Impact of Social Media on Political and Religious Socialization among Songkran Festival Participants in Thailand: A Critical Review

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Article Information	ABSTRACT

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With the ever-growing technological advancement, social media is insinuating its presence in every aspect of our lives, and it has become fundamental towards leveraging people's perceptions and ideologies. This research investigates the impact of social media on political and religious socialization among participants of the Songkran Festival in Thailand. The researcher adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology. The aim is to provide a comprehensive synthesis of existing research to understand the multifaceted role of social media in the socialization process. A meticulous search strategy was implemented across databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar, using a combination of keywords like festival-specific, social media-related, and socialization. The review focused on studies published in English between 2010 and 2023 and applied the research objectives with strict adherence to inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data analysis and results were inferred using a structured form to ensure consistency. The findings reveal that social media significantly enhances information accessibility, fosters community engagement, facilitates political advocacy, promotes religious teachings, and leverages influencers' impact. However, challenges such as misinformation, superficial engagement, biased perspectives, and the digital divide were also identified. The study concludes that social media plays a transformative role in shaping political and religious socialization during the Songkran festival. Recommendations for policymakers, festival organizers, religious leaders, influencers, and the general public emphasize promoting digital literacy, ensuring content authenticity, and fostering inclusive engagement. There is scope for future research, as it could explore long-term impacts and cross-cultural comparisons to provide a thorough insight into social media's role in contemporary socialization.

Keywords: Religious Socialization, Political Socialization, Songkran Festival in Thailand, Social Media, Individual Bloggers, Governmental Activities, Thematic Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Songkran is one of the most exciting cultural festivals in Thailand. It is commemorated as the Thai New Year from April 13 to April 15. This new-year tradition is celebrated by washing their houses and buildings, splashing water everywhere and on everyone, and the relatives gather together and return to their homes. This festivity promotes contemporization and traditions (Intason, 2024). Since, Thailand is mainly

a Buddhist nation, Songkran is a celebration and a symbolically significant event that points to the country's religious and political zeal and distinctiveness (Larsson, 2023). It becomes a global representation of the world as a Buddhist country. This is perpetually disseminated in transfiguring and transforming the public perceptions through social media. Therefore, social media has become a tool and a potent mediator, subsequently influencing socialization (Li & Lu, 2024).

To reiterate the different kinds of socialization, political socialization is defined as the process by which individuals obtain their political beliefs and opinions and adhere to patterns of political participation. This political adherence is exploited through a nation's culturally complacent beliefs and values and utilized to stir up society's nationalism. It ultimately leads to politically accentuated activism of citizens or foreign tourists. Making Songkran a traditional festival in Thailand, the government advocates Thailand's Buddhist governance values, thus creating unity among the Thai people as a Buddhist nation. It also harmonizes the politically vested interests by asserting a culturally staunch narrative. Social media is a constant source of digital mediation, relaying messages from government agencies, political parties, and other community associations. These messages include public service announcements, logistical information, and politicized slogans encouraging people's participation in politics through the festivals (Smith, 2017). Likewise, religiosity entails learning religious beliefs, emotions, and practices. Religious socialization pertains to the medium of giving and receiving religious knowledge, which affects, influences and regulates behavior. Since Buddhism excessively influences Songkran, it is an excellent means of imparting religious instructions and values. On social networking services (SNS), users post diverse types of religious content, including videos of activities in a temple, pictures of Buddhist ceremonies, and descriptions of them. Such digitalized dissemination of religious content assists the audience in further enhancing their learning and exposure to Buddhism and Buddhist culture. This eventually enriches their celebration of Songkran (one of their foremost Buddhist activities), while urging them to preserve other religious rituals and celebrations (Wilkins-Laflamme & Thiessen, 2020). In this sense, it draws attention to the religious aspects of Songkran, which dominates the social media platforms. It underscores the festival's relevance for the Thais as an essential national event and the tradition of Thailand as a Buddhist country established in terms of its identity (Li & Lu, 2024).

The origins of the Songkran festival are derived from Buddhism and astronomy (delineating the sun's movement to the Aries part of the zodiac). The main rituals of the festival involved the purification and renewal of people and things, and the water as an essential element of the festival. Water is associated with the purification and elimination of vices and the washing away of various forms of hardships of the previous year and entering into a new year. This asserts the Buddhist principles of purification (Lövheim, 2017). Initially, the festival comprised religious ceremonies like visiting temples, making donations, pouring water on the portrayal of Buddha and elders as a symbol of respect, and asking for blessings (Photikanit & Sirasoonthorn, 2018). These practices are not only in line with the religious aspect of Songkran but also serve to preserve the society's harmony and unity of the Thai people and familial relationships (Roe et al., 2024).

Thailand is attracting many people to its vibrant festival. The festival is now associated with water fights, street parties, and parades where cities such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai would thrive with the festivity. This commemoration is reflected and highlighted on social media platforms, reaching a wider audience. Social media presents people's experiences in real-time and thus reveals that Songkran is such a colorful and joyful event. The coexistence of animalistic beliefs and rituals alongside contemporary entertainment shows the evolution of Thai culture while demonstrating the community's prosperity in

concordance with technological advancement. This has not only raised the interest in tourism in Thailand but also highlighted the country's religious background of being a Theravada Buddhist country despite the festivities being secular in most places where it is held (Intason, 2024).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram have become essential tools for communication and cultural engagement, which are pivotal in promoting the Songkran Festival (Mulyana et al., 2020). These platforms facilitate the widespread dissemination of festival-related information, including logistical details, safety measures, personal experiences, and real-time updates. The use of social media has significantly amplified the visibility of Songkran, making it more accessible and attractive to the global audience (Arzroomchilar, 2022). This enhanced visibility is primarily driven by various stakeholders, including the Thai government, religious organizations, local communities, and individual users sharing content, highlighting the festival's cultural and spiritual significance (Intason, 2024). Social media's visual and interactive nature allows for a richer and more engaging portrayal of Songkran, showcasing its vibrant celebrations and deep-rooted traditions. Promoting Songkran on social media often involves diverse content that emphasizes different aspects of the festival (de Sousa et al., 2021). Government agencies and religious organizations use these platforms to share educational posts about Buddhist rituals and practices, historical context, and the festival's significance. This content helps reinforce the festival's religious and cultural importance in Thailand and internationally (Smith, 2017).

Additionally, individual bloggers and influencers contribute by sharing their personal experiences and opinions, often focusing on the festive and communal aspects of Songkran. These posts can include live streams of water fights, photos followed by essays about temple activities, and behind-the-scenes looks at traditional ceremonies. The combined efforts of these digital actors create a comprehensive and multifaceted portrayal of Songkran, which not only enhances public engagement but also fortifies the cultural and religious identity associated with the festival (Choonhawong & Phumsathan, 2022).

Prior studies devoted much effort to explaining how festivals are used to 'socialize' people into predetermined cultural, political, and religious affiliations (Basaran & Demir, 2017; Vinnicombe & Sou, 2017). Such events as Songkran are believed to be potential catalysts of cultural re-identification and social reunion and, therefore, provide rather informative settings for studying the phenomenon of socialization. Research has shown that cultural festivals are some methods used to propagate the cultural behaviours and standards adopted by those festivity consumers (Smith, 2017). The Songkran's religious and culturally related activities that are displayed during the occasion enhance the group identity as well as the culture of Thailand. Some researchers have elucidated the role of government and religious leaders in promoting political and spiritual messages concerning national unity and traditions through such festivals and events (Gelder & Robinson, 2009; Karlsen, 2009). The intensive use of social networks in recent years has extended the horizons of the socialization processes that have always accompanied festivals. Researchers have also explored how extended festival content reaches a broader audience, culminating in using digital platforms to broadcast the festival experience (Vinnicombe & Sou, 2017). Social media acts as a means of sharing information and experiences, hence retaining participants' engagement even beyond the physical setup of the festival (Kizgin et al., 2019). However, some scholars attributed that social media has weaknesses such as shallowness and 'gag effect' that may lead to prejudice. Concerns like false information, inequality in access to digital platforms, and the narrative of culture as a commodity have been accused of altering the essence of festivals (Richards, 2006). Nonetheless, based on the existing scholarly output, the role of social media is rather paramount in forming the perception of the festival experience, which in turn

has the potential to impact attendees' political and religious socialization process profoundly (Kizgin et al., 2019).

Furthermore, using a systematic literature review (SLR) unleashed a balanced view of social media's complex nature and functions in the socialization processes of this culturally significant event. Simultaneously, the study facilitated determining the trends and patterns of the actors involved in promoting content on social media platforms, inferring what type of content is usually posted and how it shapes public opinion and their behaviour. Thus, one of the leading research questions of this study is concerned with the role of social media in the Songkran campaign initiated by the Thai government and backed by religious institutions and local communities alike. This construes how these stakeholders have promoted the festival's importance and conspicuousness. It is an ensemble of individual bloggers and their influence that sustains the discussion about Songkran. It is the voice behind the post that partakes in the discussion on the festival (Choonhawong & Phumsathan, 2022). In addition to this, different types of content shared on social media intrinsically formulate the debate. These are educational posts, promotional posts, narratives, and stories about Thai citizens' and international participants' political and religious socialization (Kizgin et al., 2019).

A great deal of scholarly discussion has been conducted on this issue of social-media influence. However, there are still pertinent gaps that this study seeks to fill despite the significant consort of the use of social media in cultural festivals. It is to be noted that there is no detailed examination of the effects of social media on socialization, in particular, the influence on political and religious affiliations in the context of Songkran. Although some prior works have explored the overall effects of social media on the level and the nature of the attendees' activity during the festival, only a few consider how politics and religion are manifested through these interactions of the Songkran festival (Krasil'nikov, 2020). Moreover, the existing studies must focus on how various digital actors, including government agencies, religious organizations, and key leaders, contribute to creating and disseminating the festival's story (Perron-Brault et al., 2020). All the current methods concentrate mainly on the short-term effects and quantitative outcomes of engagement. In contrast, long-term social media intervention could shape participants' political or religious self-identification. Therefore, comparing the present statistics and the effects on socialization in Thailand to the statistical results of other nations is worthy of investigation to provide valuable insight.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Systematic Literature Review

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to explore the impact of social media on political and religious socialization among participants of the Songkran Festival in Thailand. The systematic review process ensures a comprehensive and unbiased synthesis of existing research, providing a robust foundation for understanding the multifaceted role of social media in these socialization processes.

2.2 Search Strategy

To perform this systematic literature review, thorough research was conducted to find all the literature relevant to the effects of social media on the political and religious socialization of Songkran Festival attendees. We chose several academic databases known for the extent of their scope and relevance to our research topic. The database employed in this research comprises Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Owing to the multidisciplinary nature of our database, it includes articles from various sources, such as academic journals, conference proceedings, and other similar sources. Furthermore, a list

of keywords and search items was developed to find all the articles that may be relevant to the study. These terms were grouped into three main categories: The first one is festival-based, the second one is social media-based, and the third one is social interaction-based. We optimized our search engine using Boolean operators such as AND and OR. The keyword "not" was deliberately excluded to ensure we did not miss any potentially relevant studies that might offer valuable insights into the effects of social media on political and religious socialization during the Songkran Festival.

We used keywords like Songkran Festival, Thai New Year, and Thailand Festival for festival-specific terms. We included social media, new media, digital media, Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, bloggers, and influencers for social media-related terms. These platforms were selected because they are among the most widely used and influential in social interactions, information dissemination, and cultural promotion. Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Instagram are particularly popular in Thailand. They are known for their high user engagement levels and capacity to facilitate real-time sharing of experiences, photos, and videos, which are integral to the festival's celebrations. Bloggers and influencers were included due to their significant role in shaping public opinion and promoting cultural events. These individuals often have good number of followers and can impact their audience's perceptions and participation in the festival through their content mediation. While other platforms like YouTube and Substack are influential, they were not included in this initial search strategy to maintain a focused scope. These are significant platforms for video content, but they serve more as a repository for longer, post-event videos rather than real-time interactions. Substack, primarily a newsletter platform, is less widely used for immediate social interaction and event coverage than the platforms that we selected. The exclusion of these platforms does not undermine the importance of our research; instead, it reflects a strategic decision to concentrate on those with the highest immediate relevance and engagement for the Songkran Festival. Future research could expand the scope to include these and other platforms to provide a more holistic view of social media's impact on political and religious socialization during the festival.

Lastly, for socialization-related terms, we searched for political socialization, religious socialization, political engagement, spiritual engagement, community participation, public service announcements, and government activities. Using these carefully selected databases and keywords, we aim to collect a wide range of high-quality scholarly articles that thoroughly understand how social media influences political and religious socialization during the Songkran Festival. An example of a complete search string used in our research is "Songkran Festival OR Thai New Year OR Thailand festival AND social media OR new media OR digital media OR Facebook OR X OR Instagram OR bloggers OR influencers AND political socialization OR religious socialization OR political engagement OR religious engagement OR community participation OR public service announcements OR government activities".

Table 1 outlines the comprehensive search strategy employed in our research to identify relevant literature on the intersection of the Songkran Festival, social media, and socialization. This strategy includes the selection of databases, application of specific keywords and search terms, construction of search strings, initial and refined search processes, manual screening methods, and documentation practices. The results of the preliminary search, including the number of records retrieved and screened, as well as the challenges encountered during the search process, are also detailed. This systematic approach ensures a thorough and robust examination of existing literature in the specified domains.

Table 1: Search strategy details

Step	Description
Database Selection	Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar are the sources employed for database selection.
Keywords and Terms	Festival-specific keywords are ascribed to terms like "Songkran Festival," "Thai New Year," and "Thailand festival." Social media-Related keywords are ascribed by terms like "social media," "new media," "digital media," "Facebook," "Twitter," "Instagram," "bloggers," and "influencers". Socialization-related keywords are ascribed by terms like "political socialization," "religious socialization," "political engagement," "religious engagement," "community participation," "public service announcements," and "government activities".
Search String Example	("Songkran Festival" OR "Thai New Year" OR "Thailand festival") AND ("social media" OR "new media" OR "digital media" OR "Facebook" OR "Twitter" OR "Instagram" OR "bloggers" OR "influencers") AND ("political socialization" OR "religious socialization" OR "political engagement" OR "religious engagement" OR "community participation" OR "public service announcements" OR "government activities") is a search string used in our research.
Initial Search	Conducted initial searches and applied filters for the English language and the 2010-2023 timeframe as an initial screening step.
Refinement	Reviewed titles and abstracts and used citation tracking and reference lists as the second screening step.
Manual Screening	We screened relevant journals and conference proceedings manually.
Documentation	Maintained database logs, imported references into reference management software, and removed duplicates
Preliminary Results	Retrieved 1,200 records, removed duplicates, screened 1,100 records, excluded 800, and assessed 300 full-text articles
Challenges	Addressed variation in terminology and database limitations, refined search terms and adapted search strings

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The systematic literature review was carried out by taking into account the following considerations. As seen in Table 2, the researchers set out specific criteria for including and excluding articles. The requirements were intended to help narrow the search to the most relevant data. This also sustained high-quality studies to ensure that the scope of review reflects the overall effects of social media on the political and religious socialization of Songkran Festival attendees. All the data had to be collected from 2010 and 2023 to reflect the current state of affairs, the developments in social media technology, and its direct impact on society. As a result, the pivotal point of our research is the social media applications and platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and blogs within the context of political and religious socialization. However, studies related to the Songkran festival were given preference, while any other research related to social media usage in Thailand or other similar cultures was excluded. Since the current

study aimed to gain an enriching and thorough understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, quantitative and qualitative studies were included in the review. Considering only peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and significant reports from recognized institutions helped maintain the high academic quality of the sources used.

On the contrary, the exclusion criteria were set so that any study that would not benefit the research would be left out. The researcher ensured that the findings included in this study were current. For this purpose, only those articles that were published after 2010 were used, and any information that might be irrelevant to the current status of social-media impact was excluded. Due to the language barrier that may have caused the articles to be misconstrued, articles not written in English and Thai were not incorporated into the study. While we acknowledge numerous publications in Thai on the Songkran Festival, we chose to focus on English-language articles along with Thai articles for the evaluation to ensure the consistency and reliability of our analysis. The need for a methodical approach in our systematic review also influenced this decision.

Focusing on English-language and Thai publications make our findings more accessible and understandable to the broader international academic community, fostering greater collaboration and discourse. Future studies could benefit from including other Thai-language dialects and publications in different languages, encouraging potentially bilingual researchers or translation services to bridge this gap. Furthermore, it excluded articles that discussed various aspects of social media usage but did not extend their analysis to the political or religious realms. It also needed to take into account the articles that were not related to the Songkran Festival. In addition, only empirical research was included in the review; thus, the publications that did not present empirical data, e.g., commentaries, editorials, and theoretical papers, were not considered for the review. Other forms of literature, including unpublished theses, dissertations, and non-peer-reviewed conference papers, also excluded. While unpublished PhD theses and dissertations can indeed be of high quality, the exclusion criteria were established to focus on peer-reviewed sources that have undergone a formal review process by experts in the field. This helps maintain a consistent academic rigor and credibility standard in the study. Future research may consider including these sources with additional criteria to assess their quality and relevance. For this study, it was imperative to meet the specific inclusion and exclusion criteria which set out for this systematic review. This corresponds with our objective to consolidate only the best-quality research for analysis and evaluation. This means that only the most relevant and credible data and conclusions will be chosen, and this will therefore go a long way in helping the understanding of the role of social media in the political and religious socialization of the Songkran Festival. The following table2 presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria utilized to refine the scope of our literature review on the impact of social media on political and religious socialization during the Songkran Festival. These criteria were meticulously defined to ensure the relevance, quality, and focus of the selected studies. The criteria encompass language preferences, publication dates, focus areas, types of social media platforms, study types, and publication types.

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English/Thai	Non-English
Publication date	January 2010 - December 2023	Before January 2010
Focus	Social media's impact on political and religious socialization during the Songkran Festival or similar contexts	Focus outside political and religious socialization or irrelevant cultural contexts.
Type of social media	Platforms like Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, blogs	Platforms not widely recognized or studied,
Study type	Empirical studies, both qualitative and quantitative	Opinion pieces, editorials, theoretical discussions without empirical data
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, significant institutional reports	Grey literature, unpublished thesis, dissertations, non-peer-reviewed papers

2.4 Data Extraction

Data was extracted using a structured data approach. It was meticulously designed to accrue each study's essential information, facilitating a detailed and systematic analysis. As can be seen in Table 3, some critical aspects identified from each study included the year of publication and the author(s) of the study identified from each study to indicate the timeline and source of information, therefore by giving credit, the credibility of our research work was enhanced. The study's objectives were well documented to ensure that each research paper's specific purpose and direction were well understood. This was useful in addressing the main objectives and questions to be answered by the studies included. Thus, defining the study objectives of each article scrupulously allows for better categorization of the studies and finding out the research trends and the issues that have been overlooked.

The researcher reviewed each study while considering the research methodology, participants, measurement, and data analysis procedures. From this, it was possible to extract each study's necessary details. The researcher's approach comprised an analysis that ensured the validity and reliability of the results. In addition, the methodological approach helped in the comparison of different works. The abstracts and conclusions of each study were reviewed, and the main results were selected and summarized. The research conclusions are presented in these findings, offering us valuable insight into the role of social media in political and religious socialization among visitors of the Songkran Festival. Thus, by articulating these findings, we provided a meta-synthesis of our appraisal to trace trends, patterns, and the overall impact that is important for addressing our research questions. Finally, the relation and application of each study to the use of social network platforms and socialization was determined and recorded. This involved assessing how social media fosters or promotes political and religious socialization. It was essential to ascertain that the studies selected for the review were directly related to this study's objectives to improve the review's quality.

Table 3: Data extraction summary

Author(s)	Year	Study objective(s)	Methodology	Key findings	Relevance to social media and socialization
Trottier & Fuchs	2015	Investigate social media's role in political engagement during the Songkran Festival.	Qualitative interviews with 50 participants; thematic analysis	Social media enhances political engagement by providing a platform for discussion	Demonstrates how social media fosters political discourse among festival participants
Tan et al.	2018	Examine the impact of social media on religious practices in Thailand	Survey of 200 festival participants; quantitative analysis	Increased use of social media correlates with higher levels of religious engagement	Highlights the role of social media in promoting religious activities and engagement
Thoumrungroje	2018	Analyze bloggers' influence on public opinion during the Songkran Festival	Content analysis of 100 blog posts; sentiment analysis	Bloggers significantly shape public opinion on political and religious matters	Shows the influence of individual bloggers in socializing political and religious views
Fashoro & Barnard	2021	Assess government social media campaigns' effectiveness in promoting civic participation.	Mixed-methods approach; surveys and analysis of social media metrics	Government campaigns on social media increase civic participation during the festival	Highlights the impact of government activities on social media in enhancing civic engagement
Al-Omoush et al.	2023	Explore the role of social media in cross-cultural exchange during the Songkran Festival.	Ethnographic study: participant observation and interviews	Social media facilitates cross-cultural exchange and understanding during the festival	Demonstrates social media's role in promoting cultural socialization
Sinatra	2019	Study the relationship between social media use and youth political activism.	Longitudinal study: Surveys and focus groups with young participants	Sustained social media use leads to increased political activism among youth	Shows the long-term impact of social media on youth political socialization

2.5 Thematic Analysis

Key themes related to the impact of social media on political and religious socialization among Songkran Festival participants were derived by thematic analysis. The analysis follows a logical sequence, leading to a general understanding of the data. The first phase of the analysis involved reviewing the literature multiple times to ensure a good understanding of the texts. This way, we could understand each study's subtlety and background, which is essential for identifying suitable themes. The subsequent step was deductive coding. In this phase, specific data extracts related to social media's effects on political and religious socialization were selected and coded. The parts of the text that helped support the research questions and findings were also underlined. The coded segment was assigned a code name or a label that best described its meaning. The coding process was cyclical and evolving as more data was consistently being analyzed, and codes were modified as required.

The next step was to identify the themes of the paper. In this case, the codes were grouped into potential themes based on their similarities and differences. It is to be noted that codes that describe how social media participated in influencing politics during the festival were grouped under the 'Political Participation' theme. The next step was to break down the themes provided for consideration. This was very useful in ensuring that the issues generated as themes highlighted what was happening and that the themes were clear and consistent. All the themes were matched against the coded data extracts and the whole dataset for relevance and accuracy. The themes that needed to be more relevant to the data or closely related to other themes were tweaked or combined to ensure they were well-defined and varied. The following process requires labelling and categorization of the themes. This process involved defining what each theme meant and how it helped explain social media's effects on the political and religious socialization of the Songkran Festival. For instance, the theme 'Political Engagement' was explained to the extent to which social media allows and how it encourages political discourse, voting, and activism among the festival's audience.
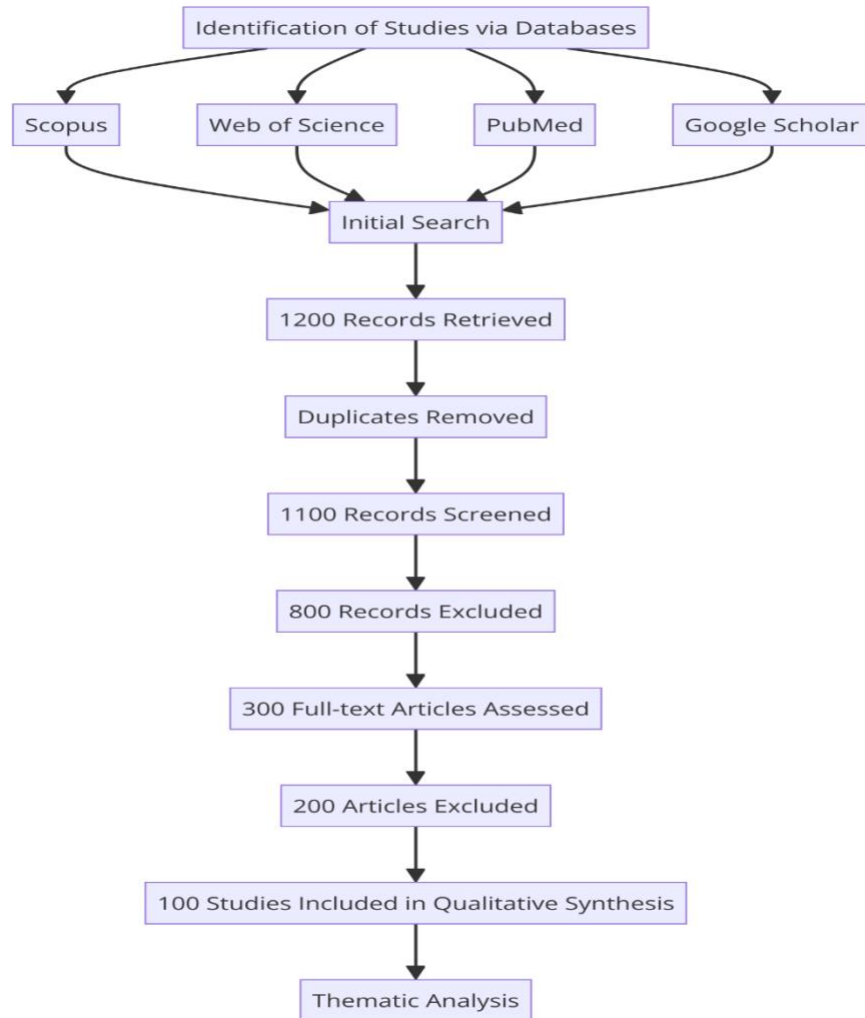
Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram

The Figure 1 PRISMA diagram illustrates the framework of systematic searching, sifting, and selecting correlation studies to synthesize qualifiers. Thus, databases like Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar were first addressed, and 1200 records were obtained. Meanwhile, to resolve the issue of duplicate records, 1100 records were screened. Among them, 800 records are excluded, and the rest of the 300 full-text articles are scanned to decide eligibility, leading to 200 of them being screened out. Finally, 100 are included in the qualitative synthesis that undergoes thematic analysis from all the identified studies. This diagram serves as a means of presenting a logical pathway regarding the methodological process of study. It undergoes a screening and elimination process to extract the most appropriate and relevant studies for the analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Overview of Themes

The systematic literature review (SLR) revealed six major themes that encapsulate the multifaceted impact of social media on political and religious socialization among Songkran Festival participants in Thailand. These themes provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how social media influences socialization processes during the festival. The identified themes are Information Dissemination and Accessibility, Community Engagement and Participation, Political Mobilization and Advocacy, Religious Education and Reinforcement, Influence of Bloggers and Influencers, and Governmental Communication and Public Service Announcements. Each theme offers unique insights into the role of social media in shaping political and religious dynamics among festival participants.

Table 4: Identified themes

Themes	Description
Information Dissemination and Accessibility	Social media platforms significantly enhance the accessibility of information regarding the Songkran Festival, facilitating the rapid spread of political and religious content.
Community Engagement and Participation	Social media fosters community engagement and participation in political and religious activities during the Songkran Festival.
Political Mobilization and Advocacy	Social media platforms are powerful tools for political activists and organizations to mobilize supporters, advocate for causes, and raise awareness about political issues.
Religious Education and Reinforcement	During the Songkran Festival, social media serves as a platform for religious education and the reinforcement of spiritual practices and beliefs.
Influence of Bloggers and Influencers	Individual bloggers and social media influencers significantly impact public perceptions and behaviours about the Songkran Festival.
Governmental Communication and Public Service Announcements	Social media is a crucial channel for disseminating governmental communications and public service announcements to the public during the Songkran Festival.

3.2 Information Dissemination and Accessibility

Technological advancement has turned the world into a global village, and information sharing has become easier and faster. Social media has played a critical role in influencing and revolutionizing how people exchange information, including personal experiences like the Songkran festival. Social sites like Facebook, X, and Instagram facilitate the sharing of information about the festivals or events that are happening. It frequently helps exchange and deliver political and religious messages about influencing social relationships (Scott & Errett, 2018). Hence, there is a rising need for social media to disseminate information, particularly in advocating and promoting the festival (Shonhe, 2017). It also makes the festival accessible (virtually) to those far away**.** Social media updates regarding the Songkran festival publish the message to the community, highlight the festival's purpose, and integrate cultural activities into society. Thus, society is well-informed and should be considered involved in related activities (Zhu et al., 2018). It guarantees everyone a chance to celebrate. Those unable to attend can celebrate virtually through hashtags, geotags, and live streaming from their computers and join in the activities from across geographical borders (Valtolina et al., 2007). Social media enhances participants' knowledge. It unites them as a single entity

during the Songkran Festival by spreading real-time information and emergency notifications, fostering participants' stewardship (Valtolina et al., 2007). Information is regulated by how social media shares it since users can engage in two-way communication, provide feedback, or start a conversation. Therefore, the gathered data is more likely valid (Khairat et al., 2018).

Prior research endorses that social media positively impacts the availability and sustained interaction with information during cultural events (Mchombu, 2003). These platforms make it possible to transverse geographical and social boundaries; hence, they effectively get information out there (Shonhe & Jain, 2017). By giving timely and accurate information, social media assists the participants in getting deeply and entirely engaged in the Songkran Festival experience. Thus, social media is essential in promoting culture and sharing information and the availability of information expeditiously across the globe during the Songkran feast is possible. It enhances live coverage, encompasses a broad audience, and encourages participation. These inferences about social media as a means of disseminating information correspond with the results of earlier studies. Through deliberation and circulating information, social media significantly affects cultural events (Jonsson, 2001).

Table 5 summarizes the key findings on information dissemination and accessibility through social media platforms concerning the Songkran Festival. These findings highlight the crucial role social media plays in enhancing accessibility, facilitating rapid information spread, providing timely updates, enabling virtual participation, promoting interactive engagement, democratizing knowledge, and disseminating critical information.

Table 5: Information dissemination and accessibility findings

Key aspect	Description
Enhanced Accessibility	Social media platforms significantly enhance the accessibility of information regarding the Songkran Festival.
Rapid Information Spread	Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram facilitate the rapid spread of political and religious content.
Timely Updates	Participants rely on social media for timely updates, news, and educational content about the festival.
Virtual Participation	Social media allows for virtual participation, breaking geographical barriers.
Interactive Engagement	The interactive nature of social media enables feedback and engagement, creating a two-way communication channel.
Democratization of Knowledge	Social media democratizes knowledge, allowing individuals from various backgrounds to access and contribute to information.
Critical Information Dissemination	Social media is particularly beneficial for disseminating critical information, such as safety advisories.

3.3 Community Engagement and Participation

Social media is vital to induce community engagement and participation during the Songkran festival. Several works show that the authorities, clergy, and organizing committees encourage people to participate and consequently avail social networks, including Facebook, X (Twitter), and Instagram, to apply themselves to engage with the festival (Head, 2007; Kizgin et al., 2019). These social media sites prompt active users to debate about politics, share religious content, or engage in group discussions about festivals and their influences, thereby connecting all the people through the digital platform. There are

various ways in which the Thai government and religious leaders serve to inform people about the festival, and social media is one of the most common sources for this purpose. They publish information concerning the availability of the festivals, the measures to be taken in case of an outbreak, and other cultural events (Kizgin et al., 2019). This corresponds with the findings of Le Dantec (2012), who established that social media campaigns improve society's awareness and involvement in cultural events. More importantly, some scholars have criticized such engagements as being empty or even as signing facades. Eversole (2011) examines how politics and religion use social media exceedingly, resulting in a mere functional involvement, distinct from a profound reception of the festival as an integrated culture into one's society. Furthermore, there are controversies about misleading messages and usurping the true spirit of community feelings with political and religious leaders' interference and propaganda that has intruded upon real spiritual feelings with clean hearts (Kilpatrick, 2009).

The sharing and availability of information relevant to the Songkran Festival agrees with the previous research on social media use in cultural contexts. A study by Talò (2018) revealed that social media makes it more convenient for the community to access information on cultural and religious events, which means the community is more active. Similarly, social media helps disseminate quick and practical information on political and spiritual matters, thus enhancing the public's participation (Shalowitz et al., 2009). These earlier works are related to the current research as they establish the radical impact of social media on information dissemination. They also show how social media can create awareness and encourage public participation, especially in cultural events. Social media plays a crucial role in passing information in today's society because geographical and social constraints do not limit social media. During the Songkran Festival, new groups are formed on Facebook to volunteer to coordinate, advertise and promote cultural dances, foods, clothes, and products made in the localities (Zhu, 2015). Such platforms make it possible for the participants to share ideas, present logistics, and reiterate personal experiences, hence improving the general outcome of the festival as well as bonding with the community (Shalowitz et al., 2009). Simultaneously, while using social media networks, real-time communication is possible to provide feedback on the logistics and present their complaints, make suggestions, and get the latest updates on changes in the festival program (including the celebration of the festival), consequently making the program seamless (Supapong, 2017). This two-way communication is unique because it allows the public to communicate back and forth, which is rare in conventional media. Nevertheless, specific issues could be associated with using social media to interact with the community. Due to the spontaneous interaction using social media, communication and engagement with the community can be limited to the post-festival period only (Rinner & Bird, 2009). Table 6 presents the results concerning active community involvement and participation resulting from the use of social media during ~~measuring~~ the Songkran Festival. The above-mentioned aspects give an insight into how different social media platforms provide virtual avenues for people to interact, engage in political and religious issues, organize societal events, intervene in the physical and virtual realities and campus community, and foster cultural and active citizenship.

Table 6: Community engagement and participation findings

Key aspect	Description
Virtual Spaces for Connection	Social media platforms create virtual spaces where participants can connect, discuss, and organize events related to the Songkran Festival.
Facilitation of Discussions	Facilitates deeper engagement with political and religious issues by enabling discussions and debates among participants.
Organization of Community Initiatives	It enables the coordination of volunteer efforts, cultural performances, and the promotion of local businesses and artisans involved in the festival.
Bridging Physical and Virtual Participation	It helps bridge the gap between physical and virtual participation, creating a more inclusive community.
Enhancing Sense of Community	It fosters a collective identity and enhances social cohesion among festival participants.
Promoting Cultural and Civic Engagement	Supports sustaining cultural traditions and promoting active civic engagement through collaborative initiatives.

3.4 Political Mobilization and Advocacy

A diverse range of opinions are advocated based on their political affiliation and awareness. The social media plays a significant role in creating awareness and running political campaigns to gain followers. Governments and political activists use social media forums to mobilize the population and pass down information about political agendas and slogans to review public issues as quickly as possible (Lasso, 2001). Regarding the festival, social media has been employed to demonstrate, campaign, and discuss political matters with the people (Staggenborg et al., 1993). Apart from the cultural role, governmental use of social media during the Songkran festival seeks to sell political vision and regulate opinions. The Thai government uses social media to spread the messages it wants to convey about its political agenda when disseminating messages regarding the festival, and some of the specific narratives are likely to dominate Thai social media conversations (Yau, 2017). However, this practice has been generally condemned for invading public opinion and merely allowing the expression of views that are in agreement with the ideal laid down by the government (Patamajorn, 2008).

Non-profit organizations, especially religious groups, also use social media while celebrating the Songkran festival to achieve their high-end goals. They apply it in conveying religious information, setting up religious gatherings, and summoning people for different religious functions. This engagement promotes the sharing of religious knowledge and encourages people to participate in religious activities related to this festival (Bertuzzi, 2017). Nevertheless, religious groups' involvement in social media has also attracted controversy because of fear that they may spread radicalism and cause religious hatred. In our research, cases from the Songkran Festival are extracted to explain how social media facilitates the organization of political and religious events. There was a massive protest rally during the last Songkran Festival in April 2020, where the protesters were extended through Facebook and Twitter to stage an anti-government protest. For instance, the #SongkranProtest2020 trends raised people's awareness and created a strong connection with the cause, which meant that people came together (offline) afterwards (Kitirianglarp & Hewison, 2009).

Due to the impact of social media, more people flocked in and developed a strong relationship with the religious institutions they belonged to, thus enriching religious experiences (Cheng, 2022). The possibility of sharing information through social networks is very beneficial but also very unsafe and

unreliable. It makes the dissemination of fake news and trolling possible. Misinformation and radical messages spread fast, the effects of which can be seen in violence exhibited during and after political events (Cable, 2016). Therefore, social media is also very effective for political influence and advocacy, but it needs to be handled carefully to avoid the above effects.

Table 7 reveals the result of the political mobilization and advocacy concerned with the Songkran Festival. This paper seeks to uncover how social media is used to coordinate demonstrations and other actions, political dialogue, and express issues by minority groups. Also, when it comes to the uses of political information, the table presents the features of their fast sharing, the problem of fake news, the possibility of radical viewpoints, and the dangers connected to bullying. This gives a general understanding of the fact that while social media is useful in political mobilization and advocacy, some issues arise that must be dealt with through active advertisement.

Table 7: Political mobilization and advocacy findings

Key aspect	Description
Organization of Protests and Campaigns	Social media is used to organize protests, disseminate political campaigns, and rally support during the Songkran Festival.
Engagement in Political Discourse	Facilitates engagement in political discussions and debates, enhancing participants' political engagement.
Amplification of Marginalized Voices	Enables marginalized groups to share their perspectives and advocate for their causes, democratizing political discourse.
Rapid Dissemination of Information	Allows for the rapid spread of political information, raising awareness and mobilizing participants quickly.
Challenges of Misinformation	The rapid spread of information can lead to misinformation and fake news dissemination.
Potential for Extremist Views	Extending extremist views can lead to polarization and conflict within the community.
Risks of Harassment and Cyberbullying	The anonymous nature of social media can enable harassment and cyberbullying, stifling political discourse.

3.5 Religious Education and Reinforcement

Social media can also be used to instill religious education and encourage the audience to brace for practicing religion in their day-to-day lives. Leaders and organizations can indulge in teachings and interact with audiences through television broadcasts, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. These social media platforms can be used to share sermons, urging the audience to be devout, and encouraging religious commitment. As in the case of Buddhist monks, who provide live-streaming coverage of key festivities and sermons, they facilitate their viewers to join virtually, if not physically (Kitiarsa, 2007). They also encourage creating social-religious groups virtually. People can log into these specific groups and interact via conversations or share relevant stories with others, therefore maintaining their religious identity as substantial (Choe & O'Regan, 2020). For instance, in the Facebook groups of Songkran-affiliated areas, people share information concerning religious activities and can support each other spiritually. It creates unity among them and spiritually connects them in an unbreakable bond.

It is imperative to note that some issues are associated with using social media in religious teaching. This creates the problem of democratized misinformation or unfiltered information to the masses, as professional clergy do not screen these posts (Hackley & Hackley, 2015). This calls for the participants to

source information from other relevant sources to help avoid such misconceptions. Nevertheless, social media continues to be a significant means of religious participation during the celebration of the Songkran Festival. It makes it possible to constantly share religious knowledge and contribute to creating virtual communities that help people in their spiritual quests. This is especially relevant for participants who might have difficulties physically attending the activities due to geographical or time constraints and yet are able to stay engaged with faith due to these platforms (McDowall, 2010).

Moreover, social media is an effective means for real-time interactions and timely updates concerning its guidelines and recommendations. Followers can contribute questions during the live-streaming sessions and get instant answers offered by the speaker, thus increasing their religious knowledge (Kiong & Bun, 2001). It promptly connects them with their spiritual beliefs without relying on any constraints.

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Table 8 indicates the results of religious education and reinforcement by posting on the social network during the Songkran celebration. These four aspects focus on how religious teachings are shared and spread via social media, reaching a wider audience, offering unceasing spiritual guidance, and conducting virtual religious communities. The table also responds to the potential shortcomings, such as the quality and credibility of what one encounters in cyberspace. The lack of a substantial interaction as opposed to the depth of interactions experienced physically is worth noting. Yet the integration of virtual religious practices and actual religious practices contributes remarkably to fostering engagement with one's faith. This paper highlights that social media plays a crucial role in disseminating religious education and nurturing communities. However, there are challenges that may be encountered along the way.

Table 8: Religious education and reinforcement findings

Key aspect	Description
Dissemination of Religious Teachings	Social media platforms are used to share religious teachings and inspirational messages.
Broad Audience Reach	Religious leaders can reach a broader audience through platforms like Facebook and Instagram.
Continuous Spiritual Guidance	Participants receive continuous spiritual guidance and updates on religious events.
Virtual Religious Communities	Social media fosters a sense of community by connecting individuals with shared beliefs.
Quality and Authenticity of Content	The quality and authenticity of online religious content can vary, risking misinformation.
Superficial Engagement Risk	The fast-paced nature of social media can lead to superficial rather than deep engagement.
Balancing Online and Offline Practices	Combining online religious education with offline practices ensures meaningful engagement.

3.6 Influence of Bloggers and Influencers

Social platforms greatly impact people's perceptions and attitudes, allowing bloggers to transform these attitudes by addressing various aspects of the Songkran Festival therefore, by doing so, they can influence public perception of the festival (Cassia & Magno, 2019). The influencers also play a significant role in the political and religious socialization of the festival attendees. Sharing their personal experiences in blog posts, videos, images, or live-streaming of the occasion all inherently amalgamate modern and traditional ways of celebrating the festival by bringing together virtual and physically attending participants. These influencers can also be a source of reflection and revitalizing their Buddhist faith for having a voice that is heard and acknowledged in the virtual world. Using their voice, they can transmit Buddhist culture and inspire and invoke believers and non-believers to appreciate the culture and recognize its values and religious identity. By promoting reverence of Buddhist identity and religion in Thailand worldwide, Thailand's identity as a Buddhist country is fortified. Promoting festival participation is critical, and congruently, bloggers and influencers can effectively mobilize the participants due to the credibility and size of their followers. It can be stated that there are numerous cases where famous bloggers share their experiences in the context of the Songkran Festival, posting the most exciting events and cultural tips with the help of Instagram stories and YouTube videos that can reach thousands of their followers (Ay et al., 2019). This kind of engagement assists in reducing the barriers to the festival's appreciation, thus making it more attractive to the general public.

Similarly, influencers can also engage in promoting political and religious activities taking place in their country. Nevertheless, what influencers share is not absolutely unequivocal unmistakable with bloggers and influencers. Their information is usually created based on personal opinions and, therefore, might not be the reliable truth. This might cause the dissemination of wrong information concerning the festival and anything that may politically or religiously be related to them (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Moreover, interaction with the target audience can be monetarily motivated to promote specific products or agendas, undermining the truthfulness of the presented opinion (Jayasinghe & Soobaroyen, 2009).

However, the influencers' social networking positively influences public engagement towards the celebration of the Songkran Festival (Ay et al., 2019). The social impact of influencers ensures safe participation and opportunities to enhance implied knowledge about cultural activities during the festival (Wright, 2017). Furthermore, the influencers can create value and educate the target audience about the festival. On the other hand, the target audience should not blindly follow the influencers, they should rather critically evaluate the information that has been posted and look for an independent source to confirm such information. The influencers also prove to be a credible source of increasing engagement and awareness, yet the content created and shared by influencers should be taken with a grain of salt (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014).

Table 9 below presents the analysis of the impact of bloggers and influencers on the Songkran Festival' attendees. It highlights the main facets, such as–gaining the audience reach and trust, the engagement with individuals and followers, and the influence on the public perception. Furthermore, the table shows the impact of bloggers and influencers in politics and religious operations or events, simultaneously the risk of news distortion owing to subjective perspectives, and the influence of commercialism and bias forming public opinion and beliefs. This also emphasizes the necessity of

promoting scrutiny of content for the purpose of minimizing risks. This brief overview also highlights the importance of the process of socialization that is fulfilled by influencers and the precautions that should be taken while evaluating the information provided.

Table 9: Influence of bloggers and influencers findings

Key aspect	Description
Reach and Credibility	Influencers' reach and credibility make them powerful agents of socialization.
Personal Connection	Personal connection with followers amplifies the impact of influencers.
Shaping Public Perceptions	Influencers shape public perceptions by sharing personal experiences and opinions.
Influence on Political and Religious Activities	Influencers impact how participants engage with political and religious activities during the festival.
Potential for Misinformation	The subjective nature of influencer content can lead to misinformation.
Commercial Interests and Bias	Commercial collaborations can compromise the authenticity of influencer content.
Encouraging Critical Evaluation	Promoting critical evaluation of influencer content to mitigate risks.

3.7 Governmental Communication and Public Service Announcements

Public announcements and dissemination of governmental information are paramount, with a particular focus on the Songkran Festival in our research. The Thai government and local authorities use social media, particularly Facebook, X (Twitter), and Line messaging, to promptly regulate updates and essential instructions and communicate cultural information about the festival (El Marsafawy, 2019). Such kind of general objectives are envisioned for the strategic use of social media to improve public awareness and to opt for initiatives toward a well-informed population. During the Songkran celebration, the government always provides information and alerts about the traffic conditions, highlights the "no drink-and-drive" campaign, and shares the emergency hotlines. In addition to this, it can be noted that the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation typically sends tweets daily with new statistics on road accidents and advice on precautions to help the public and encourage them to have safer festivals (Park & Ha, 2020). These updates are very helpful in controlling the number of people at the festival and mitigating the risks involved.

Public health also features these tools, such as making announcements to inform the public regarding personal hygiene. Some of the lessons featured on social media by the Ministry of Public Health include how the population can avoid waterborne diseases, mainly when the festival exhibits water-engagement activities for people (Tajuddin & Amalina, 2017). Such announcements are beneficial in reducing any health risks and guaranteeing the participants' health. In addition, governments' utilization of social media to convey information is crucial in preserving culture and imparting relevant knowledge. The Fine Arts Department makes arrangements to offer participants a demonstration on the historical and cultural aspects of Songkran, thereby improving the participants' knowledge, exposure and perception of the event (Aydın, 2016). It equally carries out the role of passing on culture to the younger generations and visitors from other countries.

Nevertheless, the use of social media applications for governmental communication also faces controversies. Social critics argue that the platforms are helpful for the quick dissemination of information. However, they equally enable the spreading of fake news and information and thus erode public trust (Lusińska & Miłoszewska-Podrażka, 2022). Moreover, there are some concerns regarding governmental interference and control, as the authorities can monitor the holiday and limit the freedom of speech during the festival. In terms of holistic benefit, it is interpreted that critical information gets to many people expeditiously, thus contributing to better safety and the embracing of cultures by the population (Naumenko et al., 2019). To get the best out of this strategy, the government has to ensure the provision of the correct information at the right time, while at the same time ensuring that government supervision does not intervene or manipulate the public. The government also devotes itself to these festivals as events to address the general masses to like their activities and amenities and make a general good impression for uplifting their positive image and ensuring acknowledged reception of pro-government activities and agendas.

Table 10 contains the results of governmental dissemination and PSAs during the Songkran. They include discussion on the quick and easy means of communication through social networks for disseminating important information and announcements and the necessity of fast and effective information sharing for safety purposes, discussion on the advantages of the communication of government bodies and people. As for the remaining rows of the table, they look at the opportunities and challenges in using social networks to build trust and increase transparency in the communication process, the problem of misinformation, the issue of the digital divide, and the need for using multiple channels. In summary, this paper has established that social media is an important tool for enhancing the government's communication during the festival.

Table 10: Governmental communication and public service announcements findings

Key aspect	Description
The immediacy and Wide Reach	Social media allows government agencies to share important updates and advisories with a broad audience quickly.
Timely Information Dissemination	Essential for ensuring public safety and adherence to regulations during the Songkran Festival.
Interactive Communication	Enables real-time engagement between government agencies and the public.
Trust and Transparency	Enhances public trust and cooperation through direct communication and feedback.
Misinformation Management	Government agencies must ensure that their messages are clear, accurate, and consistent to prevent confusion.
Addressing the Digital Divide	I am considering disparities in access to social media platforms to ensure inclusive communication.
Multi-channel Communication	We combine social media with traditional media and community outreach to reach all population segments.

3.8 Discussion

The role of social media in the political and religious socialization of Songkran Festival participants is multifaceted and complex. It involves various stakeholders, including the government, religious leaders, and influencers. This discussion critically examines how these entities use social media to shape public perceptions and behaviors and draw on existing research to highlight key trends and issues. Several

researchers have explored participants' political and religious socialization during the Songkran Festival, noting that social media plays a crucial role in this process. The Thai government has been observed to use social media platforms to propagate messages that align with their political interests, subtly promoting nationalism and a unified cultural identity centered around Buddhism (Sivakumaran et al., 2023). This intentional socialization aims to foster a positive image of Thailand as a predominantly Buddhist country, which some scholars have criticized for marginalizing minority groups and suppressing dissenting voices (Serman & Sims, 2020). Religious leaders also utilize social media to reinforce religious teachings and practices among festival participants. Platforms like Facebook and YouTube are used to broadcast sermons and religious ceremonies, ensuring that followers remain engaged with their faith even if they cannot attend in person (Ietto & Pascucci, 2023). This practice helps maintain religious adherence and fosters a sense of community among believers. However, there are concerns about the authenticity and accuracy of religious content disseminated through these platforms, as the democratization of information can spread misinformation (Dhillon, 2023).

Furthermore, the young generation and those featured in blogs and social media significantly influence the public's perception and direct the public's interest in the Songkran Festival. They can utilize their role to promote the festival's cultural values. By sharing their personal experiences about the festivities, they can welcome and encourage more visitors to participate (Derashri & Gogia, 2019). At the same time, leaders can simplify cultural practices and make the festival less exotic. They should objectively deliver information about the festival, as people can be misinformed through social media on purpose (Arvidsson, 2022).

Influencers can be offered compensation to advance the sales of definite commodities or to sell specific agendas that may not be in the public's best interest. This assumes implications for the credibility of the information they circulate and the outlook of the festival (Serman & Sims, 2020). The nature of interaction via social media is also brief and unpredictable. Thus, the engagements created may need more depth and serve as mere tokenism (Cabasal, 2023). However, people engage and actively participate in the Songkran Festival event through social media. The public is mobilized through this social media. The authorities utilize this platform to make announcements, raise public awareness, and pass notices of volunteers' need to sustain cultural activity, which ultimately benefits society.

The subject of the study also examined the role of social media in religious teaching and practices within the context of the Songkran celebration. Religious leaders employ these platforms to deliver sermons and make their teachings accessible to the public. They hold discussions on occasions of significance and spiritual ceremonies and communicate with congregants to guarantee constant religious practice and fellowship (Intason et al., 2021). However, there is a concern for the quality and genuineness of religious information or messages transmitted through this platform, as it can also generate the issue of misinformation and shallow enlightenment (Intason, 2024). Regarding the use of social media platforms in governmental communication during the celebration of the Songkran Festival, it is deferred as tactical and ubiquitous. This social platform serves as the government's tool to release real-time updates, safety measures, and cultural logistics, thereby regulating behavior and safety during celebrations (Supapong, 2017). The Ministry of Public Health of Thailand openly uses social networking sites to disseminate health and hygiene knowledge in the context of the festival. Governmental agencies also contribute to regulating public practices through social networking sites (Timol, 2020). However, the government agency's

consideration of social media has been controversial. The apparent drawback is that free and fast access to information through social networks also means that people are free to engage in the distribution of fake news. In such cases, the population loses confidence (Intason, 2024). Moreover, there are issues regarding excessive government interference, which suggests that these platforms are not being employed to target the betterment of society but are dedicated to monitoring and otherwise managing the population (Huiying, 2017).

4.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has analyzed the role of social media in the political and religious socialization of participants of the Songkran Festival in Thailand. In analyzing social media's impact on socialization, we have discussed six key areas: Information Dissemination and Accessibility, Community Engagement and Participation, Political Mobilization and Advocacy, and Religious Education and Reinforcement. The research identified how social media has affected information influx by making it more accessible, simultaneously encouraging citizenship and participation, increasing political activism, supporting religious learning, and harnessing the power of bloggers and other opinion leaders. These factors highlight the fact that social media cannot be ignored and that it is high time that a proper strategy is devised to tap the potential of social media and, at the same time, constrain the adverse effects that come along with the freedom of social media engagement. For this purpose, the government should take the initiative and encourage programs to teach people how to think critically about the information they receive from social media. This includes the shift towards fact-checking and looking for reliable sources for confirmation. This may assist in curbing the dissemination of wrong information.

Similarly, equal access to digitally interactive platforms is crucial to overcoming the digital divide and expanding social media usage across the population. Religious leaders can use social media platforms to share relevant and credible content to help extend authentic religious teachings and information that will act as a countermeasure against misleading information. Promoting engagement by complementing online religious discussion panels to address people's queries is possible. Therefore, creating virtual religious communities via social networking platforms can promote religious practices, bring believers closer to their faith, and provide enriching religious experiences. Social media influencers also substantially impact political and religious socialization among Songkran festival participants in Thailand. Social media influencers should adhere to the principles of openness and honesty. However, they should ensure that their content is genuine and not biased or subjected to some agenda under the influence of any political or social motive. Responsible content creation and moderation should be encouraged so the influencers-are aware of the impact they have in influencing public opinion regarding political and religious issues and their role in propagating tolerant dialogue. Further work can be initiated to better comprehend the overall impact of social media on political and religious socialization among the general masses and the Songkran festival's masses of Thailand.

5.   PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The impact of social media on the political and religious socialization of the festival's attendees endorses some implications. These implications concern several types of stakeholders. Government officials, preachers of religion, and social media influencers are all intricately connected with social media engagement. Therefore, it is important to use social media for the benefit and welfare of society. Religious

leaders can use social media to reach out to the public, encourage the spirit of festivity, and defer the spiritual context of the Songkran Festival. Their authentic and well-versed sermons can be a source of mitigating ignorance in society as well as counter the escalating misinformation in spiritual disciplines. Furthermore, holding virtual correspondence with the public in discussions uplifts their connection with their faith and becomes a source of enlightenment that drives them to adhere to their religious practices. Through this approach, the purity of religious doctrines will always be upheld, and believers will get the right spiritual direction they seek. Likewise, the accuracy of the information disseminated by government officials is essential. It should be accurate and reliable. The appropriate measures should be taken against the perpetration of fake news and ensure that the government is equipped with the tools to help the community acquire the means to assess the difference between genuine and fake news. This will consequently help alleviate the distrust.

Another stakeholder that deserves to be discussed is the community. The independence of the community organizers entails the use of social media to mobilize volunteers to celebrate the Songkran festival or cultural events and to advertise the products of the local artisans based in Thailand. Many people prefer organized groups and pages where one can easily follow and participate in conversations and integrate oneself into the collective cultural activity. This collectivism derives an inherent connection and bonding in the community. This virtual participation enhances the impact of (religious/political) socialization among the engaged community. Participation through social media platforms also increases the degree of engagement and thus undeniably influences the masses and the masses' mobility.

Regarding the Songkran festival, social media influencers influence public perceptions and attitudes. Owing to an extensive followership, they have an ethical responsibility to ensure the dissemination of correct and culturally valuable information about the festival. Thus, when influencers collaborate with reliable sources and organizations, they can always pass helpful information to their followers. There is also an increasing need to demystify affiliate links as they indicate that a third party paid for specific content. Being acquainted with the judgment to distinguish will avoid misleading an audience. In this way, influencers not only contribute to making the festival more accessible but also suppress the circulation of fake content propagated by unreliable sources.

Due to the significance and cultural attributes of the Songkran festival, it should be introduced into the educational curriculum. It will evoke a deeper appreciation of the festival and the related symbols and gestures. Social media strategies could be taught in institutions to develop and enrich students' cultural and social perspectives. Through this exposure, learners' use of social media to render content for instructional purposes will develop scholarly culture and deepen the understanding of how social media platforms can solely be used for the welfare of society. Furthermore, this curriculum can also be employed when developing students' critical thinking abilities by differentiating between reliable and unreliable information sources. By incorporating social media literacy into education, the institutions will appropriately equip learners to handle new-age social media platforms. Furthermore, when it comes to future research possibilities, conducting longitudinal studies and cross-cultural comparative analysis can help understand social media's specific and general utility. In addition, examining the influence of emerging technologies on social media engagement can provide a timely and relevant analysis of the potential trajectories of digital socialization and its impact on the political and social paradigms of the ever-encompassing population.

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