

Mass Media in Social and Political Participation

Sirisak Piriyasanti¹, Asst. Prof. Dr. Noppawan Phuengpha²

^{1,2}Faculty of Political Science and Law, Burapha University, Thailand

*Correspondence Author Email: noppawanp@go.buu.ac.th

Abstract. *Online media significantly enhances public political participation by providing accurate, comprehensive, and diverse information. It helps the public understand current situations, analyze government policies, and critique them rationally. Mass media, including television, radio, newspapers, and digital platforms, has transformed society's engagement in social and political processes. It plays a crucial role in social and political participation by providing information, promoting social activities, and inspiring collective action. However, the influence of mass media on social and political behavior is complex and can lead to misinformation, political bias, and polarization. The objectives is; to examine the role of mass media in influencing public participation and to analyze the application of the concept of political participation in understanding the relationship between mass media and public political engagement. This article using a quantitative approach. Mass media, from traditional newspapers to digital platforms, has significantly influenced social and political participation. Despite challenges like misinformation and superficial online participation, it remains a powerful force in shaping citizen engagement.*

Keywords: *Mass Media, Social Media, Political Participation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Online media significantly enhances public political participation by providing accurate, comprehensive, impartial, and diverse information. It helps the public understand current situations, analyze government policies, and critique them rationally. The media also provides a platform for the public to express opinions, exchange perspectives, and communicate their problems, driving social change. Research articles have studied the role of mass media in Thai politics.

Online media offers real-time access to news and developments, making it easier for people to stay informed about political events and issues. This broadens their understanding and allows for more educated participation in political discourse. The vast range of sources available online presents a multitude of viewpoints. This diversity helps citizens analyze policies from various angles, promoting critical thinking and a more comprehensive understanding of political issues. Social media and other digital platforms allow individuals to voice their opinions, share ideas, and engage in discussions with others. This interaction fosters public debate and collective decision-making, encouraging participation in political processes. Online media facilitates the organization of movements and campaigns, helping people to advocate for change and influence policy decisions. Social networks are often used to mobilize groups around common causes, thereby amplifying voices and driving political or social change.

The role of mass media in social and political participation has become an increasingly relevant topic in this modern era, especially with the rapid development of communication and information technology. Mass media, both conventional such as television, radio, and newspapers, as well as new media that includes digital platforms like social media and online news portals, have transformed the

way society engages in social and political processes. Through mass media, information can spread widely in a short time, influencing public opinion and even shaping political and social behavior. However, alongside the positive influence it offers, mass media also has the potential to spread misinformation, political bias, and polarization among the public.

In general, mass media refers to communication channels that enable the dissemination of information to a wide audience. This media includes various outlets such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and digital platforms like news websites and social media. In the context of social and political participation, mass media plays a crucial role as a bridge between the public and information related to social and political issues. Mass media serves as a source of information, a space for public discussion, and a platform for conveying the aspirations and demands of society.

According to the agenda-setting theory, mass media has the ability to influence what the public thinks by selecting certain issues that then become the main topics of social discussion. Thus, mass media holds the power to determine which issues are considered important by society, which can subsequently affect their social and political participation. On the other hand, framing theory also highlights how the media presents information in a way that shapes public perception of a particular event or political issue.

Social participation encompasses various forms of individual involvement in community life, including volunteer actions, engagement in social organizations, and participation in community activities. Mass media can facilitate social participation by providing information about various social activities, promoting acts of solidarity, and inspiring collective action through reporting on relevant issues.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the mass media played a crucial role in disseminating information related to preventive measures and health protocols. Media is also used to organize social assistance and solidarity campaigns for affected communities. In this context, mass media not only serves as a disseminator of information but also as a driver of social participation in facing crises.

However, the influence of mass media on social participation can also be ambivalent. On one hand, mass media can raise public awareness of pressing social issues, but on the other hand, excessive exposure to certain social problems can lead to feelings of apathy or fatigue among the public. This is often referred to as "information burnout," where individuals feel overwhelmed by the multitude of social issues being reported and choose not to engage.

Mass media also plays an important role in political participation. In modern democracy, mass media serves as the primary medium for political parties, candidates, and interest groups to convey their political messages to the public. The media functions as the main channel for political campaigns, public debates, and discussions about government policies. Furthermore, mass media also provides a space for the public to express their political views, whether through letters to the editor, comments, or discussions on digital platforms.

During the election period, the role of mass media becomes increasingly significant. Mass media provides information about candidates, work programs, and the election process, which

ultimately helps voters make more informed decisions. In addition, the political surveys and analyses presented by the media can also influence the political preferences of the public. For example, news about the electoral viability of candidates can shape public perception of who has a greater chance of winning, which ultimately affects their participation in elections.

However, just like in social participation, the influence of mass media on political participation is not always positive. Mass media often serves as a tool for political propaganda, where unbalanced or biased reporting can manipulate public opinion. In some cases, mass media can even exacerbate political polarization in society by highlighting differences and conflicts between political groups. In addition, the proliferation of fake news (hoaxes) in the digital era also adds challenges for society to obtain accurate and reliable information.

The development of digital technology, particularly social media, has brought significant changes in the way society engages in political activities. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube allow users to share information, discuss political issues, and organize collective actions more easily and quickly. In recent years, social media has become an important space for political mobilization, especially among young people and groups that were previously underrepresented in the political process.

Major political movements such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the #BlackLivesMatter campaign are examples of how social media has been used as a tool for mass mobilization on a global scale. Social media allows information and political messages to spread rapidly, crossing geographical and social boundaries. Furthermore, social media also provides a platform for voices that are often marginalized by conventional mass media, thereby expanding the space for political participation.

However, although social media can enhance political participation, its use also presents new challenges. Political polarization is often exacerbated by social media algorithms that tend to display content aligned with user preferences, thereby narrowing the space for dialogue and reinforcing echo chambers. In addition, the spread of disinformation and fake news on social media has also become a serious problem that can undermine the integrity of the political process.

The role of mass media in social and political participation is very complex and diverse. On one hand, mass media has great potential to raise awareness, encourage active participation, and expand the space for social and political dialogue. Mass media also plays a key role in the democratic process by providing relevant information and enabling the public to engage more actively in political processes. However, on the other hand, mass media can also exacerbate social and political polarization, spread misinformation, and manipulate public opinion through biased reporting.

Thus, in the context of social and political participation, mass media needs to be managed carefully so that its impact on society is constructive. It is important to enhance media literacy among the public so that they can discern accurate information and avoid falling into disinformation or political manipulation. Furthermore, regulations on mass media, especially social media, need to be continuously developed to address the various challenges that arise alongside advancements in information technology.

II. METHODS

This article using a quantitative approach. Quantitative is a comprehensive understanding of the behaviours, experiences, and points of view of individuals or groups is the goal of qualitative research, which aims to investigate these aspects. Rather than concentrating on counting numbers or measuring, the emphasis is placed on the process and the meaning (Moleong, 2007).

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between mass media and social and political participation has been a topic of considerable debate, especially as the media landscape has evolved dramatically over time. Mass media, which includes print, television, radio, and, more recently, the internet, plays a pivotal role in shaping the opinions, values, and behaviors of individuals in society. The impact of mass media on social and political participation has been particularly evident over the past few decades, as political events and social movements have increasingly been mediated through various forms of communication (Delli Carpini, 2004). In the early 2000s, the explosion of digital media transformed the political landscape, amplifying the voices of citizens and providing them with new avenues for participation. This paper aims to explore the role of mass media in fostering social and political participation, with a particular focus on the period from the 2000s onward.

Historically, traditional mass media—such as newspapers, television, and radio—played a central role in disseminating political information to the public. These platforms were often the primary sources of news, and citizens relied on them to stay informed about political developments (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Traditional mass media was largely controlled by a small number of gatekeepers—editors, broadcasters, and publishers—who had the power to determine which issues would be covered and how they would be presented. This power significantly influenced public opinion and political engagement.

The agenda-setting theory, proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), argues that mass media does not tell people what to think but rather what to think about. In this sense, traditional media shaped political participation by highlighting certain issues while neglecting others. This led to increased political engagement around certain issues, while others were sidelined. For example, during election periods, mass media coverage of political campaigns and candidates can increase voter turnout by informing the public about their options and the stakes of the election (Prior, 2007).

However, the influence of traditional mass media on political participation was not without limitations. While it could provide citizens with information, it also served to reinforce existing power structures by giving disproportionate attention to elite perspectives (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The media's role as a gatekeeper often meant that alternative or dissenting voices were marginalized, thereby limiting the scope of political discourse and participation.

The advent of digital media, particularly the internet, social media, and online news platforms, has transformed the landscape of political participation. Digital media has decentralized the dissemination of information, allowing individuals and groups to bypass traditional gatekeepers and

communicate directly with the public. This has democratized access to information, enabling a more diverse range of voices to be heard (Chadwick, 2013).

One of the most significant impacts of digital media on political participation is the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms allow individuals to share political content, engage in discussions, and organize events such as protests or campaigns. The ease with which information can be shared on social media has led to the rapid spread of political ideas and movements, contributing to the rise of social and political activism in the digital age (Loader & Mercea, 2011).

The role of digital media in facilitating political participation was evident during the Arab Spring in 2010-2011. Social media platforms played a crucial role in organizing protests and disseminating information across borders, helping to mobilize citizens and sustain movements against authoritarian regimes (Howard & Hussain, 2011). Similarly, in democratic contexts, social media has been used to increase voter turnout and participation in political campaigns. The 2008 and 2012 U.S. presidential elections, for example, saw a significant use of social media by candidates to engage with voters, particularly younger demographics (Bennett, 2012).

However, the rise of digital media has also introduced challenges. The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms has raised concerns about its impact on political participation. While digital media can empower citizens by providing access to diverse perspectives, it can also polarize political discourse and contribute to the spread of false information, potentially undermining democratic participation (Tucker et al., 2018).

Mass media has always been a crucial tool for social movements to communicate their messages, mobilize supporters, and gain public attention. In the pre-digital era, television and newspapers played a central role in amplifying the voices of social movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. These movements relied on media coverage to highlight issues of injustice and inequality, thereby raising awareness and generating public support (Gitlin, 1980).

With the rise of digital media, the ability of social movements to organize and communicate has expanded exponentially. Social media platforms have become essential tools for activists to share information, coordinate events, and engage in discussions with supporters. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which gained prominence in 2013, is a prime example of how social media can be used to promote social participation. Through the use of hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, activists have been able to raise awareness of police brutality and systemic racism, mobilize protests, and build a global movement (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2018).

Digital media has also facilitated the creation of online communities, where individuals can engage in discussions and activities related to social issues. These communities often serve as spaces for marginalized groups to connect, share experiences, and advocate for change. For example, the LGBTQ+ community has used digital media to build networks of support and promote social and political participation around issues such as marriage equality and transgender rights (Gray, 2009).

While digital media has provided new opportunities for social participation, it has also introduced new challenges. One of the main criticisms of social media activism is the phenomenon

of "slacktivism," where individuals engage in low-effort online activities—such as liking or sharing content—without taking meaningful action (Morozov, 2009). Critics argue that this type of participation is often superficial and does not translate into real-world change.

However, proponents of digital media activism argue that online activities can complement offline actions and contribute to the success of social movements. For example, social media can be used to raise awareness, build networks, and coordinate actions, which can lead to greater participation in protests, campaigns, or other forms of activism (Tufekci, 2017). Moreover, the use of digital media allows activists to bypass traditional media outlets, which may not always provide coverage of certain issues, and communicate directly with their audiences.

The role of journalism has also evolved in the digital age. As mass media has shifted from print to online platforms, traditional journalism has had to adapt to new technologies and consumer behaviors. The rise of citizen journalism, where ordinary individuals report on events and share their stories via social media, has challenged traditional notions of who qualifies as a journalist and what constitutes news (Gillmor, 2006). This shift has democratized the media landscape, allowing a broader range of voices to contribute to public discourse.

However, the decline of traditional journalism, particularly local newspapers, has raised concerns about the impact on political participation. Local journalism plays a crucial role in holding local governments accountable and informing citizens about local issues. The decline of local newspapers has been associated with lower voter turnout and reduced civic engagement (Hayes & Lawless, 2015). As media companies increasingly prioritize profit over public interest, there is a growing need to support journalism that serves as a check on power and promotes informed participation in democracy.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Mass media has played a pivotal role in shaping social and political participation throughout history, from traditional newspapers and television to modern digital platforms. While traditional mass media helped to inform and mobilize citizens, it was often controlled by gatekeepers who influenced the political agenda. The rise of digital media has democratized access to information, providing new opportunities for political and social participation. Social media platforms have become essential tools for activism, enabling individuals to connect, share information, and organize movements.

However, the shift to digital media has also introduced challenges, such as the spread of misinformation and concerns about the superficial nature of online participation. Despite these challenges, mass media—both traditional and digital—remains a powerful force in promoting social and political participation. The ongoing evolution of media technologies will continue to shape the ways in which citizens engage with politics and society in the future.

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