], Tweets [Twitter profile] Accessed on October 22, 2022, from <https://twitter.com/paritchi>

⁴⁴ เพนกวิ้น - พริษฐ์ ชิวารักษ์ Parit Chiwarak, Home [Facebook page], Facebook, Accessed on January 17, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/paritchiwarakofficial/>

⁴⁵ ให้มันจบที่รุ่นเรา (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@paritchi), August 8, 2022. Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1291952643116425216?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHw>

⁴⁶ “Explainer: What’s behind Thailand’s protests?”, para. 11, Reuters, October 15, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-protests-reasons-explainer-idUSKBN2700IX>

traits of youths brought about by the onset of social media, which altered their perception and behavior, and consequentially resulted in new qualities that set them apart from previous generations. In the second part of the paper, the social media content, focusing mainly Twitter and Facebook, of the two above mentioned influencers will be examined together with the level of engagement and the reaction that youths had towards the post over the time period of February 2020 to October 2022. Through this study, this paper will show what identities of the Thai youths were expressed through their text, visual material, reactions, shares, and links on social media. This study recognizes that the both the influencers and the youths are not known on a personal basis, and it would be unreasonable to conclude beyond doubt that this was exactly the way they thought or felt. However, this paper aims to instead understand how the content or post were inspired and how it reflects the Thai youth's identities of this generation.

The Thai society views the youths “as the future of the nation, and the last hope by the Thais⁴⁷” and they are also “considered as valuable resources that will contribute positively to productivity and social order⁴⁸”. Hence, the revelation of the Thai youths’ identities through their social media activities will help the Thai state understand if the traditional way of handling the youths is still effective and hence have a significant impact in shaping the Thai Society in the digital age.

⁴⁷ T. Wongyannava, “Policing the Imagined Family and Children in Thailand: From Family Name to Emotional Love”, *Imagining Communities in Thailand*, 2008, Mekong Press, p. 38

⁴⁸ P. Potjanalawan, “From womb to tomb of liberty: Life of youth in cage of dictatorial morality in 1960s-1980s (จากครรภ์มารดาสู่เชิงตะกอนแห่งเสรีภาพ: ชีวิตเด็กและเยาวชนภายใต้กรงศีลธรรมเชิงเผด็จการ ทศวรรษ 2500-2520)”, *Indochina Junction (ชุมชนทางอินโดจีน: เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ปริทัศน์)*, Vol. 4 (7), p. 397, 2015

Social Media and the impact on its Users in Contemporary Thai Society

The rise of 3G cellular technologies in 2001 led to a global smartphone revolution which resulted in the widespread usage of smartphones. Smartphones were especially adopted among the youths and young people as it was a multifunctional personal device that provided accessibility, mobility, and a sense of independence⁴⁹. The 3G cellular network was finally made available in Thailand in 2011 and in a study conducted by the Electronic Transactions Development Agency, the average Thai consumer in 2022 spends 7 hours and 4 minutes per day browsing the internet on a mobile device⁵⁰. Internet penetration in Thailand is at 78% of the entire country's population⁵¹, with 95.9% of them accessing the internet via smartphones⁵². With such a high internet and smartphone penetration rate in Thailand, it has gotten increasingly easy for Thais to gain access to online activities, inadvertently increasing their engagement with social media platforms. This is supported by the "Digital 2022: Thailand" report released by Datareportal in partnership with creative agency We Are Social and strategic consultancy Kepios. It was found that 81.2% of the Thai population were active social media users⁵³ and 74.8% of these social media users are youths

⁴⁹ A. D. Ahad, "Smartphone Habits Among Youth: Uses and Gratification Theory", *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning*, Vol. 7(1), p. 1, 2017.

⁵⁰ ETDA, "*Thailand Internet User Behavior 2022*", p. 3, 2022, Electronic Transactions Development Agency, <https://www.eta.or.th/th/Useful-Resource/publications/iub2022.aspx>

⁵¹ We Are Social and Hootsuite, "*The Global State of Digital in July 2022*", p. 21, 2022, We Are Social, <https://wearesocial.com/uk/blog/2022/07/the-global-state-of-digital-in-july-2022>

⁵² Ibid, p. 28

⁵³ We Are Social and Kepios, "*Digital 2022: Thailand*", p. 16, 2022, Datareportal, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-thailand>

who are aged between 18 to 24 years old⁵⁴. “Technology is fundamentally changing the way we live, work, relate to one another and to the external world”⁵⁵. Hence, the advancement of internet technologies and rapid adoption of social media will also impact the lives and behavior of individuals, especially youths who are the bulk of social media users, and this will be discussed in this section going forward.

The development of communication technologies and information flow has created a very fluid situation where the boundaries between public and private are blurred and constantly changing⁵⁶. Personal privacy is becoming increasingly important due to the ease with which data can circulate, increasing the likelihood that personal data may be misused or abused⁵⁷. Beate Rössler, Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Amsterdam, considers something as private “if one can oneself control the access to it”⁵⁸, however privacy in this age is not clear-cut or sustainable as “information and communication technologies have transformed the ways that information is disseminated, accessed and controlled”⁵⁹ and the ability to control access to one’s information, especially in the social media context, has been profoundly affected. This means that “individuals who share information in these contexts may think they have control over it but perhaps they don’t

⁵⁴ Statista Research Department, “*Distribution of social media users in Thailand in 2021, by age group*”, 2022, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1294505/thailand-distribution-of-social-media-users-by-age-group/>

⁵⁵ M. Lambertini, “*Technology can help us save the planet. But more than anything, we must learn to value nature*” by, 2018, World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/08/here-s-how-technology-can-help-us-save-the-planet/>

⁵⁶ J. B. Thompson, “Shifting Boundaries of Public and Private Life”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol.28(4), p. 64, 2011.

⁵⁷ J. Klosek “*Data Privacy in the Information Age*”, Connecticut, London: Quorum Books, 1972, p.1

⁵⁸ B. Rössler, “*The Value of Privacy*”, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005, p. 8

⁵⁹ J. B. Thompson, “Shifting Boundaries of Public and Private Life”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol.28(4), p. 62, 2011

– they may have less control than they think”⁶⁰. Consider the following scenario where somebody wants to become a social media user, they are compelled to first create a profile which “share an incredible amount of information about themselves on the platforms”⁶¹ or they will not be allowed to use the social media platform. Furthermore, users are encouraged not to give false information during registration as they might risk losing access to their account in the future if they are unable to confirm their identity with their identity documents in an event of a security check. This demonstrates how social media has made private information not private as one does not control the access of it anymore.

However, it is not just this personal information, which a user is required to provide upon registration, that is found on the social media platform. As users become more integrated with the social media platform, it becomes more natural for them to “communicate simultaneously not only with their friends and acquaintances but also with relative strangers”⁶². Furthermore, they begin to continuously share publicly “photos, videos, regular status updates on daily events, preferences, experiences, and places”⁶³ of their lives on the social media platform, leading to some scholars to associate narcissism to social media usage⁶⁴. Moreover, their innermost thoughts and opinions are

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 62

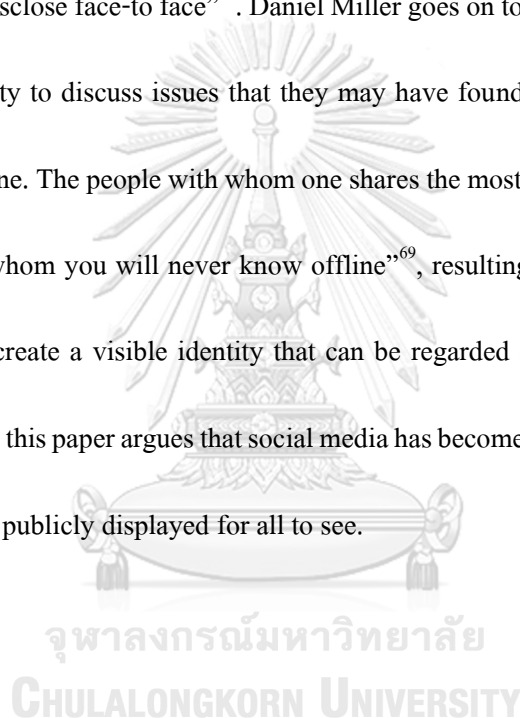
⁶¹ G. O. A. Ampong, A. Mensah, A. S. Y. Adu, J. A. Addae, O. K. Omoregie and K. S. Ofori, “Examining Self-Disclosure on Social Networking Sites: A Flow Theory and Privacy Perspective”, *Behav Sci (Basel)*, Vol. 8(6), p. 2, 2018

⁶² Ibid, p. 1

⁶³ Ibid, p. 3

⁶⁴ J. McCain and W. K. Campbell, “Narcissism and Social Media Use: A Meta-Analytic Review”, *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, Vol. 7(3), p.308, 2018

also expressed through the “three behaviors—like, comment, and share”⁶⁵. Although, it has been argued that social media content lacks authenticity because “the need for self-presentation is a fundamental motivation for using social media”⁶⁶ and “self-presentation involves communication designed to project a desirable public representation of the self”⁶⁷. However, the lack of non-verbal cues in the social media environment “makes disclosing information less risky for those who might be reluctant to self-disclose face-to face”⁶⁸. Daniel Miller goes on to further state that “people have used online anonymity to discuss issues that they may have found difficult to share with people who know them offline. The people with whom one shares the most intimate secrets may thus now be online strangers whom you will never know offline”⁶⁹, resulting in social media becoming “a place where people create a visible identity that can be regarded as more real than their offline persona”⁷⁰. Likewise, this paper argues that social media has become a medium where one’s private and real thoughts are publicly displayed for all to see.



⁶⁵ S. Yang, “Like, comment, and share on Facebook: How each behaviour differs from the other”, *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 43(2), p. 441, 2017

⁶⁶ G. J. Hjetland, T. R. Finserås, B. Sivertsen, I. Colman, R. T. Hella and J. C. Skogen, “Focus on Self-Presentation on Social Media across Sociodemographic Variables, Lifestyles, and Personalities: A Cross-Sectional Study”, *International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health*, Vol. 19(17), p. 2, 2022.

⁶⁷ G. O. A. Ampong, A. Mensah, A. S. Y. Adu, J. A. Addae, O. K. Omoregie and K. S. Ofori, “Examining Self-Disclosure on Social Networking Sites: A Flow Theory and Privacy Perspective”, *Behav Sci (Basel)*, Vol. 8(6), p. 2, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6027239>

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 3

⁶⁹ D. Miller, “How the World Changed Social Media”, London, UCL Press, 2016, p. 103

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 110

Social media provides an avenue for users to create and share user-generated content, while fostering interaction and collaboration among participants⁷¹, this means that any user can create and post content on a social media platform that other users can view and engage with. Hence, social media has become “the voice for the underdog and the unrepresented in opposition to mainstream news media”⁷². Coupled with the development of mobile internet that have provided constant access to information, individuals who were once suppressed by official channels can now easily reach out and connect with an audience. Therefore, with the increased exposure to alternate viewpoints on social media, audience have better access to information which can be easily verified by communities⁷³, scrutinized by experts and challenged by opponents. Hence, traditional forms of Thai governance, such as cultural mandates⁷⁴, where people are unilaterally told what to do by the government will no longer be as effective.

In addition to the access to the no holds barred information available online, social media has also attracted a diverse range of users from both the rich, cosmopolitan, and educated community as well as the socially underprivileged such as the uneducated or low wage manual migrant workers⁷⁵. Consequently, the social media users are exposed to, and made aware of social issues such as inequality, leading to “considerable interest in the capacity of the internet and social

⁷¹ G. O. A. Ampong, A. Mensah, A. S. Y. Adu, J. A. Addae, O. K. Omoregie and K. S. Ofori, “Examining Self-Disclosure on Social Networking Sites: A Flow Theory and Privacy Perspective”, *Behav Sci (Basel)*, Vol. 8(6), p. 1, 2018

⁷² P. Gerbaudo, “Social Media and Populism: An Elective Affinity?”, *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 40(5), p. 748, 2018

⁷³ R. McCarthy, G. Byrne, A. Brettell, L. Choucri, P. Ormandy, J. Chatwin, “Midwife-moderated social media groups as a validated information source for women during pregnancy”, *Midwifery*, Vol. 88, p.5, 2020

⁷⁴ The Cultural Mandates were directives passed by the Thai government between 1939 and 1942, and “were considered the correct practices for Thai people to follow along their way to national greatness” (Numnonda, 1978)

⁷⁵ D. Miller, “*How the World Changed Social Media*”, London, UCL Press, 2016, p. 128

media to produce large-scale social change”⁷⁶. One such example would be the global spread of Woke Culture, which is to be “alert to injustice in society”⁷⁷, due to the online social movements such as #BlackLivesMatter⁷⁸, #MeToo⁷⁹, #LoveisLove⁸⁰ and #StayWoke⁸¹ on social media platforms. As Daniel Miller argues, “[t]he internet represents egalitarianism, freedom of speech and democracy”⁸² and social media is used as a tool “to consolidate collective power against power institution”⁸³. Hence, it can be seen that social media has given rise to users that are well informed, committed to social justice, and willing to fight for it.

Advances in society have traditionally been linked to increasing individualism and autonomy. This can be seen since the eighteenth century in Europe during the Enlightenment era where new ways of thinking, personal experience and revolutionary changes caused individual reason and emotion to be deemed as important as collective consciousness⁸⁴. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the rise of social media has been associated with the increase of individualistic self-centered users with narcissistic behaviors where “millions of selfies are taken every day and posted

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 128

⁷⁷ Oxford Languages, s.v. “Woke”

⁷⁸ #BlackLivesMatter was a protest movement that happened both in the streets and on social media in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in July 2013 in the shooting death of African American teen Trayvon Martin (Yang, 2016)

⁷⁹ #MeToo gained widespread attention when actress Alyssa Milano used it as a Twitter hashtag in response to allegations of sexual assault by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Through the #MeToo hashtag, Milano encouraged members of the public to join in to showcase the magnitude of the problem of sexual violence (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2018)

⁸⁰ #LoveisLove originated from a phrase meaning that the love expressed by an individual or couple is valid regardless of the sexual orientation or gender identity of their lover or partner. It is used to support marriage equality.

⁸¹ #StayWoke stresses the requirement for resolution and represents the urgent need to get woke, stay woke and better the state of life (Richardson & Ragland, 2018)

⁸² D. Miller, “*How the World Changed Social Media*”, London, UCL Press, 2016, p. 131

⁸³ Ibid, p.131

⁸⁴ A. Pagden, “*The Enlightenment and Why it Still Matters*”, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 3

on a variety of social networking sites all over the world, providing individuals with opportunities to show multiple facets of the self”⁸⁵. However, Daniel Miller argues that the advancement in social media have a reverse effect in that it makes us less individualistic and less autonomous because social media reinforces the individual’s facility to network socially⁸⁶. The social media world is seen as “a succession of ego-centered networks in which new media is the new neighborhood; here people think they are individuals, but they are in networks”⁸⁷. This is in line with the above discussion where it was mentioned that social media is a collective force.

Furthermore, the hashtag is a metadata tag with a prefix ‘#’ symbol that associate content to a user-defined tag⁸⁸. This provides a collective indexing or ‘keywording’ of the social media world⁸⁹, allowing users with similar interest to engage with each other⁹⁰. As a result, this has given rise to a phenomenon known as hashtag activism, which is “discursive protest on social media united through a hashtagged word, phrase or sentence”⁹¹. Certain notable examples of hashtag activism have been mentioned above and this further reiterates Daniel Miller’s argument that social

⁸⁵ Y. Sung, E. Kim and S. M. Choi, “#Me and brands: understanding brand-selfie posters on social media”, *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 37(1), p. 14, 2018

⁸⁶ D. Miller, “*Social Media in an English Village*”, London, UCL Press, 2016, p. 4

⁸⁷ D. Miller, “*How the World Changed Social Media*”, London, UCL Press, 2016, p.182

⁸⁸ H. Chang, H. Iyer, “Trends in Twitter Hashtag Applications: Design Features for Value-Added Dimensions to Future Library Catalogues”, *Library Trends*, Vol. 61(1), p.248, 2012

⁸⁹ A. Bernard. “*Theory of the Hashtag*”, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019, p. 2

⁹⁰ J. Lazarevic “*Social Capital in Online Hashtag Communities: Analyzing #RubyPH*”, (2015, Master’s Thesis, Ryerson University, https://rshare.library.ryerson.ca/articles/thesis/Social_capital_in_online_hashtag_communities_analyzing_RubyPH/14647656

⁹¹ G. Yang, “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter”, *Media and Communication*, Vol. 4(4), p.13, 2016, https://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/472/

media is collective and has “shaped new, modern forms of tribal allegiances”⁹². Hence, this paper will further argue that social media is the collective power of the users and that the hashtag, which is a crucial component of almost every social media platform, has become a symbol of that collective power on social media.

Therefore, as social media continues to be increasingly popular in Thailand, the youths in Thailand will continue to be exposed to all sources of information, resulting in a united generation, that is more aware and ready to address social justice. This will be manifested on their social media platforms due to the blurring of the boundaries between private thoughts and public life and will be explored by this paper through the activities of the influencers in the next section.

Thai Youth Identities in Action

The advancement in technology and the rise of social media have changed the daily lives of individuals with the easy and constant access to information. As the use of social media continue to increase, users become increasingly exposed to both alternate viewpoints and social issues, such as inequality, giving rise to a generation that is committed to social justice. Another aspect of social media, which was mentioned previously, is that the social media ecosystem has facilitated the users to become more collective as it emphasizes on the network. In a collectivist culture, followers “are expected to more readily internalize their leader’s vision”⁹³ as “there is typically a high level of

⁹² D. Miller, “*How the World Changed Social Media*”, London, UCL Press, 2016, p.185

⁹³ D. I. Jung and B. J. Avolio, “Effects of Leadership Style and Followers' Cultural Orientation on Performance in Group and Individual Task Conditions”, *The Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 42(2), p.209, 1999

value congruence between followers and leaders owing to extensive socialization process in collectivist cultures”⁹⁴. Therefore, in the collectivist social media world, influencers who are prominent figures and well known for their knowledge and expertise on specific areas will take on the roles of the leader, and the youths who look upon them as the ideal personas are then the followers. This paper will examine two Thai youth influencers in order to understand how and what youth identities are constructed in connection to these influencers and how the youths orientate themselves to the figure of these influencers to construct their identities.

Danupha Khanatheerakul, or better known by her stage name, Milli, is a popular Thai rapper and singer registered under YUPP! Entertainment⁹⁵. Milli embarked on her music career at age 16 on March 11, 2019, where she competed on the TV show, *The Rapper 2*, and received astounding praises from all the judges⁹⁶. Today, Milli has over 2million followers on Facebook⁹⁷, 913.3K followers on Twitter⁹⁸, 2.7million followers on Instagram⁹⁹ and 5.6million followers on TikTok¹⁰⁰. Milli rose to fame in 2020 with her debut single – *Phak Korn*¹⁰¹, a hip-hop song, which was a mix of the Thai, Lu, Isan and English language, that spoke strongly against bullying, with

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 209

⁹⁵ “Artists, in YUPP! Entertainment” Accessed on October 22, 2022. <http://yuppentertainment.com/en/artists/>

⁹⁶ “*The Rapper 2* “มินนี่ MILLI” แร็ปเปอร์สาวจอมแสบ วัย 16 ปี”, para. 1, workpointTODAY, March 12, 2019, <https://workpointtoday.com/rapper-2-มินนี่-milli-แร็ปเปอร์สาวจ้อ/>

⁹⁷ MILLI. Home [Facebook page]. Facebook. Accessed October 22, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100044389129163>

⁹⁸ “เอจิ้นนะวัย”, in Twitter (@millimdk) Accessed on October 22, 2022. <https://twitter.com/millimdk>

⁹⁹ “phuckitol”, in Instagram (@phuckitol) Accessed on October 22, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/phuckitol/>

¹⁰⁰ “milliyormlenlaew”, in TikTok (@milliyormlenlaew) Accessed on October 22, 2022. <https://www.tiktok.com/@milliyormlenlaew>

¹⁰¹ พักก่อน which is literally translated as “to take a rest” implies someone is being told to stop what they are doing

lyrics like “You are so crude, publicly ridiculing others to make yourself look good¹⁰²”. Following the success of Phak Korn, another single titled Sud Pang¹⁰³, was released a few months later. Lyrics such as “I used to dream that I will be as beautiful as angels, but today my ideals have changed, I look in the mirror and I think what I see is amazing¹⁰⁴,” aimed to tear down beauty standards and empower people to be confident in their own skin. In April 2022, Milli became the first Thai artist to perform at the world-famous Coachella¹⁰⁵ Valley Music and Arts Festival¹⁰⁶. The performance was a rap, where the lyrics spoke strongly about various social issues in Thailand. For instance, global warming (Thailand has 3 seasons: hot, hotter, and so damn hot¹⁰⁷), stereotypes (I didn’t ride an elephant, there is the BTS train¹⁰⁸), corruption (The Kinnari lamp post each costing 100,000 baht¹⁰⁹), underdevelopment (The trains of Thailand since the reign of King Rama V have been used for 120 years¹¹⁰), and politics (Country is good, people is good, all food is good, but uncle is

¹⁰² นิสัยมึงก็โครต โสมม พุดเผาเพื่อนตรงหน้าสาธง แอ๊บเบิวทำเป็นกูดแล้วก็ขอให้หลัวชม (Original Thai Lyrics)

¹⁰³ สุดปัง is literally translated to “super bang”, which implies that something is extremely good

¹⁰⁴ ฝันที่เคยฝันว่าอยากสวยอย่างที่ว่า คั้งนางฟ้า นางสวรรค์ คิดว่าคงได้แค่ฝัน แต่วันนี้มันกลับกัน เพราะว่ามันกลับหลังหัน มองตัวเองในกระจก ก็แบบว่า อืม ก็แอบปัง (Original Thai Lyrics)

¹⁰⁵ Annual music and arts festival held in the Coachella Valley in California since 1999

¹⁰⁶ “Female rapper Milli becomes first Thai artist to perform at Coachella Festival”, April 17, 2022. ThaiPBSWorld, <https://www.thaipbsworld.com/female-rapper-milli-becomes-first-thai-artist-to-perform-at-coachella-festival/>

¹⁰⁷ สภาพอากาศในประเทศไทยที่มี ร้อน คือ ร้อน ร้อนมาก และ ร้อนชิบหาย (Original lyrics). This highlights the increasing temperature in Thailand and the low green area ratio, way below the WHO recommendation.

¹⁰⁸ โย้ยไม่ได้ขี่ช้าง รถไฟฟ้า BTS ก็มีค่ะ (Original lyrics). This corrects the common tourist misconception that elephants that elephants are used as transport.

¹⁰⁹ เสาไฟกัณริ คั่นละแสนละสี่ (Original lyrics). The infamous kinnari lamp post case in Racha Thewa where the local administrative organization was accused of awarding the contract of 6,000 solar-powered streetlamps to only one company and overpaying them.

¹¹⁰ รถไฟไทยสมัย ร.5 ใช้มาแล้ว 120 ปี (Original lyrics). This draws attention to the slow development in Thailand where the Thai railway have been in use for 120 years with no upgrades made to it.

rotten¹¹¹). This performance was an instant hit and the hashtag, #MilliLiveAtCoachella began trending. To date, Milli's Coachella performance has amassed more than 264k views on YouTube¹¹².

The above-mentioned songs were written by Milli herself and reflect her strong belief in equality and social justice. This was often conveyed on her social media platforms, for example her recent Twitter post on the 14 June 2022 which states "Because what is in place is not equal #marriageequality¹¹³". This post has been retweeted over 27.2K times and emphasized how actively youths engaged with her on social media. This paper will examine 3 prominent hashtag movements, namely #SaveMilli, #BanMilli and #SupportMilli, that revolved around Milli going forward.

#SaveMilli was a hashtag movement started to support Milli after she was accused of posting offensive messages on her Twitter account. On the 19 July 2021, in response to the police use of tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets to disperse protestors near the Government House, Milli tweeted a photo of herself donning a fake mustache while holding up the three-finger salute. The photo was accompanied by the text "I still need democracy Don't be an idiot III"¹¹⁴. In response on the 21 July 2021, Sonthiya Sawasdee, Advisor to the Committee on Law, Justice and Human Rights, House of Representative and former member of the Palang Pracharath party, wrote a letter to the Police Commissioner requesting that the police keep an eye on influencers who "call out"

¹¹¹ Country is good, people is good, all food is good, but that uncle is บุญดี (Original Lyrics). Uncle is a term used in place of the Thai Prime Minister, Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha and the lyrics reflects Milli's thoughts towards the political issues.

¹¹² "MILLI IN COACHELLA - ประเทศไทยร้อนชิบหาย, Mirror Mirror, สุดปัง , ข้าวเหนียวมะม่วง", in YouTube (MV Now!®). Accessed on October 23, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx7ldF1P3bo>

¹¹³ "ก๊ี้ที่ให้มามันไม่เท่าเทียมไงโว้ย #สมรสเท่าเทียม" in Twitter (@millimdk), June 14, 2022. Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://twitter.com/millimdk/status/1536683178806480896?s=20&t=5R_oZ2V90qIYUROHj0nF6w

¹¹⁴ Twitter (@millimdk), July 19, 2021, Accessed on October 23, 2022. <https://twitter.com/millimdk/status/1417024641244090370?s=20&t=K5058IO0CoWPoia7ftDxaw>

the government and post fake news on their social media platform. He recommended that the police issue warnings accordingly to these offenders. When the news broke out, social media users, with a majority being youths, responded vehemently and the hashtag, #SaveMilli/#Saveมิลลิ began to trend. Milli responded on the very same day on Twitter with a photo of herself captioned “Use this photo instead, it’s prettier #SaveMilli¹¹⁵”, displaying her complete disregard to Sawasdee’s letter. Milli’s tweet was met with overwhelming support with more than 1,724 public responses, which this paper would focus on in order to examine the Thai youths’ identities in relation to the hashtag #SaveMilli. The responses to Milli tweets were generally positive and can be broadly classified into 3 main categories.

Firstly, direct support, this group of users gave support through tweets of approval and encouragement, ranging from a simple “fighting¹¹⁶” to longer responses such as “Fight on, Milli, we will be supporting you here. I have been your supporter for a long time, and you have never shied away from calling out what is wrong. Thank you. We will get through this together. Love you #SaveMilli¹¹⁷”. These direct responses show how these group of youths identified directly with Milli and see themselves as someone like her with similar pro-democratic ideals, and the courage to call out what is wrong.

¹¹⁵ เอรูปนี่ค๊ะ สวย #Saveมิลลิ (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@millimdk), July 21, 2021, Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://twitter.com/millimdk/status/1417789364327780356?s=20&t=U4wsr7WmpKb_1fIQ PkdzFQ

¹¹⁶ ผู้ ๆ (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@ss_stn40), July 21, 2021, Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://twitter.com/ss_stn40/status/1417789615151349760?s=20&t=rK8bJ9P_bW8aL5V1vKkqGQ

¹¹⁷ ผู้ณะมิลลิ จะอยู่ตรงนี้สนับสนุนเสมอ เราตามเธอมานาน เธอไม่เคยแพ้ว่าเรื่องกอลเข้าที่เลย ขอบคุณมากๆ ขอบคุณจริงๆ เราจะผ่านมันไปด้วยกัน รักเธอ #Saveมิลลิ (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@xxcrholic), July 21, 2021, Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://twitter.com/xxcrholic/status/1417790005884309504?s=20&t=U4wsr7WmpKb_1f IQPkdzFQ

Next, indirect support, these group of youth expressed their support to Milli indirectly by making references to Milli's career as a rapper with responses such as "release a new single titled call out¹¹⁸," and "rap in Lu language against them¹¹⁹". Jargon gives people a sense of belonging to a specific group¹²⁰ and by referring to Milli's career and music, these youths offer support and solidarity while identifying themselves to be in a same group as Milli, a new generation separated from others.

Lastly, call to action, these groups of youths encouraged Milli not to give in and to continue to put up a fight. With tweets such as "Do not give in, fight against them¹²¹" to "Fight on, pull out all their white hair at the police station¹²²". These replies show that this generation's willingness to fight for the right causes and the term, white hair, further revealed and emphasized the generation gap they felt. Moreover, it is noteworthy that there were posts that supported the fight by providing information from professional lawyers stating that it is not illegal to make comments about the government and what Milli did was not against the law¹²³. This further shows how the youths are

¹¹⁸ ซึ่งเกิดใหม่ชื่อเพลง กอดเอาที่ เลยมัยแม่ (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@Ari_TheVoice), July 21, 2021, Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://twitter.com/Ari_TheVoice/status/1417789644092051460?s=20&t=U4_wsr7WmpKb_1fIQPkdzFQ

¹¹⁹ แรปภาษาลูใส่มันเลยกรับผม (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@TarotYouuuu), July 21, 2021, Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://twitter.com/TarotYouuuu/status/1417790320901718017?s=20&t=U4wsr7WmpKb_1fIQPkdzFQ

¹²⁰ H. Normayanti and H. Heryaono, "The Jargon Used in Avengers: Endgame (2019) Movie: Sociolinguistics Study", *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute Journal*. Vol. 5(2), p.13615, 2022, <https://www.bircu-journal.com/index.php/birci/article/view/5220/pdf>

¹²¹ นื่อง!!!! อย่าไปยอม ผู้เขาสิวะอีหญิง (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@_emptysoul_), July 21, 2021, Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://twitter.com/_emptysoul_/status/1417790081180442627?s=20&t=U4wsr7WmpKb_1fIQPkdzFQ

¹²² ผู้ชนะ ถอนหางอกมันทิ้งโรงพัก (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@sornsense), July 21, 2021, Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://twitter.com/sornsense/status/1417790062314414086?s=20&t=U4wsr7WmpKb_1fIQPkdzFQ

¹²³ Twitter (@sspsrmspace), July 21, 2021, Accessed on October 23, 2022. https://twitter.com/sspsrmspace/status/1417791970517295109?s=20&t=U4wsr7WmpKb_1fIQPkdzFQ

able to buttress their arguments with facts to make informed decisions and are well prepared for a confrontation.

#BanMilli was a hashtag movement that attempted to have Milli cancelled following a controversial tweet that she posted. On 6 October 2022, a former policeman armed with a pistol, shotgun and knife went on a rampage in daycare center in Nong Bua Lamphu¹²⁴. The aftermath of the event left 38 people dead, including 24 kindergarten age children¹²⁵. This event shocked the Thai nation and social media was rife with discussion, demanding accountability from the Thai government for not preventing the tragedy, as well as for the questionable management of the events after the tragedy took place¹²⁶. The online discussions and debates transpired and, on the 7 October 2022, Milli tweeted “Go and be a burden, and it does not help the victim’s family at all¹²⁷”. This controversial tweet resulted in a flurry of discussions as Milli did not specify who she was referring to in the tweet¹²⁸. Some speculated that she was referring to the Prime Minister who had visited the families of the victims earlier that day¹²⁹, while others thought it might be King Vajiralongkorn and

¹²⁴ T. Vejpongsa and D. Rising, “*Thai daycare massacre: At least 36 killed in deadliest rampage in nation's history*”, para. 9, NZ Herald, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/thai-daycare-massacre-at-least-36-killed-in-deadliest-rampage-in-nations-history/Z2EW2T4GXLHNMCA6SWPXJ4VI/>

¹²⁵ *Twitter (@KhaosodEnglish)*, October 7, 2022, Accessed on October 23,2022. <https://twitter.com/KhaosodEnglish/status/1578200748613304321>

¹²⁶ “*Nong Bua Lamphu massacre: Recounting mistakes, seeking a way forward*”, October 15, 2022, Prachatai English, <https://prachatai.com/english/node/10053>

¹²⁷ *ไปที่ไปเป็นภาระ ไม่ได้ช่วยเยียวยาจิตใจครอบครัวผู้เสียชีวิตเลยสักนิด* (Original Thai Tweet), *Twitter (@millimdk)*, October 7, 2022, Accessed on October 24, 2022. <https://twitter.com/millimdk/status/1578323165972877312?s=20&t=cSbV2FpSdVs5jEOJZuEIFQ>

¹²⁸ “*มิลลิ คณภา พาดแรงโพสต์แคปชั่นแซบไม่รู้หมายถึงใคร อ่านแล้วมีสะดุด!*”, October 9, 2022, Bright Today. <https://today.line.me/th/v2/article/PGn7Eo0>

¹²⁹ “*PM meets mass shooting victims’ families*”, October 7, 2022, National News Bureau of Thailand, <https://thainews.prd.go.th/en/news/detail/TCATG221007201910874>

Queen Suthida who also visited the Nong Bua Lamphu hospital the same day¹³⁰. This was the main cause of the controversy as it involved both the monarchy and military government.

Responses to Milli's tweet were generally divided, with the first group being appalled at the young rapper and began to promote the use of the hashtag, #BanMilli/#Banมิลลิ, while voicing their dissatisfaction and calling for brands to cancel her. This included Pareena Kraikupt, a politician from the Palang Pracharat Party and former member of the House of Representatives, who responded with a Facebook post stating:

“Celebrities should be good role models. For someone who lose their wife or children, having the King and Queen's support would be the greatest thing in life and the most positive encouragement. Losing sleep over this incident. May her parents, record label, sponsor and society help teach her what is appropriate. In times of tragedy, if you do not want to support or encourage, you should not say anything about those we are doing so. You need to learn humility; don't you understand hierarchy?¹³¹”.

¹³⁰ “The King and Queen of Thailand visit families of massacre victims in Nong Bua Lam Phu”, October 7, 2022. Thai PBS, <https://www.thaipbsworld.com/the-king-and-queen-of-thailand-visit-families-of-massacre-victims-in-nong-bua-lam-phu/>

¹³¹ เพราะดารา ควรเป็นแบบอย่างที่ดี ระวีงปาก อ๋ายาเทิมเกริม ถ้าลูกคุณ หรือเมียคุณเป็นผู้บริสุทธิ์ต้องมาเสียชีวิต แล้วในหลวงพระราชินีเสด็จมาให้กำลังใจ คือสิ่งยิ่งใหญ่ที่สุดในชีวิต ที่ชีวิตนี้..จะหาไม่ได้อีกแล้ว เป็นพลังบวกที่ยิ่งใหญ่ในการเยียวยาจิตใจ นอนไม่หลับเลย ฟากพ่อแม่อบรมสั่งสอน ให้เคารพผู้อื่น และให้เคารพความรู้สึกผู้อื่น ฟากค่ายเพลง สปอนเซอร์ สังคม ช่วยสั่งสอน ดาราคนนี้เช่นเดียวกันด้วย เมื่อคนอื่นก็เป็นทุกข์พอแล้ว และถ้าตัวเองไม่คิดจะช่วยหรือให้กำลังใจใครก็ไม่ควรไปว่าคนอื่นอย่างนั้น ต้องหัดเจียมเนื้อตัวเองด้วย ตำสูงไม่รู้จักหรือ? (Original Thai Post), Facebook Post (ปารีณา ไกรคุปต์), October 9, 2022, Accessed on October 24, 2022. https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=669686487851752&id=100044312192325&set=a.11482286671453&eav=AfaU7_4mJLW0S3t6k3c0YfrX6Th3BhVA_2K-GWamzeY03uKooQPhqq8j2y5WNljDpE&paipv=0&source=57

This once again brings to attention the generational gap and highlights the difference on how the previous generation envision the ideal youth as one who is humble and submissive, as opposed to how the youths identify themselves as discussed previously.

On the other hand, the responses to Milli's tweet were very mixed, with some expressing support, while others questioned if it disregarded the feelings of the victims. It was until 10 October 2022, where Milli posted another tweet to apologize for her previous tweet, stating that it was not her intention to disrespect the victim's family and clarified that the tweet was meant for the unauthorized personnel at the crime scene¹³². Response was swift and clear this time and another hashtag movement, #SupportMilli/ #Supportมิลลิ started. Youths began to reply to her apologies with simple words of encouragement such as "fighting"¹³³ and "cheering you on, Milli"¹³⁴. However, there was a significant proportion of youths who questioned why Milli had to apologize in the first place when she had not done anything wrong. Responses ranged from "There is no need to apologize as it is a tweet of a citizen expressing her views and no names were mentioned. If it caused any misunderstanding, you could explain in detail, but you do not have to apologize"¹³⁵ to "There's no need to apologize, you did your best to question the authorities and what they did in

¹³² *Twitter (@millimdk)*, October 10, 2022, Accessed on October 24, 2022. <https://twitter.com/millimdk/status/1579477558386905091?s=20&t=O4X8jiEFx-5QqHjM2-DreQ>

¹³³ *สู้ ๆ มี น น ว ย !* (Original Thai Tweet), *Twitter (@vurrust)*, October 18, 2022. Accessed on October 24, 2022. <https://twitter.com/vurrust/status/1582406397924626432?s=20&t=O4X8jiEFx-5QqHjM2-DreQ>

¹³⁴ *ส่งกำลังใจให้นวย* (Original Thai Tweet), *Twitter (@NadingNarak)*, October 11, 2022. Accessed on October 24, 2022. <https://twitter.com/NadingNarak/status/1579512437199765504?s=20&t=O4X8jiEFx-5QqHjM2-DreQ>

¹³⁵ *ไม่มีความจำเป็นต้องขอโทษเลยกับทวิตนั้น เป็น ทวิตแสดงความคิดเห็นในฐานะพลเมือง ปชช คนหนึ่ง ที่เรารู้ว่าไม่ได้เจาะจงชื่อใคร ถ้าจะมีคนเข้าใจผิด อยากรออธิบายเพิ่มก็ได้ แต่มันไม่มีความจำเป็นต้องขอโทษเลยอะ* (Original Thai Tweet), *Twitter (@owner_duck)*, October 10, 2022. Accessed on October 24, 2022.

this incident. I wish you success as you continue to challenge those old and worthless people¹³⁶”.

Through their interaction with Milli, it can be seen that the Thai youth identities relating to their stance on social justice and standing up for what they believe is right is manifested, not when Milli was under attack for posting the controversial tweets, but when Milli does not maintain her stance, relents, and apologizes instead.

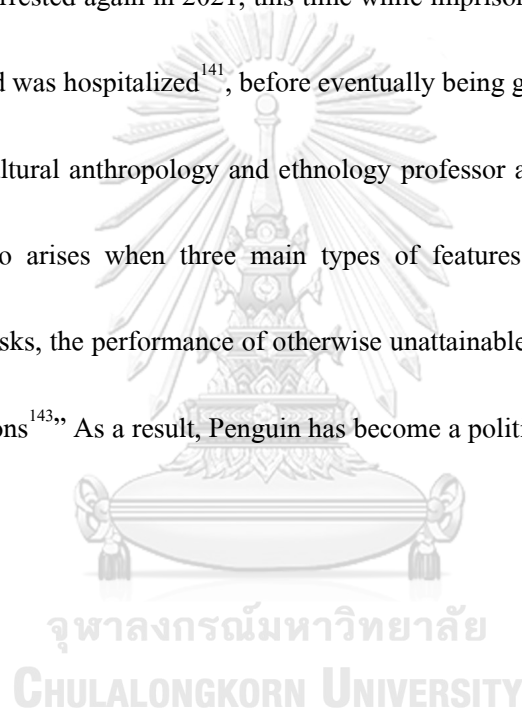
All in all, the Thai youth identity is constructed in relation to Milli’s persona, who is an influencer. The youths see themselves as a separate generation belonging to the same group as Milli, who are well informed and prioritizes social justice. They are not afraid of opposition and are willing to take a stance even when facing immense pressure from the outsiders, who are from the other generation with outdated standards. In the following section, this paper will look at another influencer to understand how influencers will have an impact on the Thai youths’ actions, and how the youths’ identities are constructed through their actions as well.

Parit Chiwarak, nicknamed Penguin, is a Political Science student at Thammasat University and a Thai political activist. Penguin has been politically active since at his young age and he was just 16 years old when he made the news as the Secretary-General of Education for Liberation of Siam in 2015, whereby he campaigned against the government’s plan to withdraw support for public educational organizations¹³⁷ and the hazing rituals practiced in Thai

¹³⁶ ไม่อยากให้ขอโทษเลยหนูทำดีแล้วในการตั้งคำถามกับผู้มีอำนาจที่เอาแต่ใจในเหตุการณ์นี้นะ ขอให้หนูประสบความสำเร็จยิ่งขึ้นไปเพื่อตอกหน้าไอ้พวกแก่กระโหลกกระลาพวกนี้นะคะ Original Thai Tweet), *Twitter* (@o1_THE_lo), October 11, 2022. Accessed on October 24, 2022. https://twitter.com/o1_THE_lo/status/1579534524186529793?s=20&t=O4X8jiEFx-5QqHjM2-DreQ

¹³⁷ “Government support for educational public organizations may be scrapped”, (para. 12), *Prachatai English*, November 10, 2015, <https://prachatai.com/english/node/5599>

universities¹³⁸. Penguin was one of the protest leaders via the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration during the 2020 anti-government protest in Thailand and was first arrested on the 14 August 2020 and charged with sedition, assembly with intention to cause violence, violating the ban on public gathering, and other criminal offenses¹³⁹. Although Penguin was released the next day, on the condition that he will not commit the same offenses¹⁴⁰, he continued his protest activities and was eventually arrested again in 2021, this time while imprisoned, Penguin went on a hunger strike for 46 days and was hospitalized¹⁴¹, before eventually being granted bail on 11 May 2021¹⁴². Adrian Stoicescu, cultural anthropology and ethnology professor at the University of Bucharest, mentions that a hero arises when three main types of features are integrated, namely, “the willingness to take risks, the performance of otherwise unattainable actions, and the generation of behaviors and reactions¹⁴³” As a result, Penguin has become a political idol for the youths and has



¹³⁸ “Hazing in Thai universities breeds authoritarianism: Anti-SOTUS group”, (para. 4), Prachatai English, June 6, 2016, <https://prachatai.com/english/node/6233>

¹³⁹ “Thailand: Drop Charges, Release Student Activist” (para. 3), Human Rights Watch, August 15, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/15/thailand-drop-charges-release-student-activist>

¹⁴⁰ Twitter (@parichi), August 15, 2020. Accessed on October 25, 2020. <https://twitter.com/parichi/status/1294570901669736448>

¹⁴¹ “Thai protest leader hospitalised after 46-day hunger strike”, (para. 1), Reuters, April 30, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/jailed-thai-protest-leader-hospitalized-after-46-day-hunger-strike-2021-04-30/>

¹⁴² “Bail approved for 'Penguin', 'Ammy'”, (para. 1), Bangkok Post, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/2113979/bail-approved-for-penguin-ammy>

¹⁴³ A. Stoicescu, “The Making of a Hero in Romanian Protest Cultures. The Case of 2017 Street Rallies”, *The Annals of the University of Bucharest. Studies of Romanian Language and Literature*, Vol. 69, p. 127, 2020

over 52.3K followers on Facebook¹⁴⁴, 301.5K followers on Twitter¹⁴⁵, and 3.8K followers on Instagram¹⁴⁶.

The 2020 anti-government protest was when Penguin's influence could be seen clearly. It was triggered upon the Constitution Court's verdict to dissolve the Future Forward Party and ban the party's executives from politics for the next decade on the 21 February 2020¹⁴⁷. The protestors were made up of mainly students and young people¹⁴⁸ and what started as student-organized protest within the universities eventually escalated to a full-blown street protest in July 2020, with the protestors demanding the dissolution of the House of Representative, the cessation of the government's intimidation of the people, and the drafting of a new constitution¹⁴⁹. The protest took a new turn in August 2020 when the protestors made 10 unprecedented demands to reform the monarchy¹⁵⁰. Tensions continue to intensify as the protestors gathered in various locations both in Bangkok and other provinces until December 2020 where both the end of year and COVID-19 outbreak prompted the protestors to call the protest off for the time being. The 2020 anti-government protest was revolutionary as it was the first large-scale protest in Thailand mediated on

¹⁴⁴ Parit Chiwarak (เพ็ญทิวฉิม), in *Facebook* (Profile Page) Accessed on October 25, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/paritchi>

¹⁴⁵ "เพ็ญทิวฉิม - Parit C. III", in *Twitter* (@paritchi) Accessed on October 25, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi>

¹⁴⁶ "paritchi", in *Instagram* (@paritchi) Accessed on October 25, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/paritchi/>

¹⁴⁷ "FFP dissolved, executives banned for 10 years", para. 1, *Bangkok Post*. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/1862769/ffp-dissolved-executives-banned-for-10-years>

¹⁴⁸ "Explainer: What's behind Thailand's protests?", para. 11, October 15, 2020. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-protests-reasons-explainer-idUSKBN2700IX>

¹⁴⁹ "เยาวชนปลดแอก' เปิดแถลงการณ์ข้อเรียกร้องฉบับเต็ม", para. 10-13, July 19, 2020. *กรุงเทพธุรกิจ* <https://www.bangkokbiznews.com/news/detail/890036>

¹⁵⁰ "The ten demands that shook Thailand", para. 2, September 2, 2020. *New Mandala*. <https://www.newmandala.org/the-ten-demands-that-shook-thailand/>

social media¹⁵¹. Although the protest resumed in 2021, it revolved mostly around the COVID-19 vaccine this time. Hence, this paper will focus on the time period between February 2020 to December 2020 of the protest and examine Penguin's social media activities during the period to understand how the youth identities, which affected their actions during the protest, were constructed and manifested through Penguin's leadership and call to action.

In 2020, Penguin posted a total 381 Tweets over 12 months¹⁵², and was notably more active in February, August and November as the protest activities escalated. Upon examination of the tweets throughout the year, the following main themes stood out in Penguin's tweets that were reflective of the Thai youth identities. Firstly, the youths viewed themselves as a separate and new generation of Thais. In Penguin's tweets, terms such as "let this end in our generation¹⁵³", "let them do their worse¹⁵⁴", and "Let's use creativity, flexibility, and nonviolence in our fight. These are what we are good at and what they are not good and used to. It is our strengths and their weakness¹⁵⁵", suggest how the youths identified themselves and reflects the divide between the generations. However, the Thai youths still saw value in their Thai roots and were not seeking to

¹⁵¹ A. Sinpeng "Hashtag activism: social media and the #FreeYouth protests in Thailand", *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 53(2), p. 192, 2021

¹⁵² "Monthly Gained Tweets for 'พณณวิน - Pawit C. III'", Social Blade (@paritchi), <https://socialblade.com/twitter/user/paritchi>

¹⁵³ ให้มันจบที่รุ่นเรา (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@paritchi), August 8, 2022. Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1291952643116425216?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHwy>

¹⁵⁴ Twitter (@paritchi), August 17, 2022. Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1295344680599556098?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHwy>

¹⁵⁵ จงเอาความสร้างสรรค์ ความคิดหยุ่น ความไม่รุนแรงเข้าสู่ เพราะเหล่านี้คือสิ่งที่เรานัดแต่เขาไม่ถนัดและไม่คุ้นชิน เป็นจุดแข็งเราแต่เป็นจุดอ่อนเขา (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@paritchi), November 25, 2022. Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1331466934278209538?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHwy>

get rid of their Thai culture to emulate another foreign identity despite the exposure to foreign ideas and pop culture caused by the internet and social media. Penguin used traditional Thai poetry¹⁵⁶ in his tweets to strongly convey his messages. For instance, in response to the arrest of protestors made by the police, Penguin wrote the following poem¹⁵⁷:

“In hopes of getting a promotion, so you diligently oppress the people,
 To get a higher rank and medals, or an honorable title
 Those policemen should reconsider, and get this in their minds
 In fact, we (the people) are your masters, remember that.”¹⁵⁸

to drive the point that the Thai police should be for the Thai people. In addition, references to the Khana Ratsdadon on 24th June 1932¹⁵⁹, an important part of Thai history where constitutional monarchy was first established, was also often made.

As mentioned earlier, although Penguin is idolized by the youths as a political hero, it would seem that the youths were irrational if this was the sole reason that they participated in the protest. Looking at Penguin’s tweets when addressing the youths, it can be determined that the youths were burdened by social justice and inequality. In his tweets, the term “people¹⁶⁰” was most

¹⁵⁶ *Twitter (@Paritchi)*, July 15, 2020. Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1283126518827241473?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHyw>

¹⁵⁷ กาพย์ (kap). A type of Thai versification in which one verse line contains 11 words or syllabus

¹⁵⁸ เพียงหวังจะเลื่อนขั้น จึงขยันข่มประชา / เพื่อยศและเหรียญตรา บรรดาศักดิ์ก็ระนั้นๆ / แท้ควรตำรวจคิด และตั้งจิตร่วมยึดถือ / ที่แท้พวกกูคือ นายของมึงฟังจดจำ (Original Thai Tweet), *Twitter (@Paritchi)*, January 17, 2021. Accessed on November 6, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1350758868733755393?s=20&t=AZBtVZYDlGw6zdPlqg PQ9Q>

¹⁵⁹ *Twitter (@Paritchi)*, June 24, 2020. Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1275489007619600384?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHyw>

¹⁶⁰ ประชาชน or ประชากร

often mentioned, emphasizing the cause was for the greater good of the people. “Sakdina will perish, and the people will prosper”¹⁶¹ was the tweet that highlighted that the fight was against inequality as Sakdina was a system back in the Ayutthaya society that specified everyone’s rank and position in society¹⁶². It is also interesting to mention that Penguin chose the word “pracharaat (ประชาราช)” instead of the more commonly used “prachachon (ประชาชน)” for the term “people”, as the sound “raat (ราช)” was similar to “raat (ราช)”, which means the royal institution or royalty, implying that the people were similar or equal to the royal institution in Thailand. Furthermore, as the youths have unlimited access to information, the justification of what was right, or deemed as justice was not just based on what Penguin believed in but was backed with information. For instance, Penguin used England, Japan, and Scandinavia as his examples to show how democratic nations function with a monarchy in order to refute claims that the demands for the reform of the Thai monarchy was unacceptable¹⁶³. As a result, the Thai youths had a firm belief in social justice that was backed by logic and could be succinctly summed up by one of Penguin’s Tweet, “No justice, no compromise¹⁶⁴”, where they would refuse to back down if things were not made right.

¹⁶¹ ศักดินาจะพินาศ ประชากรจะเจริญ (Original Thai Tweet), Twitter (@paritchi), November 5, 2020. Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1324352260193673218>

¹⁶² D. K. Wyatt, “*From Thailand a Short History*”, Thailand, Silkworm Books, 1984, p.73

¹⁶³ Twitter (@paritchi), August 17, 2020, Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1295224688432488448?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHyw>

¹⁶⁴ Twitter (@paritchi), November 14, 2020, Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1327606114280587264?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHyw>

The firm belief in social justice has also created a generation of youths who take action. Penguin tweets such as “To honor Prayut is to disrespect the people, you have to choose your side¹⁶⁵” was a clear message for the youths to pick a side. In addition, there were clear tweets informing the youths the time and location of the next protest, or to make a stance by performing specific actions such as the tying of white bows¹⁶⁶ or 8 actions to fight dictatorship from home¹⁶⁷. It should also be mentioned that the hashtags used by Penguin were clear call to actions such as #supportforthe10reforms¹⁶⁸, #abolish112¹⁶⁹, or simply just the date of the upcoming mob. Lastly, it is noteworthy to mention that the Thai youths are not alone when taking actions but have the support of the youths in the international community such as the Milk Tea Alliance, where Penguin thanked Hong Kong Activist, Joshua Wong for his support for their efforts in Thailand in a Tweet¹⁷⁰.

Thai youths today see themselves as a separate new generation and their identities are further constructed in their interactions with influencers. As shown above, youths orientate to Milli’s social media activities where their identities are expressed through the interaction with her post. On the other hand, Penguin’s online activism has resulted in the Thai youths to associate

¹⁶⁵ การให้เกียรติประยุทธ์ ถือเป็นการไม่ให้เกียรติประชาชน คงต้องเลือกว่าจะให้เกียรติใคร (Original Thai Tweet), *Twitter* (@paritchi), January 20, 2020, Accessed on October 25, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1219165960466132992?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHyw>

¹⁶⁶ *Twitter* (@paritchi), August 18, 2020, Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1295526304360460288?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHyw>

¹⁶⁷ แนวทางการต่อสู้กับเผด็จการ 8 ข้อที่ทุกคนทำได้จากที่บ้าน (Original Thai Tweet), *Twitter* (@paritchi), September 20, 2020, Accessed on October 27, 2020. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1307425791639056384?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHyw>

¹⁶⁸ #สนับสนุน10ข้อเรียกร้อง (Original Thai Hashtag)

¹⁶⁹ #ยกเลิก112 (Original Thai Hashtag)

¹⁷⁰ *Twitter* (@paritchi), August 15, 2020, Accessed on October 27, 2022. <https://twitter.com/paritchi/status/1294646133839388674?s=20&t=TBhR1U29dMnT3-m2oiKHyw>

political activism with the street protest, and in doing so, show their political allegiance that is constructed based on their identities. The Thai youths today are aware of social issues, such as inequality, and know that there are available solutions found in other countries/societies. Hence, they are firm believers of social justice and will not just sit still and accept blindly what the ruling authorities have to offer. The youths have access to information in order to evaluate if these proposed solutions are feasible and will not hesitate to call out and take action to make the situation right.

Thai Youth Identities and “The Thai Society Going Forward”

Advances in technology and the rise of social media have altered the social environment and given rise to new Thai youth identities, which in turn will have impact on the society going forward. Despite the different perceived identities of each generation, the youths continue to hold an important position in the hearts of the Thai people as they “are generally regarded as the future of the nation, and the last hope by the Thai”¹⁷¹. As such, the youths have always been a key priority of the Thai government who have often taken a hard stance to ensure the youths are properly guided. For instance, in the 1940s where etiquette and decorum was of utmost importance, “a guidebook on etiquette was written and training sessions were prioritized”¹⁷² when “there was a perceived

¹⁷¹ T. Wongyannava, *“Policing the Imagined Family and Children in Thailand: From Family Name to Emotional Love”*, Mekong Press, 2008, p. 38

¹⁷² P. Chaoumdee, *“Photographs and Middle-Class Teenagers Lives in Bangkok from the 1960s to the 1980s.”*, p. 79, 2017, Master’s Thesis, Chulalongkorn University

decline of manners amongst the youth”¹⁷³ in 1947. Another more extreme example would be the 1970s where “the more relaxed political and social climate gave Thai youths the freedom to develop more controversial thoughts”¹⁷⁴ and unfortunately this cumulated into what we know today as the 6th October 1976 massacre. Hence, the government have traditionally sought to manage the youths by controlling them through education, censorship, or by force.

Nevertheless, this method of control would not be effective with this generation of youth as it has been established that they have access to information all the time, and are able to assess the information that they are given and supplement the information that has been withheld from them. Furthermore, social media provides the youths with alternative viewpoints and the government would not be able to have the final say anymore. On top of that, the government would not be able to control the youths by force this time as well, because of how freely information flows on social media and how, as mentioned above, it has connected the Thai youths to the international community of youths. Should the government attempts to control the Thai youths by force, this would earn the disapproval of the international community and would be extremely detrimental for Thailand, whose economy relies heavily on exports, tourism, and foreign direct investment¹⁷⁵.

The current Thai government have recognized the changes that the advances in technology and social media has brought and have also launched their counter measures. This includes the operation of a network of social media accounts, known as the Information Operations, that replied

¹⁷³ Ibid, p. 79.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 61

¹⁷⁵ “*Thailand’s development trajectory: Past and future strategies*”, para. 3, OECD Investment Policy Reviews: Thailand, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/a21090a7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/componen t/a21090a7-en>

“en masse with supportive messages to tweets from Army PR accounts and dogpiling onto tweets from opposition-aligned accounts”¹⁷⁶, and the use of the Pegasus surveillance spyware to monitor “key civil society groups in Thailand, including activists, academics, lawyers, and NGO workers”¹⁷⁷. However, these operations can be considered unsuccessful as it was exposed by the international community and backfired on the Thai government instead. “Twitter announced the takedown of 926 accounts targeting Thai Twitter users in a domestic information operation¹⁷⁸ while Canadian cybersecurity watchdog, Citizen Lab, uncovered that the Pegasus spyware were used on government critics¹⁷⁹”.

In order to be in touch with this generation of youths, it is important to let go of the old ways. As shown above, the government needs to understand that traditional ways of trying to control the people will not be feasible in these times and would more likely backfire and result in greater resistance. Perhaps, it is time to explore other avenues such as open dialogues, inclusive communication, and the encouragement of active citizenship. Although it might require a long

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¹⁷⁶ J. A. Goldstein, A. Sinpeng, D. Bush, R. Ewald, J. John, “*Cheerleading Without Fans: A Low-Impact Domestic Information Operation by the Royal Thai Army*”, p. 4, 2020, Stanford Internet observatory, <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:ym245nv3149/twitter-TH-202009.pdf>

¹⁷⁷ J. Scott-Railton, B. Marczak, I. Poetranto, B. A. Razzak, S. Chanpraset and R. Deibert, “*Pegasus Spyware Used against Thailand’s Pro-Democracy Movement*”, para. 19, Citizen Lab, University of Toronto, <https://citizenlab.ca/2022/07/geckospy-pegasus-spyware-used-against-thailands-pro-democracy-movement/>

¹⁷⁸ J. A. Goldstein, A. Sinpeng, D. Bush, R. Ewald, J. John “*Cheerleading Without Fans: A Low-Impact Domestic Information Operation by the Royal Thai Army*”, p. 3, 2020 Stanford Internet observatory, <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:ym245nv3149/twitter-TH-202009.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ “*Pegasus spyware scandal returns to haunt Thai govt*”, para.3, July 22, 2022, Thai PBS. <https://www.thaipbsworld.com/pegasus-spyware-scandal-returns-to-haunt-thai-govt/>

period of time before the success of these changes can be seen, but it would definitely rely heavily on the government willingness to listen, openness to feedback, and flexibility to make changes.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how the identities of the Thai youths today are reflected and manifested in their online activities. Social media has become an integral part of the Thai youth's lives and has significantly altered their mindset, behavior, social norms, and concepts of the Thai society, creating a brand-new generation of youths that identify themselves differently from the previous generation. Influencers are the ideal persona for the youths of Thailand today and hence would be a good representation of how the Thai youth view themselves and provide insights into the Thai youth identity.

The advancement of internet technologies and rapid adoption of social media will also impact the lives and behavior of individuals, especially youths who are the bulk of social media users. Social media provides an avenue for users to create and share user-generated content, while fostering interaction and collaboration among participants. It has also become a medium where one's private and real thoughts are publicly displayed for all to see. Furthermore, it provides the users with increased exposure to alternate viewpoints, coupled with constant access to information, users now have better access to reliable information. In addition to the access to the no holds barred information available online, social media has also attracted a diverse range of users leading users to be exposed to and made aware of social issues such as inequality resulting in users that are well

informed, committed to social justice, and willing to fight for it. However, it is noteworthy to mention that social media have also made the users less individualistic and less autonomous because it reinforces the individual's facility to network socially. Social media is the collective power of the users and the hashtag, which is a crucial component of almost every social media platform, has become a symbol of that collective power on social media.

Milli and Penguin are 2 influencers that were examined to gain insight of how the Thai youth identities are constructed in relation to the influencer's persona. It was found that youths orientate to Milli's social media activities where their identities are expressed through the interaction with her post and Penguin's online activism has inspired the Thai youths to show their political allegiance, which is constructed based on their identities. The Thai youths today see themselves as a separate new generation and are aware of social issues, such as inequality. As the youths know of available solutions found beyond Thailand, they are firm believers of social justice and will not just sit still and accept blindly what the ruling authorities have to offer. The youths have access to information to evaluate if these proposed solutions are feasible and will not hesitate to call out and take action to make the situation right.

Youths have always been a key priority of the Thai government who have traditionally sought to manage the youths by controlling them through education, censorship, or by force. This method of control would not be effective with this generation of youth as they have access to information and the outside world all the time. Attempts to control by censorship or by force in the online setting have proven to be unsuccessful and have backfired on the Thai government instead.

Perhaps it is time to let go of the old ways and explore alternative avenues such as open dialogues, inclusive communication, and the encouragement of active citizenship, to be in touch with this generation of youths, whose identities are reflected in influencers and hashtags – the Thai youths of the social media era.



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