THAI SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL

PRACTICES AND DEFINITION OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY PERCEIVED BY

THEIR AUDIENCES DURING THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19

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<u>Thai Social Media Influencers' International Social Practices and Definition of Source

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ABSTRACT

       This study identified Thai macro and micro social media influencers' social

practices that are connected to global trends and definition of source credibility

perceived by their audiences during the Thai Government's lockdown period due to

the outbreaks of COVID-19. The study was driven by the theory of self-presentation

and two-step flows. Ten in-depth interviews with informants in the Millennial

Generation who had followed Thai macro-influencers (100,000 to 1,000,000

followers) and micro-influencers (10,000 to 100,000 followers) on social media for at

least 6 months showed four social practices that were connected to global trends;

revealing stay-at-home activities, showing concern for audiences' well-being,

performing intimacy with closed ones, and replaying past performance. The perceived

trustworthiness was reflected in the content that showed influencers' ability to provide

clear explanation and honesty. The perceived expertise was reflected in the content

that showed influencers' experiences in the field of their expertise, skills, and

knowledge. The perceived attractiveness was reflected in positive personality,

presentability, and beautiful relationships with influencers' loved ones.

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Last but not the least, I am extremely grateful to my parents for their love. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to them for encouragement when the times got rough.

<div align="right">Wirassanan Tuengtin</div>

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INTRODUCTION

The first chapter introduces subjects related to the research topic, Thai social media influencers' international social practices, and definition of source credibility perceived by their audiences during the outbreak of COVID-19. Chapter 1 includes background, rationale and problem statement, research questions, objectives of the study, scope of the study, the significance of the study, and definition of terms.

1.1 Background

People around the world use social media to receive and spread information. According to the digital 2020 global overview report by We Are Social, Kemp (2020a) stated that there were 4.5 billion internet users and 3.8 billion social media users around the world in January 2020. That means nearly 60 percent of the world's population is online.

Within a population of 69.13 million people in Thailand in January 2020 ("Thailand Population," n.d.), there were 52 million internet users and 52 million social media users in Thailand (Kemp, 2020b). The number of social media users in Thailand increased by 2.3 million (+4.7%) between April 2019 and January 2020 (Kemp, 2020b). As audiences enjoy consuming new media in the digital world, businesses are trying to catch up by moving to online platforms (Norcross, 2019). Businesses and brands see social media as one of the important aspects of digital marketing, as it provides incredible benefits that help to reach target segments in the most effective way.

The impact of social media consumption habits has led to a marketing transition in which brands are using influencers to market their brands on social media. Brands across multiple sectors around the world have split marketing budgets to allocate an increasing share to a partnership with social media influencers (Brander, 2020). It leads to consumers in today's modern world to use social media as a source of information.

Thai millennials trust in influencers at the same level as professional experts but below their family and friends (Wells, 2018). This is due to Thai consumers love being active and interacting with social media influencers. Therefore, according to studies influencer marketing in Thailand performs particularly well compared to traditional advertisements in creating awareness (Wells, 2018). The top three platforms that Thai millennials used in 2018 for interacting with influencers were YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (Wells, 2018). Most brands access their target audiences by concentrating on those 3 platforms.

According to a study by Vero (2018), 83 percent of Thai millennials and Gen Z in 2018 followed at least 4 social media influencers and 94 percent consumed content from influencers on social media at least once per week (Wells, 2018). 74 percent of Thai millennials trusted a brand more if influencers talk about it on their social media channels, 85 percent wanted to see their influencers using the product they advertise, and 59 percent had made a purchase according to social media influencers' recommendation (Wells, 2018).

Thai millennials and Gen Z believed influencers are sincere; 46 percent of them believe social media influencers created content from their passion and honestly want to share their lives and knowledge. Only 26 percent of them thought influencers

do content on social media for money and another 15 percent said it is for fame and recognition (Wells, 2018).

1.2 Rationale and Problem Statement

Since the last quarter of 2019, the world has been attacked by the most recently discovered Coronavirus causing coronavirus disease COVID-19 ("Q&A on coronaviruses," 2020), and it changed the world from what we used to know. The coronavirus outbreak has been labeled a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) ("WHO Director-General," 2020) because the virus has killed tons of people in many countries around the world. As of 12:16 pm in the CEST time zone on 18 July 2020, WHO announced that there have been confirmed cases globally of COVID-19, including 591,666 deaths, reported to WHO ("WHO Coronavirus," n.d.).

The disease primarily spreads from one person to another through small droplets from the nose or mouth when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or speaks ("Q&A on coronaviruses," 2020). Therefore, keeping physical distance "at least one meter away from others" ("Q&A on coronaviruses," 2020) has been recommended.

The transition to business lockdown and closure of countries' borders in order to strengthen controlling COVID-19 spreading is complex and different from country to country. There is no one size fits all approach ("WHO/Europe," 2020). At least nine-tenths (91%) of the world's population, or 7.1 billion people (Connor, 2020), live in countries where they have a lockdown policy by restricting people who come from foreign countries.

In Thailand, the Bangkok Governor temporarily closed high-risk areas that attract large crowds such as department stores, restaurants, arenas, hairdressers, swimming pools, which are among the 26 venue types closed through April 12 ("COVID-19," 2020) from March 21 to minimize movements of people. Schools and universities, along with many entertainment and recreation venues, were shut earlier (Nguyen & Yuvejwattana, 2020). The Emergency Decree was applied nationwide, banning the entry of foreigners from March 26 (Boonlert & Sattaburuth, 2020) until July 31, 2020 (COVID-19, 2020). The Emergency Decree has affected lives in other provinces as well (Boonlert & Sattaburuth, 2020). People in Thailand were banned from being outside their residences from 10 pm to 4 am nationwide between April 3 to 30, 2020 ("Prayut to mull lifting curbs," 2020).

No one would ever have thought that we could experience the phenomena of a virus that affects the new way of living. People have a new normal for how they work, live, and interact with other people. In some countries, they cannot go into public places without masks. It seems the people may have to live in the new normal for a very long time (Y.L.M., 2020). Supply chains of businesses have been interrupted by the virus, retailers have temporarily closed their businesses, consumers across the globe are looking at products and brands through a new lens ("COVID-19: Fast-changing," 2020). Even so, the main marketing objective is the same, which is sending the right message through the right messengers to the right audience ("Influencer Marketing During COVID-19," 2020b).

Brands have had to re-evaluate their marketing and communication strategies to consider how they can have a dialogue with their audiences during this time of uncertainty (Brander, 2020). One of the best ways of doing so is with influencer

marketing (Wiley, 2020) because people spend more time online during COVID-19 as the result of the Governments' lockdown policy in most countries around the world in order to flatten the curve of virus spreading.

According to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC) (2020), the statistics of Thai consumers' average usage in megabytes on social and e-marketplace platforms from January to February 2020 showed that people's engagement through social media and e-marketplace platforms rose sharply (Tortermvasana, 2020). Social media in Thailand like Twitter reported a 266% surge, followed by Line (154%), Facebook (93.8%), and YouTube (82.1%) (Tortermvasana, 2020).

With the lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the importance of influencer culture has become even more apparent (Jordan, 2020). However, brands and influencers around the world have been hard at work collaborating across all of social media to produce engaging and useful content at scale ("Influencer Marketing During COVID-19," 2020b). Social media influencers have faced sponsorship decline, due to brands needing to adjust their budgets in order to survive during the Government's lockdown period. Fewer partner opportunities due to cancellations mean fewer campaigns and projects altogether, the travel industry is inclined to freeze budgets more than the beauty industry which might actually be doing the opposite and injecting more budget into online sales ("Staying viral," 2020). It's clear that social media influencers are encountering multiple challenging scenarios over the COVID-19 pandemic. It is likely that followers are still checking in on their favorite social media influencers ("Staying viral," 2020), to seek inspiration, education, and a distraction from the world outside because their daily lives have been disrupted, such

as going to the gym, traveling with friends, and going to entertainment venues. They naturally head to social media to see how others, similar to themselves, are filling their time, and what recommendations they have to share.

Thai influencers could make it work if they can find the best social practices during the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic to present on their social media or connect to the global trend of influencers. Hashtags like #StayHome and #WashHands are digital hubs where content creators around the world have discussed their social practices and shared useful tips on how to navigate the situation and this is reflected across all social media platforms. Conversation containing #StayHome has spiked since February 15th, 2020 on Twitter ("Influencer Marketing During COVID-19," 2020a). Influencers around the world have grown the trend of live streaming on social media channels as it is a safe way to stay connected with their audiences during the outbreak of COVID-19.

Moreover, some global influencers have continued to encourage their audiences to embrace the pause, just like Jodenny @theyoungsmiths, an Instagram influencer from Brooklyn, USA., who invested her time into mindfulness and relaxation ("Why Influencer Marketing," 2020). Jodenny stayed active on her Instagram by sharing ideas for incorporating family members into creative activities to increase mental health during an uncertain time ("Why Influencer Marketing," 2020). Lavendaire engaged her audiences on YouTube and Instagram with messages of self-love and personal improvement ("Why Influencer Marketing," 2020). She also recommended doing new things like learning a new language and organizing a house. Some global influencers have stopped posting about cruises and travel abroad in Asia, instead of reposting old content or offering staycation guides ("Influencer Marketing

During COVID-19," 2020a). At the same time, consumers have changed the priorities of their purchasing. They have centered on the most basic needs, hygiene, cleaning, and staples products soaring, while non-essential categories slump ("COVID-19: Fast-changing," 2020). There was concern about whether or not influencers would still be able to produce content while on lockdown (Jordan, 2020). The challenge for brands and social media influencers in Thailand has caused the researcher's attention on how they will bring fresh content to their audiences and be able to connect with global trends, how social media influencers can truly differentiate themselves during COVID-19, and how effective they can impact the audiences' perception under a limited environment.

1.3 Research Questions

     RQ1: What are international social practices used by Thai macro-influencers and micro-influencers on social media during the Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak?

     RQ2: How do Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness?

     RQ3: How do Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived expertise?

     RQ4: How do Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived attractiveness?

1.4 Objective of the Study

 1.4.1 To explore international social practices used by Thai macro-influencers and micro-influencers on social media during the Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

 1.4.2 To explore how Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness.

 1.4.3 To explore how Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived expertise.

 1.4.4 To explore how Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived attractiveness.

1.5 Scope of the Study

 This research aims to explore social practices that are connected to global trends that Thai macro-influencers and micro-influencers used on social media during the Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and the definition of source credibility perceived by their audiences during the outbreaks of COVID-19.

 By referring to macro social media influencers, their audience size is between 100,000 followers to a million followers ("Social Media Influencer Marketing in Thailand," 2020), and by referring to micro social media influencers, their audience ranges from 10,000 to 100,000 ("Social Media Influencer Marketing in Thailand," 2020).

 The informants of this study aged between 26-40 years old which falls into the Millennial Generation ("Boomers, Gen X," 2020). They followed the influencers for at least 6 months (since January 2020) on various social media platforms. The

research relied on grounded theory, which allowed the researcher to find out and

conceptualize the potential social practices and the informants' perception of source

credibility.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings can be significant and interesting to various sectors as per below:

1.6.1 Academicians and scholars

This study can be used to facilitate further research that is related to influencer

marketing and other sectors. The study provides data, related theories, and findings

that can be used to carry out similar studies.

1.6.2 Companies and organizations

First, the research findings can benefit brands and businesses in Thailand by

providing useful information that helps understand consumers' perception and

mindset during a crisis like COVID-19. It is crucial to understand the mindset of

consumers during this vulnerable time. Hence, the way Thai macro and micro social

media influencers communicate with audiences should be in the appropriate tone. It is

the responsibility of both parties, brands, and influencers, to work together to carry

out the best communication strategy today and to prepare for what's next.

1.6.3 Consumers

From this study, consumers can get the benefits that help them understand the

theory behind the performance of influencers and marketing strategy. The study

shows how Thai macro-influencers, micro-influencers, and brands used the

consumers' interests to engage them on social media. Additionally, consumers can

point out the struggles and the adaptations that the influencers have been going

through during the times of the Government's lockdown period due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

1.7 Definition of Terms

 1.7.1 Coronavirus is a large family of viruses that may cause illness in animals or humans ("Q&A on coronaviruses," 2020).

 1.7.2 COVID-19 is a new Coronavirus disease, which the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 ("Q&A on coronaviruses," 2020).

 1.7.3 Social distancing refers to a social practice to protect self from getting COVID-19 by keeping at least 1-meter physical distance from others ("Q&A on coronaviruses," 2020).

 1.7.4 Lockdown refers to restricting the movement of people and services to their essentials, which mass quarantining is a part ("What is lockdown?," 2020).

 1.7.5 Influencer marketing refers to a form of marketing that brands use key individuals or influencers to create content to effectively communicate and market their products or services to target audiences (Mindruta, 2017).

 1.7.6 Social media influencer refers to third party people who have the power to shape audiences by using social media platforms (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

 1.7.7 Mega-influencers are those who have a main job as professional actors, artists, athletes, or top models, etc. They monetize their influence as a secondary source of income ("Influencer Marketing in Thailand," n.d.). They have more than a million followers ("Social Media Influencer Marketing in Thailand," 2020).

1.7.8 Macro-influencers are those who earn their living as an influencer ("Influencer Marketing in Thailand," n.d.). The size of their audience is between 100,000 followers to a million followers ("Social Media Influencer Marketing in Thailand," 2020).

1.7.9 Micro-influencers are consumers who have relevant influence and may not know it ("Influencer Marketing in Thailand," n.d.). Their followers range from 10,000 to 100,000 ("Social Media Influencer Marketing in Thailand," 2020).

1.7.10 Brand advocates are consumers who are passionate and willing to share information about products but have little influence ("Influencer Marketing in Thailand," n.d.).

1.7.11 Followers refers to social media users who follow influencers and interact with them.

1.7.12 Two-step flow is a theory in the communication field that Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet formulated in 1948. The model of the theory explains that information flows from the media to key opinion leaders who tend to be more exposed to media messages and who exert personal influence on the opinions and attitudes of others (Katz & Lazarsfeild, 1995) before going to audiences.

1.7.13 Self-presentation is a theory in the communication field that Erving Goffman developed in 1956. He implied that everyone is considered as an actor who performs in the world which is considered as a stage to impress audiences. The theory illustrates an actor's performances in the front stage and backstage. The front stage is where an actor is conscious of being observed by an audience. The actor will perform to those watching by preserving certain rules and social conventions (Bullingham &

Vasconcelos, 2013). The backstage is where the actor has informal talk and relax

roles, or they are not posting on social media (Artino, 2019).

      1.7.14 Source credibility (Ohanian) is a theory in the communication field that

Roobina Ohanian developed in 1990. The measurement of source credibility under

this theory has 3 dimensions, including trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness

(Ohanian, 1991). Ohanian (1990) described that trustworthiness refers to

dependability, honesty, reliability, sincere, trustworthy, and believability. Expertise

refers to an endorser's experience, skill, knowledge, and qualification. Attractiveness

refers to similarity, familiarity, and the likeability of sources.
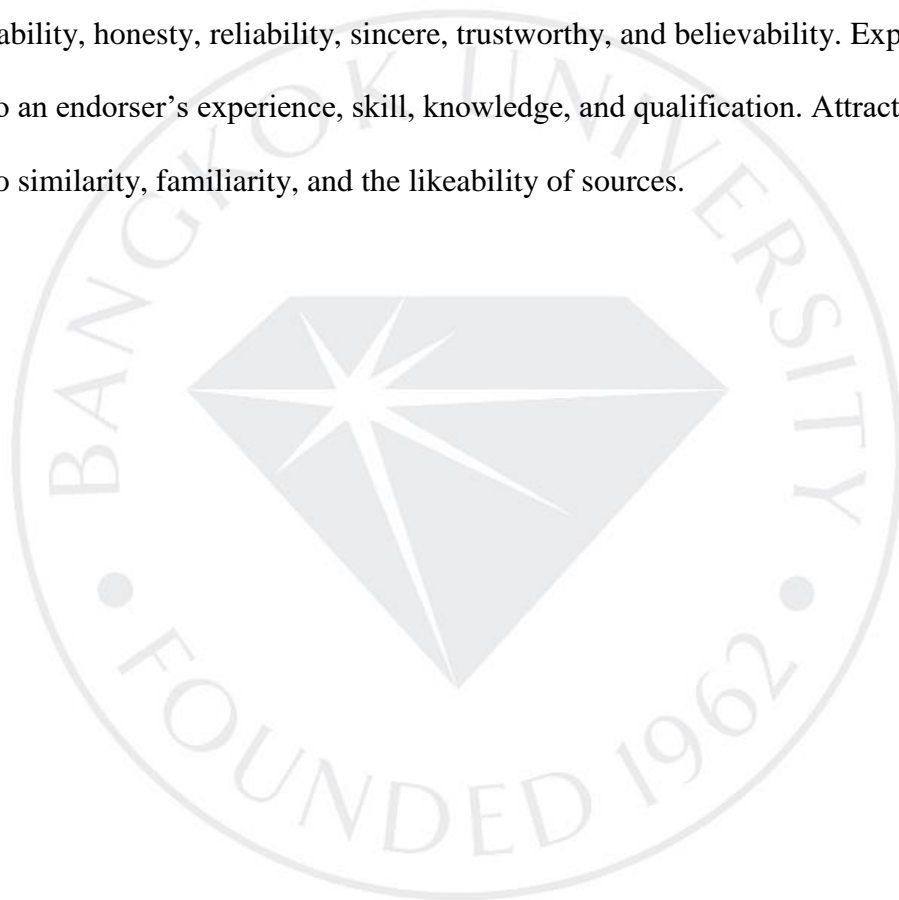
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews related literature and theory connecting to the topic of the study. Chapter two includes the history of influencers in Thailand, categories of social media influencers, related theories namely self-presentation theory, two-step flow theory, source credibility theory, as well as knowledge gap, and conceptual framework.

2.1 Related Literature

2.1.1 History of Influencers in Thailand

In the past several years, young Thai people were attracted to a new kind of social media stars (Wells, 2018). The social media stars or influencers have been defined by many vernacular terms in Thailand. Limkangvanmongkol & Abidin (2018) stated that one of these is a net idol, shortened from internet idol. They have appeared frequently on both traditional media and social media in Thailand. Net idols are outstanding by their "admiration and adoration" (Limkangvanmongkol & Abidin, 2018, p. 96). In the beginning, they were the type of schoolgirls who were famous in school because of their loveliness, their peers started to talk about them, then they emerged to web communities and online discussion forums such as dek-d.com around the mid-2000s ("What is a net idol?," 2012; Limkangvanmongkol & Abidin, 2018).

The net idols are unlike an internet celebrity, but they are people who achieve celebrity status through the internet. Not only does their loveliness make them become net idols, but many of them have talents and interesting lifestyles that are

admirable by audiences (Limkangvanmongkol & Abidin, 2018). Thus, the audiences follow or keep watching them for the purpose of imitation.

Marketers in Thailand have picked net idols and assigned them as seeds or initial consumers to publicize messages about new products or services to build brand awareness, engage, and purchase persuasions on traditional media (Limkangvanmongkol & Abidin, 2018). When Thailand first adjusted to the digital world, the net idols were a group of people who use social media to present their attitudes, experiences, activities in daily life, and special abilities to share with others (Taweephol & Nakpathom, 2017). Their popularity has increased on online platforms, therefore, mobilized themself to work with brands to advertise products or services on their social media channels, which evolved them into a commercial form of micro-celebrity or influencers (Abidin, 2016).

2.1.2 Categories of Social Media Influencers in Thailand

Influencers are unlike celebrities, they can be anywhere and they can be anyone ("What is Influencer Marketing?", 2020). Most influencers operate in a specific subsection, be it food or fashion (Jordan, 2020). The social media influencer landscape in Thailand can be identified by four types ("Influencer Marketing in Thailand," n.d.):

Mega-influencers are those who have a frame like celebrities, professional actors, top models, or athletes ("Influencer Marketing in Thailand," n.d.). They normally earn income from some other ways and being influencers is a source of secondary income, for example, Urassaya Sperbund. They have more than a million followers ("Social Media Influencer Marketing in Thailand," 2020).

Macro-influencers are people who mainly work with brands to advertise products or services to the public and earn income from brands. The size of their audiences is normally between 100,000 followers to a million followers ("Social Media Influencer Marketing in Thailand," 2020). This type includes professional bloggers, creators, or journalists, for example, Noppaluck Kulthawatchai.

Micro-influencers are consumers who have the power to influence a group of audiences who have followed them or been in their social media circle, their followers range from 10,000 to 100,000 ("Social Media Influencer Marketing in Thailand," 2020).

Brand advocates are consumers who have used and are passionate about products and services, they are therefore willing to share but have little influence ("Influencer Marketing in Thailand," n.d.).

2.2 Related Theories

The groundwork of some forms of communication can be explained by theories. Communication is an art and might be complex. The following are the theories that relate to this study.

2.2.1 Two-step Flow Theory

The two-step flow theory was formulated in 1948 by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet ("Magic Bullet," 2014). The theory was first published in the book called "The people's choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign" ("Magic Bullet," 2014). The initiation of the theory was from analyzing the decision-making process of voters in the U.S. presidential election in

1940 (Postelnicu, 2016). Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaude wanted to find out whether messages from mass media practically influence voting decisions among people ("Lazarfeld's Two Step Flow," 2016). They found that people mention a message more frequently if it is delivered from personal contact than a message delivered from mass media (Tizio, n.d.).

The theory is opposite to the magic bullet theory or one-step flow. The magic bullet theory was developed in mid-1930 ("Magic Bullet," 2014). The theory suggested that the media is powerful and it influences directly the public like being injected with a hypodermic needle.

The two-step flow explains that interpersonal interaction affects more than mass media outlets on shaping public opinion (Postelnicu, 2016). The flowing of messages from media to the public is mediated by opinion leaders who have the power to influence people's attitudes and opinions (Katz, & Lazarsfeld, 1955).
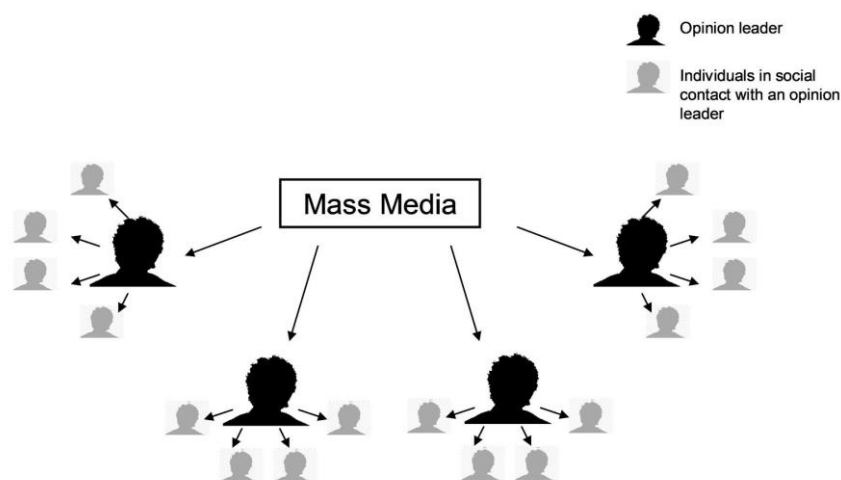
Figure 2.1: Illustration of Two-step Flow Theory

Source: Communication Theory. (n.d.). *Two Step Flow Theory*. Retrieve from

www.communicationtheory.org/two-step-flow-theory-2

The method that opinion leaders use is picking up information from the media

then they pass the information to audiences who are less active in searching for

information from the media (Postelnicu, 2016). In 1955, Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu

Katz collaborated to further develop the book called "Personal Influence" (Postelnicu,

2016). The book explains that people who have power in influencing audiences'

reactions and perceptions are social environments, such as family, friends, and

professional associations of the audiences.

It has been many years that advertisers utilize word-of-mouth from opinion

leaders to influence target audiences to buy their products (Lamb, n.d.). There have

been so many campaigns set out to use personal influence by targeting opinion

leaders, which is the flow of communication that meets the two-step flow theory.

2.2.2 Self-presentation Theory

Erving Goffman (1922–1982), a Canadian sociologist and social psychologist

(Artino, 2019), found the theory of self-presentation from writing his first, and most

famous, book "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life", which was first published

in 1956 and revised in 1959 (Tan, 2014). He got inspiration from William

Shakespeare who compared life as a theatre. Goffman adopted the inspiration into

self-presentation theory. He implied that everyone is considered as an actor and lives

on the stage, which is considered as a world, and the actor makes the impression of

their performance on an audience. The theory is a theatrical metaphor that explains

that communicators present the self in two main concepts (Tan, 2014). The first is that "All the World's a Stage" which was a poem written by William Shakespeare for the play "As You Like It" in 1599 or 1600 which he described the world from a theatrical point of view surrounding the seven ages of humanity from infancy to old age, and the other is the "Performer".

Goffman analyzed how individuals perform in order to impress audiences by using the theatrical comparison between the front stage and backstage behavior of the performers (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). The front is a performance to the public's eyes, where people act certain personas as they would like others to view them (Artino, 2019). Performers in the front stage adapt themselves to fit with social standards and have a role to communicate any messages in an acceptable manner. Backstage is an environment where performers have relaxed roles or they are not posting on social media (Artino, 2019). Performance in the backstage seems to be a more truthful type of performance (Barnhart, n.d.).

Self-presentation

Front stage

e.g., Instagram uploads, profile information

Backstage

e.g., Instant messaging

Boundary

Dramatic interaction. The user's
audience, e.g., followers and 'friends'

Informal talk and a relaxed role
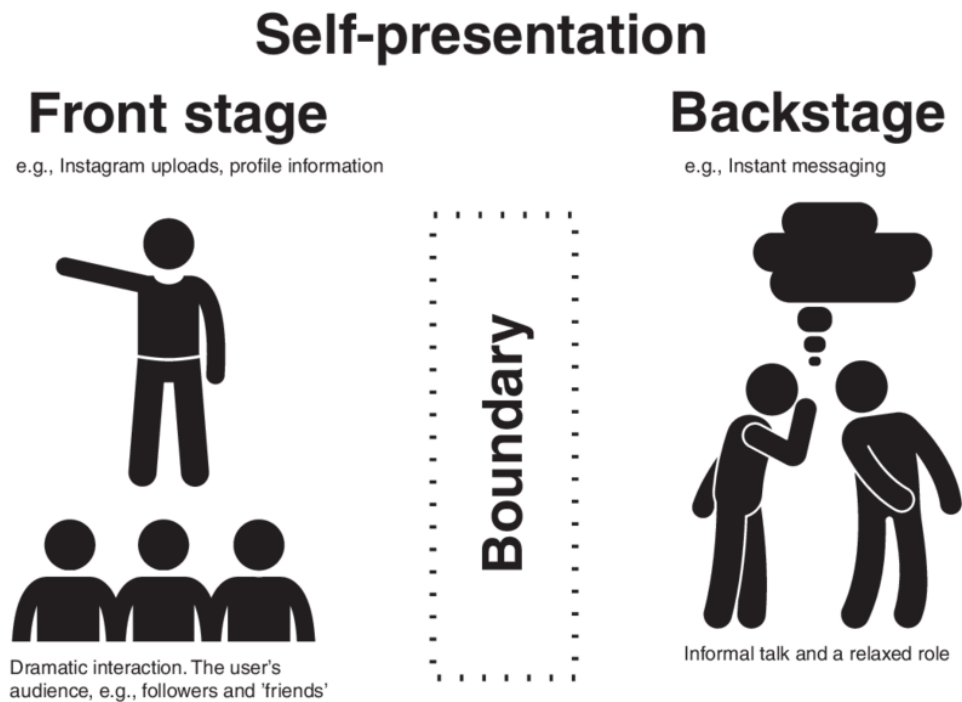
Figure 2.2: Illustration of Self-presentation Theory

Source: Holmberg, C., Berg, C., Hillman, T., Lissner, L., & Chaplin, J. (2018). Self-
presentation in digital media among adolescent patients with obesity: Striving
for integrity, risk-reduction, and social recognition. *Digital Health*, 4, 1-15.
doi: 10.1177/2055207618807603

Under the self-presentation theory, Goffman also developed a framework of
impression management. He described people presenting their images according to
how they think their audiences want to see them face-to-face (Solomon, Solomon,
Joseph, & Norton, 2013). The theory of self-representation has become groundwork
to a wider understanding of social media users' behavior and motivation and also
known as impression management (Merunková & Šlerka, 2019). His theory is very

useful in especially aiming at explaining hidden images or imperfection that any human hides on social networks (Artino, 2019).

Goffman's key point is people's awareness about the different scenarios of the front, and backstage (Artino, 2019). However, Sweetser & Keshelashvili (2005) explained that any kind of content that is presented on social media remains a virtual environment controlled by the author where, unlike face-to-face communication, a person is only what is expressed in manifest content. On social media, influencers use strategic communication by shifting between multiple personae and tailor their self-presentation to form quality performance (Abidin, 2015).

2.2.3 Source Credibility (Ohanian)

Source credibility is an important factor for communication effectiveness (Pornpitakpan, 2003). The theory refers to positive characteristics that impact the acceptance and persuasiveness of influencers during the process of advertising (Li & Yiyi, 2018). Influencers, advertisers, advertisements, websites are usually related to source credibility theory. In 1990, Ohanian developed source credibility theory by adopting studies of Hovland and Weiss in 1952 and Hovland et al. in 1953 (Bhatt, Jayswal, & Patel, 2013) to identify credibility to measure source. The scholars identified sources of credibility by two factors; expertise and trustworthiness. Thirty years later, McGuire (1985) suggested attractiveness in the source valence model which is another factor that audiences can perceive from communicators (Bhatt, Jayswal, & Patel, 2013).

Ohanian's theory has three dimensions; trust, expertise, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1991). The source credibility significantly impacts audiences' attitudes, intentions, and behavior.
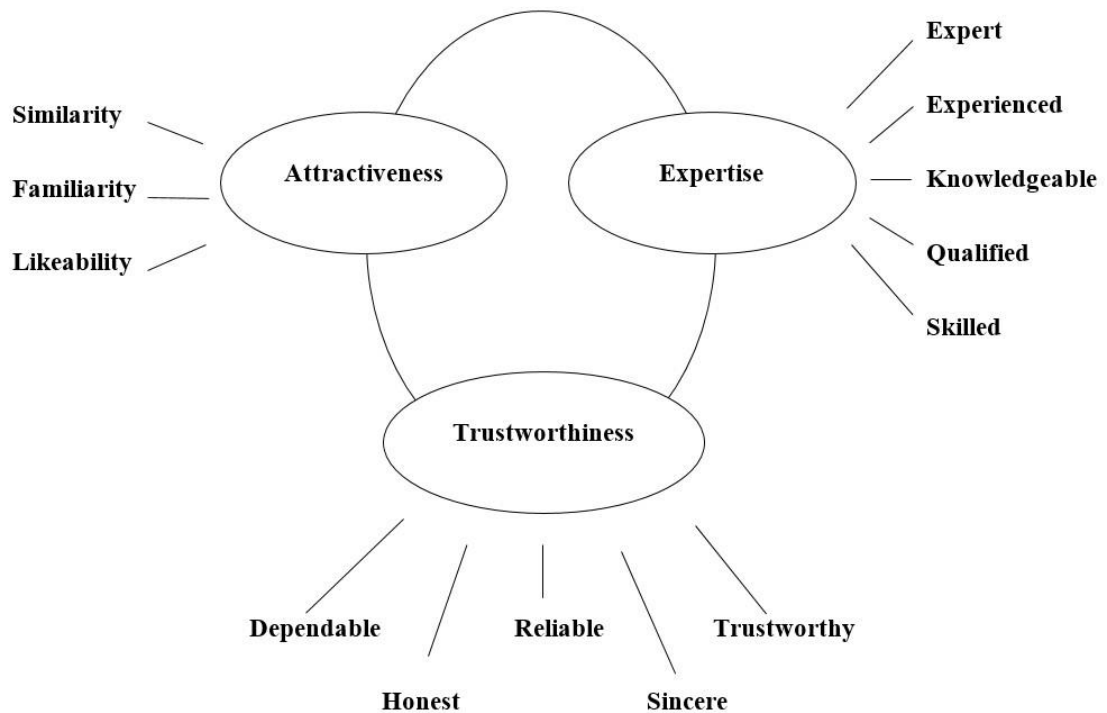
Figure 2.3: Illustration of the Ohanian Model of Source Credibility

Source: Canning L. (2006). *Celebrity endorsement in business markets*. Retrieved

from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Douglas_West7/publication/2284

73725_celebrity_endorsement_in_business_markets/links/5523a7890cf

2881f4e3a7290.pdf

Ohanian (1990) explained that trustworthiness refers to dependability, honesty, reliability, sincere, trustworthy, and believability. Influencers who have more trustworthiness, their message will be more effective and the receiver will be more

integrated. However, the perceived reliability makes social media influencers different from other types of endorsers, because audiences feel that influencers are more common and down-to-earth than other celebrities who have large popularity of fans and internet following (Fastenau, 2018).

Expertise is another factor under source credibility by Ohannian. This dimension refers to an endorser's experience, skill, knowledge, qualifications, etc. The perceived expertise of endorsers is very important as it can persuade audiences' purchase intentions rather than their trustworthiness and attractiveness (Bhatt, Jayswal, & Patel, 2013). Consumers tend to purchase complex and expensive products when the products were recommended or presented by endorsers who are experts (Friedman & Friedman, 1979).

Ohanian (1990) described attractiveness as similarity, familiability, and likeability of sources. Audiences tend to find any endorsers attractive when they seem to resemble the endorsers. The similarity of sources and audiences can be similar in interest, lifestyle, and desire, while familiarity is explained as sources' knowledge that is exposed and it attracts audiences (Ohanian, 1991). Likeability in attractiveness of Ohanian's theory is about physical appearance, behavior or other personal traits (Belch & Belch, 2000). Serban (2010) explained the attractiveness of endorsers is shown as beauty, elegance, and style.

2.3 Knowledge Gap Found from Past Studies

It seems to show that the importance of influencer culture has become even more apparent (Jordan, 2020) during the lockdown period due to the world pandemic, COVID-19. However, the researcher questioned how Thai social media influencers'

social practices are connected to global trends and the definition of source credibility as perceived by their audiences during the Thai Government's lockdown period due to the pandemic. The researcher reviewed past research and had not found the literature that examines the relations between Thai social media influencers, global social practices, and source credibility perceived by Thai audiences during the Thai Government's lockdown period due to the pandemic. Therefore, the researcher conducted this study to aim at the findings that are significant.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 2.4 shows the framework to help readers illustrate the relationship of variables and to the virtual boundary and structure of the research broadly.
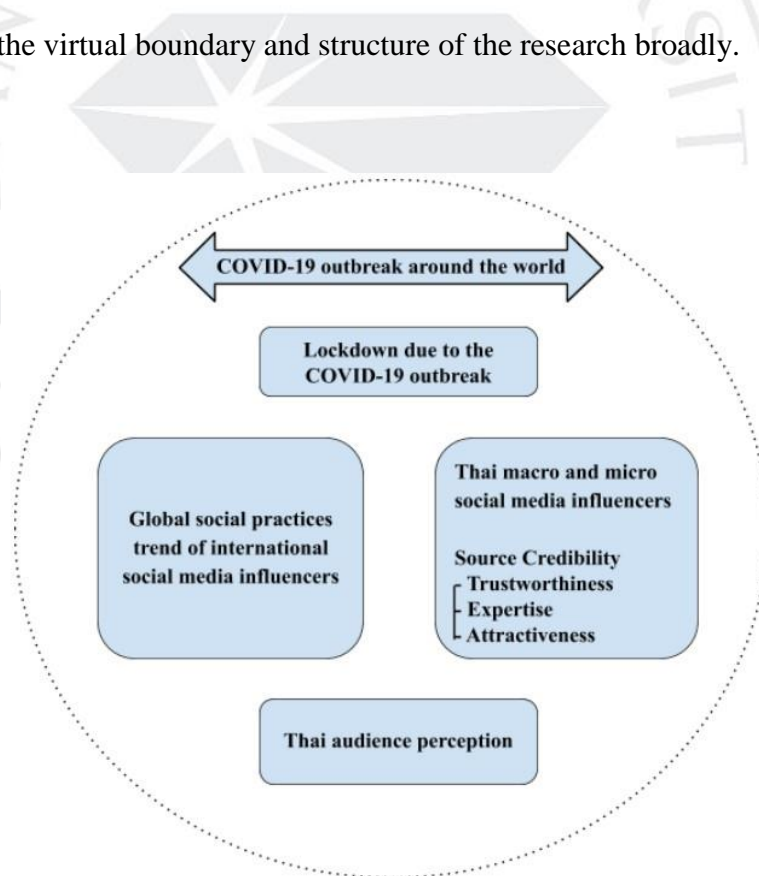
Figure 2.4: Conceptual Framework of the Study

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains how the researcher used qualitative research
methodology to study on Thai social media macro and micro-influencers'
international social practices and the definition of source credibility perceived by their
audiences during the outbreak of COVID-19. This chapter consists of a research
design, study population, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This study relied on an inductive research approach which aims to generate
meanings from collected data to identify Thai macro and micro social media
influencers' social practices that are connected to global trends and definition of
source credibility perceived by their audiences during the Thai Government's
lockdown period due to the outbreaks of COVID-19 and to construct a theoretical
analysis from the data. Under the inductive approach, the researcher was not
prevented from using existing theories to formulate the research questions that the
researcher wanted to explore (Dudovskiy, n.d.). The inductive approach is also
associated with qualitative research methodology.

The researcher used a qualitative method in order to answer the research
questions of this study. The qualitative research method was used in the format of in-
depth interviews for primary information. The method is very useful when it comes to
studying consumer perception, engagement, behavior, and decision (Reddy, 2019).
The in-depth interview, therefore, helped the researcher to understand how the

informants derive meaning from their surroundings to respond to the questions. This study believes the in-depth interview for the primary information can examine the communication phenomenon.

3.2 Study Population

Before collecting data, the researcher focused on specific characteristics of a population that were of interest ("Positive sampling," n.d.). Therefore, a group of individuals for this study for data collection were selected based on purposive sampling or judgmental sampling technique, which provides the researcher with the justification to make generalizations from the sampling ("Positive sampling," n.d.). The sampling in this study is not representative of the whole population, but it is for the researcher to pursue qualitative methods research designs.

The sampling units were selected based on the researcher's "judgment of what units will facilitate the investigation" (Adler & Clark, 2015, p. 121). The researcher used knowledge as an instrument to create sampling because the chance that the collected data is accurate with minimum error is high (Fleetwood, 2020). Moreover, the question that came to consideration of the researcher was what the right sample size for this study is. The literature often talks about reaching a 'saturation point.' In this research, it refers to the point when no additional data are being found and researchers can develop themes and their properties (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The saturation point of this study was reached at 10 informants, as the researcher saw similar circumstances from the sampling over and over again, the researcher "became empirically confident that a category was saturated" (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 61).

In other words, the researcher could not find new codes that occur from the collected data (Urquhart, 2013).

All of the informants were Thai, living in Thailand, and aged between 26-40 years old as the age range fell into the Millennial Generation ("Boomers, Gen X," 2020). The researcher chose to explore millennials as they are the first generation who grew up with digital technology or called digital natives (Wells, 2018). All informants are social media users and have various social media platforms. They use them as sources of information. Their average social media usage was five hours a day. They had followed macro-influencers or micro-influencers for at least 6 months on various social media platforms since January 2020, which was the period that the first imported COVID-19 case occurred in Thailand according to the laboratory confirmation report of the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and the 1st case from Wuhan, Hubei Province, China ("Novel Coronavirus," 2020). The researcher tried to get informants who have different careers as much as possible. The pseudonyms were assigned as the following table:

Table 3.1: Brief Profile of Informants

Label	Gender	Age	Occupation
A1	Male	31	Reporter
A2	Female	39	Entrepreneur
A3	Male	38	Interior Designer

Table 3.1 (Continued): Brief Profile of Informants

Label	Gender	Age	Occupation
A4	Male	26	Marketer
A5	Female	30	Sale Representative
A6	Female	40	Advertiser
A7	Male	34	Engineer
A8	Male	28	Graduate Student
A9	Female	35	Teacher
A10	Female	27	Unemployed

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews in a relaxed atmosphere and used loose structure for the interviews, which is flexible to change direction and add necessary points (Reddy, 2019). The questions of each interview for this study were guided by the interview protocol (Appendix). The in-depth interviews involve a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and informants and it is time-intensive activities (Reddy, 2018), but it provides deeper insight than other data collection methodologies (Boyce, & Neale, 2006).

At the time the researcher processed data collection, Thailand was having the social distancing campaign to flatten the curve of spreading COVID-19 in the country. The interviews, therefore, were conducted in the format of face-to-face and

in some cases were conducted over the online calls because the researcher considered

the informants' practicability. However, the face-to-face- interactions were conducted

under the safety concerns by wearing masks at all times, and at an agreed-upon public

meeting place such as a restaurant.

Each interview started with an oral introduction about this study and its

purpose as an icebreaker to set the rapport with the informants in the Thai language.

The researcher orally asked if they gave permission for the interview to be recorded

on a digital voice recorder. All informants gave permission. The interviewing

questions relied on the interview protocol (Appendix) that guided the researcher to

cover important questions that the researcher wanted an informant to answer and to

help to gain reliable findings (Boyce & Neale, 2006). All interviews were held in the

Thai language. The researcher also spent thirty to forty minutes for each interview.

The researcher believes that listening to the informants rather than talking helps to

gain successful in-depth interviewers (B2B International, 2020).

3.4 Data Analysis

The research used the grounded theory as a research tool to enable the

researcher to find out and to conceptualize the area of interest through the process of

constant comparison (Scott, 2009). Grounded theory is a system to help the researcher

to construct theoretical analysis from collected data that "implicit guidelines for data

collection" (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 347; Limkangvanmongkol, 2018).

Initially, the researcher used an inductive approach to collecting data that was

relevant to the topic of interest. Once a substantial amount of data has been collected,

the researcher stepped back to get a bird's eye view for themes in the data and worked

to develop a theory that could explain those themes. No hypotheses can be found at the initial stages of the research (Dudovskiy, n.d.) and the researcher was not sure about the type and nature of the research findings until the study is completed. The researcher aimed that grounded theory allowed better connecting the themes that emerged with the framework of the study. Next, the researcher took almost a month for data analysis in which coding occurred.

Coding is an important factor to help the research to approach a grounded theory (Sbaraini et al., 2011). The findings and discussion of the study rely on the link between collected data and emergent theories (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher arranged raw data putting into 3 coding processes; initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. The researcher used initial coding to inductively generate ideas as many as possible (Sbaraini et al., 2011). Then, the researcher used focused coding to decide the initial codes that are the most prevalent information and support most of the analysis (Sbaraini, Carter, Evans, et al, 2011). And, the researcher used theoretical coding to refine the theories that relate to the most prevalent information (Sbaraini et al., 2011). For example:

Table 3.2: Coding Process

Raw data	Initial coding	Focus coding	Theoretical coding
Question: What are the international social practices that you have seen the	Consuming posts reflecting activities at	Revealing stay-at-home activities	Self-presentation (Goffman)

Table 3.2 (Continued): Coding Process

Raw data	Initial coding	Focus coding	Theoretical coding
influencers did on their social media channels during the COVID-19 outbreak? Answer: Before COVID-19 pandemic, I Roam alone normally made content about travelling to foreign countries. But she has posted a lot of videos of her cooking at home lately on Facebook. One of her interesting cooking videos is making Dalgona coffee. I've also seen influencers and anyone from many countries around the world with some spare time during the period follow the trend and posted their videos on Tiktok, YouTube, and Facebook.	home that the influencer had never done before, such as cooking. The activity originated from another country and is very famous around the world during the COVID-19 outbreak.		

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter addresses the findings from four research questions. By conducting in-depth interviews with 10 informants, the independent study aims to generate meanings from analyzing the collected data in order to identify Thai macro and micro social media influencers' social practices that are connected to global trends and definition of source credibility perceived by their audiences during the Thai Government's lockdown period due to the outbreaks of COVID-19. The findings are driven by the four following questions:

RQ1: What are international social practices used by Thai macro-influencers and micro-influencers on social media during the Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak?

RQ2: How do Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness?

RQ3: How do Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived expertise?

RQ4: How do Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived attractiveness?

4.1 General Information of Samples

The researcher conducted 10 in-depth interviews with informants aged between 26-40 years old in 2020 which fall into the Millennial Generation ("Boomers, Gen X," 2020). There were 5 females and 5 males. All informants were

social media users. Their average social media usage was five hours a day. They had followed macro-influencers or micro-influencers for at least 6 months (since January 2020) on various platforms of social media.

4.2 Based on the in-depth interviews with 10 informants to generate meanings from the research questions, the following are the findings;

4.2.1 RQ1: What are international social practices used by Thai macro-influencers and micro-influencers on social media during the Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak?

The interview results showed four social practices that were connected to global trends by Thai macro and micro social media influencers; revealing stay-at-home activities, showing concern for audiences' well-being, performing intimacy with closed ones, and replaying past performance.

4.2.1.1 Revealing Stay-at-Home Activities

Perceived by the informants, Thai macro and micro social media influencers that they had followed revealed stay-at-home activities out of necessity to stay home during the Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak. They created creative content with limited support by teammates or almost without access to their usual resources (agents, photographers, assistants, even fellow creators). Therefore, they were not able to produce their content as usual as when Thailand was not in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Documenting daily activities while having social distancing was a popular content strategy on social media. In keeping their channel active, social media influencers presented content that was relevant to the situation rather than their usual content. This way allowed them to continue remaining engaged with their audiences without leaving their homes. Most of the posts portrayed influencers in stay-at-home dress and disclosed activities that were usually considered behind-the-scenes. The informants acted as paparazzi who sneaked through the gates to observe influencers' lives.

The informants consumed posts reflecting new activities that influencers had never done before, such as cooking and planting. In the case of Thai macro social media travel content creator, I Roam Alone who was unable to create new content by traveling to foreign countries due to many countries restricting the entry to reduce the number of COVID-19 cases in the countries. She was still active by initiating a new program regarding cooking at home and also using the global famous hashtag #StayHome to attract audiences to a certain niche on her Facebook, which was reiterated by an informant:

"There is a quarantine trend, people make Dalgona coffee which is whipping of ingredients; instant coffee powder, hot water, sugar, and when it becomes creamy you can add it to milk. I have followed I Roam Alone and she is a travel influencer. I saw her make Dalgona coffee during the Government's lockdown period. I believe that the concept of Dalgona coffee comes from Korea. I've also seen influencers and anyone from many countries around the world with some spare time during the period following the trend and posted their videos on Tiktok, YouTube, and Facebook." (Translated from Thai)" - A9: female, 35 years old, a teacher

April 19 · 🌐

มื้อเช้าอิหยังวะ! ครัวกระจาย แม่จิเป็นลม กับเมนูกาแฟโฟมเกาหลี+ไข่เจียวซูเฟล่แบบฝรั่งเศส
เมนูดูง่ายๆ ใช้ของแค่ 4 อย่าง เดินไปเซเว่นก็ซื้อได้ล้าว (ออกไปก็ต้องทำตามมาตรการร้านด้วยนะคะ)
แต่พอทำจริงอิหยังวะมากค่า โอ้ยยย!
งานนี้คนเหนื่อยสุด คือ แม่ เพราะต้องทำ ต้องถ่าย ต้องกินอีก 55555
#ครัวอิหยังวะ
#StayHome #WithMe

Figure 4.1: I Roam Alone made Dalgona coffee at home, posted on April 19, 2020

   on Facebook

Source: I Roam Alone. (2020). *What Da Chef EP. 2*. Retrieved from

   https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=574370123196757

        The informants observed a variety of videos content during the

lockdown period that was entertaining and worth watching, as the influencers they

had followed did new activities that they never expected them to do, such as

renovating home furniture, picking fruits from trees, which is reiterated by an

informant:

> "I watched Fah sarika's YouTube videos during the Government's lockdown period. She is a lifestyle influencer. She made many videos about her staying home doing activities such as gardening and cooking. The videos entertain me and make me feel stress-relieved. The influencer also did something new such as painting furniture and game broadcasting. I like watching her videos because she sounds genuine and it makes me feel like I am spending time doing the activities with the influencer." (Translated from Thai) - A7: male, 34 years old, an engineer

Figure 4.2.1: Fah sarika picked up fruits from trees, posted on April 26, 2020

on YouTube

Source: Fah sarika. (2020). *Quarantine at Home*. Retrieved from

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLHvT5EMJxY

Figure 4.2.2: Fah sarika repainted furniture, posted on April 26, 2020 on YouTube

Source: Fah sarika. (2020b). *Quarantine at Home*. Retrieved from

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLHvT5EMJxY

The informants observed that stay-at-home activities did not only refer to activities that were usually done at home, but also activities that we generally had not done by ourselves, such as having a haircut, and extending acrylic nails, which is reiterated by an informant:

"Saranya C. is Thai but she has lived in Australia for many years. I have followed her because I like her style. She said that during the COVID-19 outbreak in Australia, it was difficult to have a haircut at salons because the Australian government restricts salons to remain open with a 30-minute per client time, and nail salons remain closed. That was the reason she created the video making a haircut for her boyfriend which is her first time. The influencer also made a few videos doing nail extension and eyelash extension which normally she got these things serviced at the salons. She also created more cooking videos for her YouTube channel than she had done before the COVID-19 outbreak. The situation in Australia is similar to Thailand, so I feel related when I watch the videos." (Translated from Thai) - A10: female, 27 years old, an unemployed

ปอลองตัดผมให้แฟน ตัดอย่างงี้โกนหัวเลยเถอะ!

122,620 views • 4 May 2020

Figure 4.3: Saranya C. made a haircut at home, posted on May 4, 2020 on

   YouTube

Source: Saranya C. (2020). *Making a haircut for my boyfriend*. Retrieved from

   www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNkRm1jqQmQ

The informants observed sponsored content of Thai beauty influencers

by adopting a global beauty challenge in their presentation, which is reiterated by an

informant:

"I have seen many Thai influencers such as Amy Kitiya adopting a global beauty challenge by creating makeup looks to go with their medical masks. I also think they were sponsored by Seven-Eleven as I saw the brand logo on their videos." (Translated from Thai) - A4: male, 26 years old, a marketer

Figure 4.4.1: Amy Kitiya's makeup tutorial, posted on April 5, 2020 on YouTube

Source: Amy Kitiya. (2020). *How to do makeup look to go with mask*. Retrieved from

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRrJHAU_WCk

Figure 4.4.2: Global influencers' beauty challenge by creating makeup looks to go

with masks

Source: Daily Mail. (2020). *Influencers turn the COVID-10 outbreak into a BEAUTY*

challenge that sees them creating special makeup looks to go with their

medical masks. Retrieved from www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-

8084337/Influencers-turn-COVID-10-outbreak-BEAUTY-challenge.html

The informants observed branded content in stay-at-home videos,

which is reiterated by an informant:

"I saw BoomTharis who is a real estate influencer changes how he made content during the Government's lockdown period to connect with his subscribers, as it seems there are no sponsors from real estate companies for his video content, they might cut spending on the advertisement to save money when the business is slowing down. From reviewing condominiums, the influencer made many eating-at-home and stay-home-with-me videos instead." (Translated from Thai) - A3: male, 38 years old, an interior designer

Figure 4.5: Boom Tharis's video list on YouTube from March 28, 2020

Source: Boom Tharis. (2020). *Video List*. Retrieved from

www.youtube.com/c/BoomTharis/videos

The informants enjoyed branded content for not only eating food

videos but also for unboxing or unpacking delivered stuff. The technique has been a

popular international social practice used by beauty and lifestyle bloggers or

YouTubers around the world. During the outbreaks of COVID-19, many social media

influencers regardless of genres adopted the practice, which is reiterated by an

informant:

"Nurseryus' content used to be varied such as makeup tutorials, hanging out with friends, traveling with friends abroad, and shopping. But she has recently made many YouTube videos about clothing try-on haul at home. She doesn't have any videos showing activities outside her home. I have followed her for 3 years, I had never seen her make a cooking video before, but during the COVID-19 outbreak she made one video of noodle stir-fried cooking at home." (Translated from Thai) - A5: female, 30 years old, a sale representative
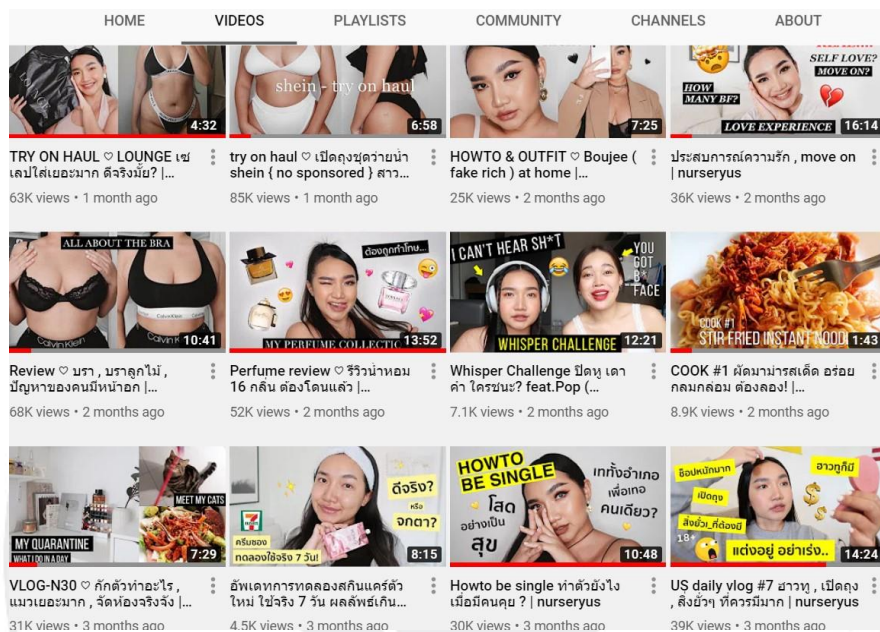
Figure 4.6: Nurseryus' video list on YouTube from March 9, 2020

Source: Nurseryus. (2020). *Video List*. Retrieved from

www.youtube.com/c/NurseNerst/videos

4.2.1.2 Showing Concern for Audiences' Well-being

During the Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the

celebrities played a significant role in encouraging and helping audiences to stay

home and be healthy. Many Hollywood celebrities, such as David Beckham and

Emma Watson, joined the #IStayHomeFor challenge. Thai social media influencers

have adopted the challenge and crafted posts that reflected their self-performance as a supportive friend who has good concerns for their audiences' well-being.

The informants observed that influencers increasingly made instructional or tutorial content as self-help and well-being guides during the COVID-19 outbreak. They helped audiences to expand their knowledge, such as how to wear medical or fabric masks to prevent COVID-19 properly. They used such content to induce more interactivity with their audiences, which is iterated by an informant:

"shaipilan posted on Instagram recommending a proper way to wear masks because wearing a mask incorrectly will not protect us from the virus. I have seen videos on social media that people, celebrities, and medical workers from around the world teaching how to wear face masks properly, and how to clean them. Shai has a friend, who is a doctor, by the name of Smith Arayaskul (oak_smith). I think he wanted to pass on the useful information that he has learned from the doctor, on to his audience for their benefit." (Translated from Thai) - A2: female, 39 years old, an entrepreneur
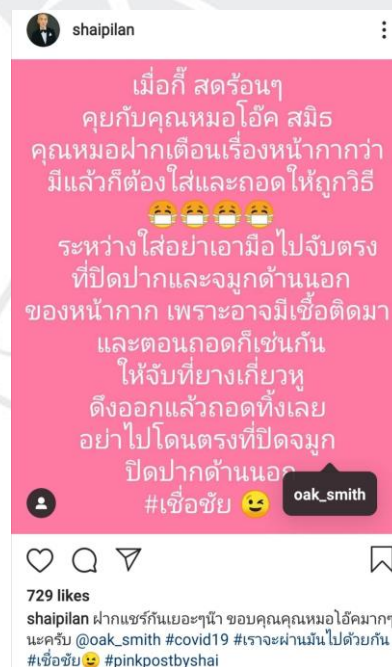
Figure 4.7.1: shaipilan's advice of how to use mask, posted on March 5, 2020 on

Instagram

Source: shaipilan. (2020). *How to Use Mask*. Retrieved from

www.instagram.com/p/B9WhXV0HpiN

Figure 4.7.2: American TV show showed how to wear masks and how to clean them

Source: Today. (2020). *How to Wear Face Masks Properly, And How to Clean Them*.

Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNsj-8wtqA8

The informants benefited from content regarding mental and

psychological aspects, as it is an unprecedented time that required the majority of

people to stay home and work from home.
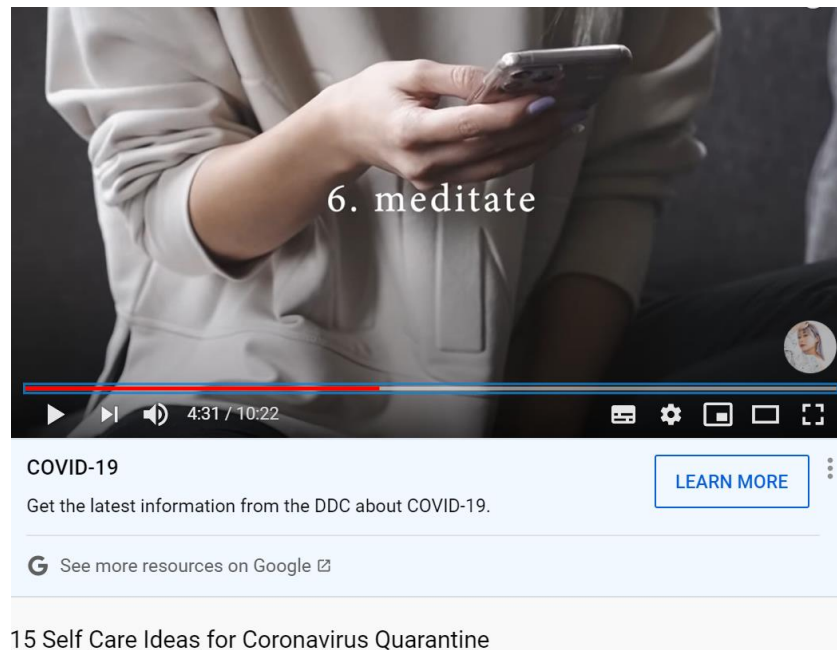
Figure 4.8.1: Lavendaire recommended mental and psychological care during

quarantine, posted March 17, 2020 on YouTube

Source: Lavendaire. (2020). *15 Self Care Ideas for Coronavirus Quarantine*.

Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQxpQ94Euic

Like social media influencers from many countries, Thai social media

influencers also have the content of adapting to a new lifestyle, how-to relieve stress

content fitted very well, which is reiterated by an informant:

"earthpynn is a beauty blogger that I have followed. I saw a video of her on how-to relieve stress at home as we can't spend time in many places like shopping malls, coffee cafes, and the workplace due to the Government's lockdown period, which can make people feel isolated and lonely. She recommended us to do makeup, dress well, and eat a special menu by ordering food from our favorite restaurants at home. She might get sponsored for talking about some products in the video, but I still consider the content useful during the situation." (Translated from Thai) - A6: female, 40 years old, an advertiser

Figure 4.8.2: earthpynn recommended how to relieve stress at home during the

lockdown, posted on April 8, 2020 on YouTube

Source: earthpynn. (2020). *What should we do during the quarantine?*. Retrieved

from www.youtube.com/watch?v=s30ko5RE3mo

The informants were also interested in posts regarding a healthy

lifestyle which is the global trend, such as work out and clean or low-calorie food,

which is reiterated by an informant:

"I have followed Healthy Sister - food & happy lifestyle on Facebook. I saw her post about recommending products for those who are interested in healthy eating should stock during the Government's lockdown period. It is useful because I didn't think about it before." (Translated from Thai) - A5: female, 30 years old, a sale representative
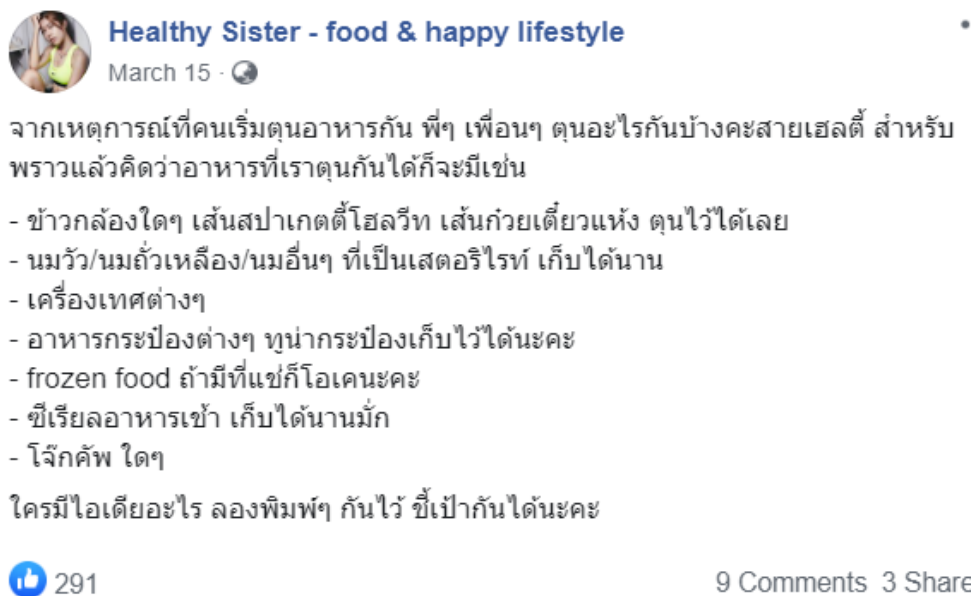
Figure 4.9: Healthy Sister - Food & Happy Lifestyle recommended what should

stock up during the lockdown, posted on March 15, 2020 on Facebook

Source: Healthy Sister. (2020). *What Should Stock up during the Lockdown*. Retrieved

from https://www.facebook.com/behealthysister/posts/3156376164372697

4.2.1.3 Performing Intimacy with Closed Ones

The COVID-19 situation brought about change not only in the types of

activities that influencers showed in their posts but also how to do those activities

with family members or closed ones. While influencers had never previously

introduced their family members in any posts, the strategy to craft the content

showing them staying together at a specific part of the house had been adopted such

as the new music video of Ariana Grande featuring Justine Bieber, by the name Stuck

with You, during the stay-at-home period was positively responded to by audiences.

#StuckwithU #ArianaGrande #JustinBieber
Ariana Grande & Justin Bieber - Stuck with U (Official Video)
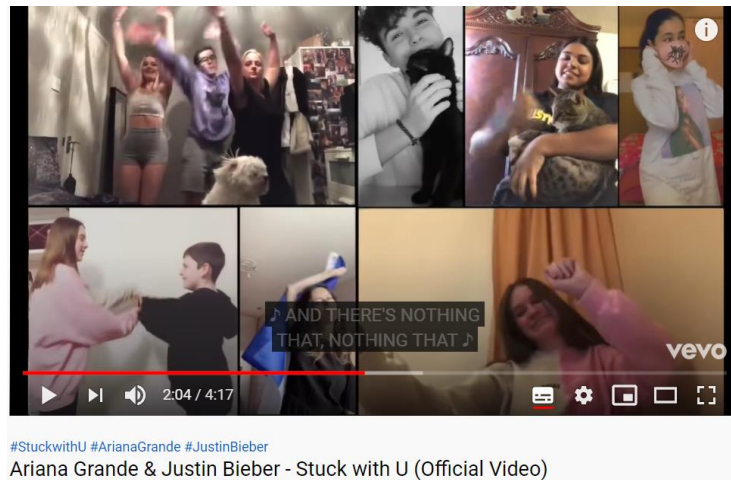
Figure 4.10.1: Stuck with You music video by Ariana Grande featuring Justine

Bieber in response to quarantine

Source: Grande, A. (2020). *Stuck with U*. Retrieved from

www.youtube.com/watch?v=pE49WK-oNjU

The informants felt warmth when watching posts that influencers did

activities with their family members or closed one at home. The posts portrayed

positive family relationships which made audiences enjoyable, which is reiterated by

an informant:

"Nisamanee.Nutt made a music video with her mom, siblings,
grandma, nephew, and niece instead of doing many makeup tutorials videos that she
used to do most of the time. I like the video. It is funny and her family seems joyous. I
watched the video a few times." (Translated from Thai) - A4, male, 26 years old, a
marketer

[Official MV] เพลง อยู่บ้าน ต้านโควิด by Nisa and Family | Nisamanee.Nutt #stayhome #withme
748,715 views • 3 Apr 2020   👍 38K 👎 533 ➤ SHARE ≡+ SAVE •••

Figure 4.10.2: Nisamanee.Nutt's music video with her family representing staying

home to protect against COVID-19, posted April 3, 2020 on YouTube

Source: Nisamanee.Nutt. (2020). *Stay Home to Protect Against COVID-19 Music*

Video. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChKdYfWmRTA

The informants enjoy observing influencers' relationships with their

closed ones, as the content is new and authentic. The content kept audiences engaged

with the influencers while hoping to consume the usual content after the lockdown,

which is reiterated by an informant:

"I Roam Alone made many videos having her mom and grandma
joining in. The videos are both live streaming and short recorded videos. It helps
while waiting for her to be able to travel aboard again." (Translated from Thai) - A9:
female, 35 years old, a teacher

Figure 4.11: I Roam Alone broadcasted with her mom and grandma, posted on

April 1, 2020 on Facebook.

Source: I Roam Alone. (2020). *Show off food during the quarantine*. Retrieved from

www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=645620049609971

The informants were not only introduced to influencers' closed ones

but also heard from them about the attitude towards different questions and issues.

They had an opportunity to know about how the influencers had been shaped by their

upbringing, which is reiterated by an informant:

"I have followed the Blacklist secret Official on YouTube. Nin is one of two influencers of this channel. She originally makes the channel with a friend, but during the lockdown, all events are canceled, she has more free time so she visits her parents at her hometown and stays with them for a while. She made a Q&A video with her parents on how she was when she was young and how she had been shaped by her parents." (Translated from Thai) - A5: female, 30 years old, a sale representative

sis talk | แต่งตัวโป๊พ่อแม่คิดไง? เลี้ยงลูกยังไงให้คิดบวก Q&A กับพ่อแม่

31,395 views • 13 Jun 2020

👍 2.2K 👎 11   ↗ SHARE   ⊟+ SAVE   •••

Figure 4.12: Nin of Blacklist secret Official made an interview with parents, posted

on June 13, 2020 on YouTube

Source: Blacklist secret Official. (2020). *How to raise a child to think positive – Q&A*

with parents. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IqlDBK8Nmc

4.2.1.4 Replaying Past Performance

It was good for influencers to appear on social media frequently in

front of their audiences as it helped increase engagement. Many influencers were

stuck at home during the Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19

outbreak, they were unable to create new content about traveling to foreign countries,

hanging out with friends, shopping in malls, dining in restaurants, etc. However, they

had to be active throughout the pandemic.

The informants who have followed Thai influencers that normally

made videos about having traveling in Thailand saw the influencers reusing past posts

just like social media influencers from other countries during the Government's

lockdown due to COVID-19 to keep their channels active and they express they

missed traveling, which is reiterated by an informant:

"HappyNancy is a traveling influencer. She always traveled and I saw
her posted some past traveling pictures and videos. She said in the caption that she
wants to travel again." (Translated from Thai) - A1: male, 31 years old, reporter

Figure 4.13: HappyNancy posted an old traveling picture during the lockdown on

April 30, 2020 on Facebook

Source: HappyNancy. (2020). *Past travelling picture*. Retrieved from

www.facebook.com/happynancyofficial/videos/vb.1637487369826501/1926

317280943507/?type=2&theater

4.2.2 RQ2: How do Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness?

Perceived trustworthiness depends on the social media influencers' ability to explain hard-to-understand information understandably. Audiences found influencers' clear explanation very engaging, and for some, information applicable to their life situations. Therefore, audiences relied on influencers' posts as dependable sources, which is reiterated by an informant:

"I have followed Capt.Benz on Facebook for a year because he consistently shares good instruction to encourage and inspire people by approaching Buddhavacan (Words of the Buddha). He makes the precept easy to understand and apply in real life. I am religious and saw Capt.Benz' became a monk after the death of his father so I think he understands Buddhavacan well." (Translated from Thai) - A1: male, 31 years old, a reporter

Figure 4.14: Capt.Benz's Facebook cover picture, posted on March 9, 2017

Source: Capt.Benz. (2020). *Facebook cover picture*. Retrieved from

www.facebook.com/polcaptbenz/photos/a.469160726609602/629682790557

394/?type=3&theater

Also, audiences trusted social media influencers' posts based on their reliable information which showed influencers' honesty. Lifestyle bloggers usually showed their before-and-after photos of making over themselves influenced by international trends. Posts honestly showed their own barefaced and normal outfit style in comparison to their new look reflected by make-up and outfit styling, which is reiterated by an informant:

"When I want some ideas about fashion and clothing, I will check out vvalentines' photos on her Instagram. She adopts fashion and style from international influencers such as Kylie Jenner which is the style that I like. vvalentines looks just right international influencers. The clothes she wears match well on her." (Translated from Thai) - A10: female, 27 years old, an unemployed

Figure 4.15: vvalentines' picture on Instagram, posted on March 17, 2020

Source: vvalentines. (2020). *Picture on Instagram*. Retrieved from

www.instagram.com/p/B90wie9nN4L

4.2.3 RQ3: How do Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media

influencers' perceived expertise?

Perceived by informants, the social media influencers' expertise during the

Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak was the result of the

influencers' experiences in the field of their expertise, which is reiterated by an

informant:

"I have followed shaipilan because he is very informative when he reviews any products. He has a lot of work experience from a flight attendant, makeup artist, and beauty magazine editor. Those jobs normally require people who have good looks and good personality so I believe that he knows how to take care of himself properly and can recommend the right information. During the COVID-10 outbreak, he recommended a hand sanitizer. He said that it is a quick-drying and non-sticky hand washing gel with 70% alcohol. I haven't bought the product but I believe that it is good because he has reviewed many brands and is selective in choosing good quality products to work with." (Translated from Thai) - A2: female, 39 years old, an entrepreneur

Figure 4.16: shaipilan recommended a hand sanitizer, posted on April 22, 2020 on

Instagram

Source: shaipilan. (2020). *Hand sanitizer recommendation*. Retrieved from

www.instagram.com/p/B_SIiSkg6DO

Also, audiences tended to perceive influencers' expertise based on influencers' skills. Audiences treasure contents that reflect technical techniques by social media influencers, which is reiterated by an informant:

"I have followed Golfwashere because he consistently posts photography techniques and recommends gadgets on his channels. Every time, I check out his social media, I will get some useful information. He is a professional photographer. He doesn't only have a Facebook page but he has a website blogging his photography work, as well as has YouTube educating photography techniques through videos. I, therefore, feel that he is very proactive about his content. During COVID-19, he presented how to take a cool video at home by using a mobile phone. It is interesting." (Translated from Thai) - A8: male, 28 years old, a graduate student

Figure 4.17: Golfwashere showed how to make cool videos at home using the

mobile phone, posted on April 14, 2020

Source: Golfwashere. (2020). *How to make cool videos at home*. Retrieved from

https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=839983883150392

Perceived by informants, the social media influencers' expertise during the

Government's lockdown period due to the COVID-19 outbreak was the result of

influencers' knowledge, which is reiterated by an informant:

"I started knowing Proud from Eat Clean Baby Facebook page that she was an admin, then she published her first clean food book and also created her individual Facebook page named Healthy Sister - food & happy lifestyle. I believe that she has knowledge of healthy food, that's why she can write the book. I am interested in eating healthily so I have followed her on social media. Following her inspires me to eat clean and she constantly posts many easy clean menus." (Translated from Thai) - A9: female, 35 years old, a teacher

Figure 4.18: Healthy Sister - Food & Happy Lifestyle's clean food book

Source: Healthy Sister. (2020). *Clean Food for Good Health*. Retrieved from

https://m.se-ed.com/Product/ProductImage/9786165278676#1

4.2.4 RQ4: How do Thai audiences define Thai macro and micro social media influencers' perceived attractiveness?

Perceived attractiveness toward social media influencers was affected by influencers' positive personality, such as friendliness and confidence, which is iterated by an informant:

"Saranya C. is one of my favorite YouTubers. I adore her lifestyle and vibe because she has a lifestyle similar to mine. I am interested in makeup tutorials. She does her makeup very well every time and I can copy it to do in real life. Many influencers do makeup tutorials but she attracts me more than others because of how she talks which is very friendly but confident at the same time. Because she graduated from New Zealand and her English is fluent so when she speaks English it sounds right. She has a very relaxing personality. It just feels like I'm genuinely hanging out with a friend." (Translated from Thai) - A10: female, 27 years old, an unemployed
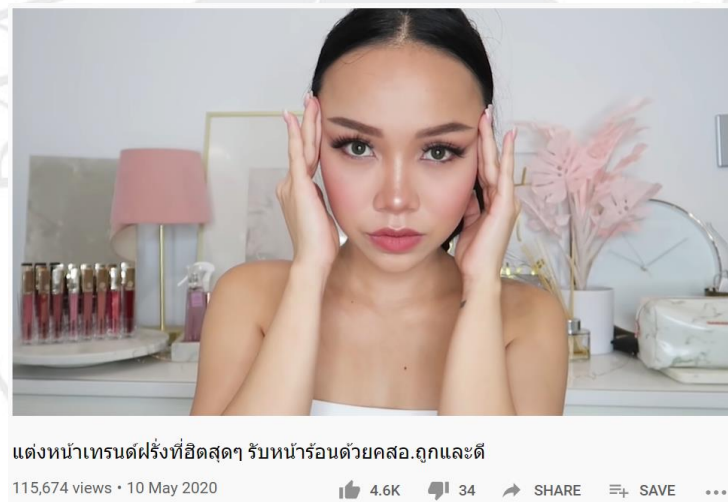
Figure 4.19: Saranya C.'s makeup tutorial, posted on May, 10 2020 on YouTube

Source: Saranya C. (2020). *Makeup tutorial*. Retrieved

from www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nn5VWicLThk

Perceived attractiveness toward social media influencers related to the

dimension of influencers' presentability in terms of their appearance, which is iterated

by an informant:

"dust_ntk has a nice body when he dresses up, he looks good. I follow him because of how he looks." (Translated from Thai) - A3: male, 38 years old, an interior designer

Figure 4.20: dust_ntk's picture on Instagram, posted on April 2, 2020

Source: dust_ntk. (2020). *Picture on Instagram*. Retrieved from

www.instagram.com/p/B-eBEowH739

Perceived attractiveness by informants toward social media influencers that

show beautiful relationships that are like a dream come true life, which is reiterated

by an informant:

"Pai Gun Na is an influential couple. They create traveling content and are very outstanding in Thailand because how they present their traveling is rare among Thai travel influencers. I think they got inspired by foreign influential couples. Pai Gun Na's pictures are very lovely and romantic, so it is like living a dream. When my boyfriend and I work from home, I like looking at their pictures for information about beautiful hotels and showing them to him as we plan to travel together after the COVID-19 situation gets better." (Translated from Thai) - A6: female, 40 years old, an advertiser

Figure 4.21: Pai Gun Na's romantic picture, posted on April 17, 2020 on Facebook

Source: Pai Gun Na. (2020). *Couple Picture*. Retrieved from

www.facebook.com/paigunna/photos/a.361434817567969/110804814957329

5/?type=3&theater

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study examines the findings related to four main research questions. By conducting in-depth interviews with 10 informants, the independent study aims to generate meanings from analyzing the collected data to identify Thai macro and micro social media influencers' social practices that are connected to global trends and definition of source credibility perceived by their audiences during the Thai Government's lockdown period due to the outbreaks of COVID-19. This chapter includes the study's summary, discussion, and limitations.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The researcher has a preliminary understanding of Thai social media influencers' social practices that are connected to global trends and the definition of source credibility perceived by their audiences during the Thai Government's lockdown period due to the outbreaks of COVID-19. Data insights were derived from 10 in-depth interviews with informants aged between 26-40 years old, which fall into the Millennial Generation ("Boomers, Gen X," 2020). The informants had followed macro-influencers or micro-influencers for at least 6 months (since January 2020) on various social media platforms. Specifically, there are four interesting findings:

5.1.1 Social Practices were Connected with Global Trends

The outcome of the research indicated that Thai influencers used 4 social practices from the perspective of influencers' audiences, including revealing stay-at-

home activities, showing concern for audience well-being, performing intimacy with closed ones, and replaying past performance that was connected to global trends during the Government's lockdown due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

Revealing stay-at-home activities is the international social practice that influencers showcased posts about their new activities at home (e.g., cooking, planting), unexpected fun activities (e.g., repainting home furniture, picking fruits from trees), activities that influencers usually asked other people to do for them before the lockdown period (e.g., cutting hair, extending acrylic nails), activities relating to global challenges (e.g., makeup looks to go with medical or fabric masks), branded content for new product categories (e.g., shifting from branded content for real estate categories to restaurant products), and displaying fashion (e.g., unpacking delivered clothing and trying on.).

Showing concern for audiences' well-being is the international social practice that influencers acted as supportive friends who shared posts about health care instructions or how-to (e.g., how to wear masks properly), mental and psychological care (e.g. stress relief techniques), and health trends (e.g., workout routine, low-calorie food).

Performing intimacy with closed ones is the international social practice that influencers shared posts that include their family members or closed ones. They revealed their fun time spent with their loved ones, showing real and authentic family scenes, and interviewing their closed ones to share their attitudes towards some issues. Replaying past performance is the international social practice that influencers reused their previous interesting content to keep their channel active. Mainly, influencers

shared content about travel, as they were unable to travel both domestic and international during the self-quarantine and social distancing period.

5.1.2 Perceived Trustworthiness

The results from the research show that perceived trustworthiness referred to the dependability, reliability, and believability of social media influencers. The perceived trustworthiness was reflected in the content that showed influencers' ability to provide a clear explanation (e.g., understandably explaining hard-to-understand information, providing information that applies to real-life situations) and honesty (e.g., showing before-and-after makeover content, the influencer's using the product they advertised).

5.1.3 Perceived Expertise

The results from the research show that perceived expertise refers to experience and knowledge (Serban, 2010) of social media influencers. The perceived expertise was reflected in the content that showed influencers' experiences in the field of their expertise (e.g., demonstrating technical skills, providing informative instruction), skills (e.g., taking interesting photos using a mobile), and knowledge (e.g., writing a clean food book, creating healthy food content).

5.1.4 Perceived Attractiveness

The results from the research show that perceived attractiveness referred to a friendly, confident, nice body figure, and beautiful relationship of social media influencers. Attractiveness does not mean simply content that showed physical

attractiveness but included positive personality (e.g., friendliness, confidence),

presentability (e.g, nice body), and beautiful relationships (e.g., couple relationships).

5.2 Discussion

The findings of this study have brought several outstanding significance that

this research strives to discuss.

5.2.1 The Findings and Theories

The researcher found that the findings of this research and the theories are

corresponding. Driven by the framework of Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and

Hazel Gaudet (1948), the social media influencers performed their persona of opinion

leaders (Kozinets et al., 2010) who consumed information from the representatives of

brands and media channels and further produced content from such information for

their social media audience (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948).

During the lockdown period, the social media influencers mixed unbranded

with branded content to keep their audience engaged. For unbranded content, they

produced content related to news and current affairs derived from media channels. For

branded content, they seeded information favorably about branded products (Kozinets

et al., 2010).

Driven by the framework of Erving Goffman (1959), the social media

influencers performed their online presence by managing their positive impression

through audiences' eyes. Audiences perceived that there are four international social

practices used by social media influencers: revealing stay-at-home activities, showing

concern for audience well-being, performing intimacy with loved ones, and replaying

past performance. Based on situational contexts (Goffman, 1959) which is influencers' lives during the outbreaks of COVID-19, influencers produced content that revealed themselves by disclosing private information, as if it would happen in the backstage (Limkangvanmongkol, 2018; Marwick, 2015). As informants perceived, social media influencers portrayed themselves at "the blurred boundaries of front and backstage" (Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 71).

Influencers shared public content by using their behind the scenes activities (e.g., an influencer was in stay-at-home outfits and climbed a tree to pick some fruits) or revealing their private life with their loved ones (e.g., influencers shared content of the video interviewing their parents living in the countryside area when she visited them).

Driven by the framework of Ohanian (1990), source credibility consists of trust, expertise, and attractiveness which impact intention, attitudes, and behavior of audiences (Serban, 2010). The macro and micro social media influencers are principal sources of information in the digital age. Their credibility is an important aspect of brands (Friedman et al., 1978). Influencers' credibility relates to audiences' perception of whether they feel the recommendations from influencers as unbiased, believable, or factual (Rebelo, 2017).

The findings of this research indicate that influencers' ability to provide a clear explanation (e.g., explaining hard-to-understand information in an understandable way, providing information that applies to real-life situations) and honesty (e.g., showing before and after makeover content, the influencers' using the products they advertise) were indicators of the social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness. Such indicators allowed them to become dependable which enhanced

their credibility (Phung & Qin, 2018; Shimp, 1997). If the information is from a trustworthy source (influencers), it can influence beliefs, attitudes, and opinions (Phung & Qin, 2018) to audiences. The audiences' level of confidence and level of acceptance of the influencers is an important paradigm in communication (Abdulmajid-Sallam & Wahid, 2012; Rebelo, 2017). Ohanian (1990) stated that a trustworthy influencer was more persuasive, whether an expert or not.

According to Capt.Benz, the social media influencer who encourages and inspires people by approaching Buddhavacan (Words of the Buddha). He makes the Buddhavacan (Words of the Buddha) easy for his audiences to understand and apply in real life. His audiences found him a very engaging and dependable source.

The perceived trustworthiness is when audiences constantly see the quality work of the influencers, making them accept that they can rely on the influencers' recommendation. The source credibility is a soft side that requires a human touch to review things and convey feelings to audiences that technology cannot detect such as authenticity and believability ("How Influencers Are Motivated," n.d.). Advertisers choose to work with influencers who are reliable to ensure advertisements run smoothly and effectively because reliable social media influencers are proactive (Ho, 2019).

The findings of this research indicate social media influencers' experiences in the field of their expertise (e.g., demonstrating technical skills, providing informative instruction), skills (e.g., taking interesting photos using a mobile), and knowledge (e.g., writing a clean food book, creating healthy food content) were indicators of the social media influencers' perceived expertise. Source expertise comes from influencers' skills and knowledge through experiences (Ohanian, 1991).

According to the influencer, shaipilan who's a beauty influencer. He has a lot of work experience from a flight attendant, makeup artist, and beauty magazine editor. The audience believes that he can recommend the right information as he has the experience. Expert social media influencers can build up loyalty and trust among their audiences when the influencers are experts in their niche, such as fashion and travel.

Variables of attractiveness are similarity between influencers and audiences, familiarity - the near of the receiver and the source, and sympathy – the affectivity shown to the receptor (Erdogan, 1999). The findings of this research indicate social media influencers' positive personality (e.g., friendliness, confidence, presentability (e.g, nice body), and beautiful relationships (e.g., couple relationships) were the social media influencers' perceived attractiveness.

According to the finding that informants perceived the attractiveness of Saranya C. by her friendly and confident personality, also the informant felt that she and the influencer have similar lifestyles which align well to Ohanian theory of source credibility. It is anticipated that attractiveness is an important factor when evaluating the effectiveness of an influencer (Waldt, Loggerenberg, & Wehmeyer, 2011). Physical attractiveness tends to give benefit influencers to gain more success in influencing customers' attitudes and beliefs than unattractive spokespersons (Ohanian, 1991).

5.2.2 The Findings and Past Research

The researcher found that the findings of this research are similar to past research. According to Balaban and Mustăţea (2019), their respondent described that

to be a trustworthy influencer, one must know what they are talking about. Their finding is similar to this research's findings because a finding of this research indicates that influencers' ability to provide a clear explanation was perceived as trustworthy.

Balaban and Mustăţea (2019) showed why their respondents found that attractiveness is an important source of credibility of influencers. To the respondents, attractive influencers can persuade them more than unattractive influencers.

5.2.3 The Findings and the Researcher's Expectation

The expectation of the researcher before conducting the in-depth interviews is similar to the findings. The researcher is a follower of social media influencers. The researcher had seen the social practices of Thai macro and micro social media influencers connected with global trends. The researcher believed that source credibility is an important asset for social media influencers to get attention and persuade audiences. The researcher also believed that a product which is promoted by influencers that we follow and like on their posts on social media are possible to get our purchasing intention.

5.3 Limitations

This research contributes to identifying Thai social media influencers' social practices that are connected to global trends and definition of source credibility perceived by their audiences during the Thai Government's lockdown period due to the outbreaks of COVID-19. However, there are some limitations to this study.

The major limitation of this qualitative research is the data collection was conducted during the Government's lockdown and social distancing period due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The data collection in qualitative research typically relies on face-to-face interaction through interviews, focus groups, and fieldwork (Jowett, 2020). In this research, the combined methods between online and face-to-face interviews were selected, as the researcher was primarily concerned with health safety during the lockdown period. During the face-to-face interviews, both researcher and respondents wore a protective mask all the time.

The disadvantage of telephone interviews is hiding social cues. The researcher therefore could not use body language as a source of extra information (Opdenakker, 2006). Another limitation is about the location of informants that are not varied enough; all informants are from central Thailand which people from different locations might have different lifestyles.

5.4 Recommendations

The result provides valuable recommendations for practical use in that brands are required to work with social media influencers who are able to adapt their impression management to any crisis situations. Influencers' content that reflects honesty, knowledge, and positive character has gained credibility in their audiences' eyes. Brands and social media influencers are required to carry out the best communication strategy for both daily use and during any critical situations.

It is suggested there should be further research to examine the impact of COVID-19 on Thai or global social media influencers and audiences in different research questions. The further research should study how social media influencers'

adapted social practices affect their audiences' engagement and purchase decisions during a global crisis, in particular, the COVID-19 lockdown period. Any researcher can consider conducting a quantitative study with a group of samples who live in every region of Thailand, as well as with different age groups to have different aspects of possible potential results.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol: Question Guideline

1. Please list Thai macro-influencers or micro-influencers who you have followed on any social media platforms for at least 6 months, since January 2020. (The researcher also explained the differences between macro-influencers and micro-influencers.)

2. How long do you use social media per day?

3. Do you spend time on social media more than before during the Government's lockdown period?

4. Have you seen Thai influencers that you have followed adopted global social practices to present on their social media channels during COVID-19 outbreak? If yes, what did they do?

5. How do you interact with them? (subscribe, give likes, give comments, send them private messages, etc.)

6. How does their presentation on social media affect your perception about their trustworthiness?

7. How does their presentation on social media affect your perception about their expertise?

8. How does their presentation on social media affect your perception about their attractiveness?

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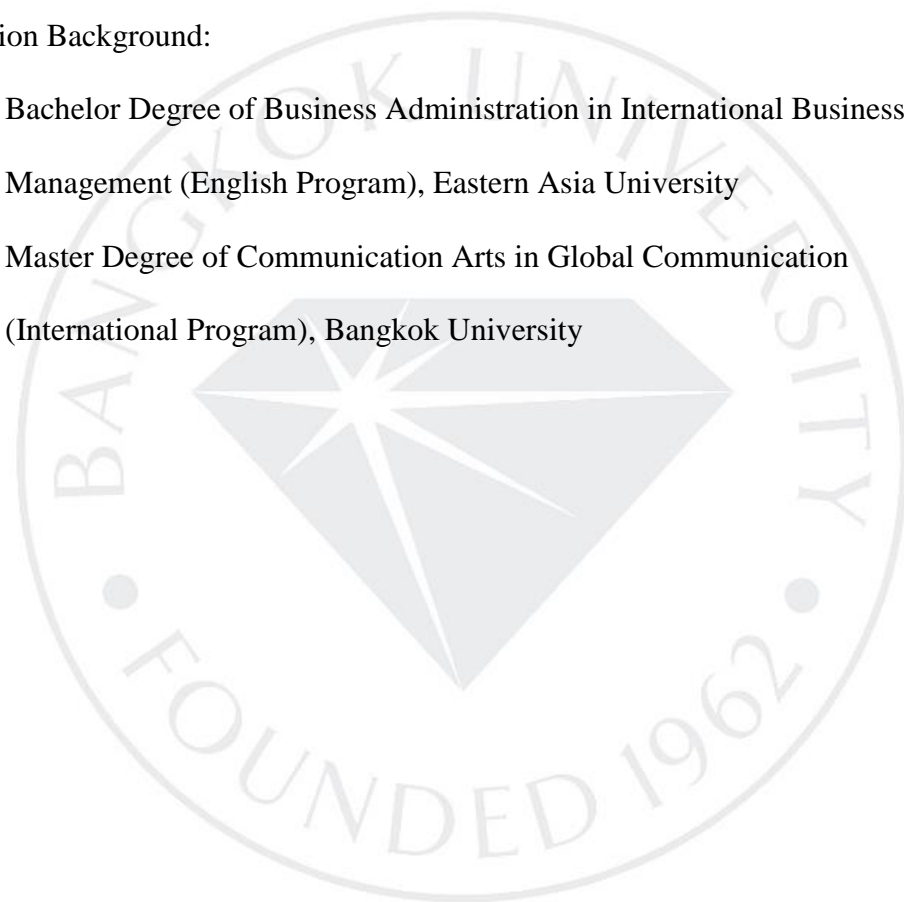
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