Buddhist Communication Styles for New Generation in Present-Day Thailand

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Abstract

Buddhist communication styles for new generation in present-day Thailand were an interdisciplinary study which concentrated on quantitative research. The study was conducted by survey research using 440 self-administered questionnaires as a tool to collect data. In-depth interview and focus group discussion which were qualitative research methods were also used to acquire supported data in order to make the research become more complete. The three objectives of this study were 1) To analyze media exposure behavior of new generations 2) To study Buddhist communication styles for new generations in present-day Thailand 3) To present policy suggestion resulting in guideline to establish appropriate Buddhist communication styles for a new generation in Thailand. The statistics used in the study were percentage, mean, independent t-test, f-test (One-Way Analysis of Variance), and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

The findings regarding Buddhist media-exposure behavior of the new generations showed that mobile phone was the most often used electronic device to communicate through online social media using wireless network connection. The frequency of Buddhist media exposure among most of the subjects was low with mostly once every two weeks. The Buddhist media exposure was unintentionally. The period of time for Buddhist media exposure via online social media was frequently during 18.01-21.00. Buddhist media exposure mostly occurred on Sunday. Most of the subjects took less than 30 minutes at a time for Buddhist media exposure via online social media. Buddhist media exposure through online social media mostly happened at their residence. Communication services/programs through online social media which were mostly used for Buddhist media exposure were Facebook, Youtube, and Instagram respectively. Regarding companions during Buddhist media exposure, the subjects were often alone.

The overview of Buddhist communication to a new generations showed that Facebook should be used as an online communication channel and presented with videos using communication through website in form of One-to-Many asynchronous communication. The content needed was Buddhist information which basically used informal language for communication.

Besides, the results of this study pointed that the subjects paid attention to Buddhist information according to the individual person they attached to. The presentation format had to be interesting and suitable for the target group. Arrangement of difficult content should be simplified. Religious issues should be carefully selected to meet the needs and ways of life. Online communication could be achieved through working as a group.

The findings from this study also indicated some policy suggestions resulting in guideline to create appropriate Buddhist communication styles for new generations in present-day Thailand which was divided into 2 phases. The first phase was short-term or urgent that included 1. To promote online media to disseminate religious information of monks, Buddhist agencies and organizations which were already recognized 2. To increase the frequency and amount of Buddhist communication 3.To use online media communication that could reach the target group by adopting the results of this research as communication guideline and 4. To study the pattern of Buddhist communication model from Phra Maha Wuttichai Vajiramedhi and Phra Maha Sompong Talaputto.

The second phase to create an appropriate pattern of Buddhist communication was long-term which included; 1. To compliment Buddhist personnel and organizations promoting their value and making them widely recognized; 2. To develop the human resources by providing them with technological knowledge; 3. To promote knowledge of integrated communication and increase proactive public relations via integrated online communication; 4. To

produce new Buddhist communicators to the society; 5. The online media access gap between urban and rural youth should be reduced; 6. To continually cultivate Buddhist information to Thai youth since they were young; 7. To encourage previous generation to express solid interest in Buddhism in order to create good role model

Hypothesis testing showed that the subjects with different ages and education would have different media exposure behavior. Ages, education, and different regions were factors affecting satisfaction toward pattern of Buddhist communication via online social media. Ages, education, and different regions had influence on desire for Buddhist communication styles via online social media.

Cost, duration, and frequency of online media communication were key factors relating to satisfaction toward pattern of Buddhist communication styles via online media that currently obtained. Cost, duration, and frequency of media communication were key factors relevant to desire for pattern of Buddhist communication via online social media.

Keywords: Buddhist communication, new generation, present-day

1. Background and Statement of the Problem

Internet is a new media and important tool making the information age grow unceasingly. It is an information technology that plays significant role and has influence on public communication in terms of both senders and receivers in all regions of the world. Nowadays, internet is widely used as a communicate tool even in the presentation of news and information in various issues due to the nature of internet which is speedy and able to shorten the distance. Therefore, political, economic, social, and other news and information have been increasingly communicated online through internet in order to provide receivers the information in time, including Buddhist information that has been presented via internet continually. Most of the population in Thailand is Buddhist. Thai way of life has been closely related to Buddhism since primeval period; hence Thais strongly respect and believes in Buddhist stories. However, negative Buddhist information has been continuously communicated via various media which is barely different from other social issues. It seems that negative Buddhist information tends to receive attention for a long time. This is perhaps because Buddhism is a very delicate and sensitive issue to people in Thailand.

When negative Buddhist information is repeatedly disseminated for a long time, it affects mass media in terms of individual and social institute. Advance technology enables online communication to disseminate negative Buddhist information rapidly; as a result, it may cause bad attitude toward Buddhism and diminish faith of message receivers, especially young generation defined as Gen Y and Gen Z. The change in social context and various media exposure make Gen Y and Gen Z incline to have bad attitude swiftly when receiving negative Buddhist information. Since most Gen Y and Gen Z are likely to have high self-confidence and prefer rapidity, they then have opportunity to be excited by the news easily.

Therefore, this present research places an importance on Gen Y and Gen Z as a new generation who are important and fond of consuming information via online media. In addition, Gen Y and Gen Z are a group of people who play important role in maintaining and disseminating Buddhism to the next generation. This research has positive intention to seek for proactive Buddhist communication styles aiming to communicate with Gen Y and Gen Z in present-day Thailand by focusing on achievement instead of letting negative information reach the new generation one-sidedly.

Considering the significance of online social media in the age of globalization stated above, the researchers perceive the needs to study Buddhist communication via online social media as it is new media that can reach a new generation like Gen Y and Gen Z properly. Although in the past negative Buddhist information was presented through various media more than the positive one, if we learn to use effective communication style to respond or disseminate positive Buddhist information that is suitable for target audiences, it is considered useful technology utilization. Thus, it is interesting to study and requires urgent action. Up to this point, public and private organizations as well as professionals related to religion still mainly focus on preserving, restoring, and promoting Buddhism whereas proactive strategies regarding Buddhist communication has not been practically implemented yet.

From the above reason, it can be seen that Buddhism exists in the digital era among globalization that surrounded by a variety of media and communication styles. Therefore, the study of "Buddhist communication styles for a new generation in present-day Thailand" will be highly beneficial. It will help create a communication style that is up to date and consistent with the era that media has influence and important role in guiding society. It is considered as taking advantage of technology advancement to adjust attitude, image, and Buddhist communication for Thai new generation in a better way.

2. Objectives of the Study

1) To analyze Buddhist media exposure behavior of a new generation

2) To study Buddhist communication styles for a new generation in present-day Thailand

3) To present policy suggestion resulting in guideline to establish appropriate Buddhist communication styles for a new generation in Thailand

3. Scope of the Study

The researcher conducted the research according to the following scope of the study.

1) Scope of time: This research took 6 months staring from the approval date.

2) Scope of population: This research studied Thai residents in Generation Y and Generation Z, aged between 15-25 years old, using the definition of the United Nations, stating that youth refers to young persons between the ages of 15 and 25 years, categorized into Generation Z aged 15-19 years, and Generation Y aged 20-25 years.

3) Scope of content: This research intended to examine communication styles through online social media only.

4. Research Methodology

The study of "Buddhist communication styles for a new generation in present-day Thailand" is an interdisciplinary study that combined quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect data. Data collection techniques applied consisted of survey, focus group session, and in-depth interview respectively. The collecting tools included structured interview form, questionnaire, and focus group record form. The process of filling out evaluation form was under thoroughly control.

4.1 Population and Sample

Part 1 The population was Thai youth aged 15-25 years (Gen Y and Gen Z). According to National Statistical Office of Thailand conducting the latest Thai population & housing census in 2010, it was found that total population aged 15-25 years was recorded at 11,652,164.

Thus, the sample was not less than 400 people, according to the Taro Yamane formula. Purposive random sampling was applied using the following specific selection criteria;

1) The sample had to be Buddhist who used to receive Buddhist information via online media.

2) The sample had to be between the ages of 15 and 25. 40 participants were selected from each year of age. The total sample is 440 people.

3) The sample consisted of 220 male and 220 female.

4) The sample was representative of each region, 110 people per a region. The sample was selected from the provinces with highest target population; Bangkok, Chiangmai, Khonkaen, and Songkhla. The total sample for data collection was 440 people.

Then the researchers distributed questionnaires to collect data from accidental sampling until achieving the required sample size.

After analyzing and summarizing the appropriate communication styles, the researchers would adopted those criteria to select the representative of a new generation (Gen Y and Gen Z) who have never completed the questionnaires to attend the focus group in order to ask for their opinion regarding the communication styles obtained from the survey. The researchers conducted one focus group per region, total of 4 focus group sessions were carried out.

Part 2 All key informants provided their insight through in-depth interview. The researcher used two selection methods.

1) Specific individual selection which the researchers and the Senate Subcommittee on the Promotion of Religious Affairs would consider as appropriate. After that, the snowball technique would be applied to gain deep research results.

2) Participants derived from the selection in Part 1, to directly meet the needs of the target group.

The participants of this study were divided into 3 groups:

4.2 Buddhist Scholars Involved with Online Media

4.2.1 Rungnapha Tantisaowaphap

Title: Religions Affairs Technical Officer, Senior Professional Level

Information Technology Center, National Office of Buddhism Thailand

4.2.2 Wutwiwat Suphanimitwong

Title: Religions Affairs Technical Officer, Senior Professional Level

Information Technology Center, National Office of Buddhism Thailand

4.2.3 Sakda Phoosisuwan

Title: Finance and Accounting Officer

Information Technology Center, National Office of Buddhism Thailand

4.3 Professional Buddhist Communicator Targeting the Younger Generation

From the quantitative data collection, it was found that Buddhist online media that gain highest popularity are online programs of Phra Maha Wuttichai Vajiramedhi and Phra Maha Sompong Talaputto.

4.3.1 Abhirak Manowan

Phra Maha Sompong Talaputto's Online Program Producer

4.3.2 Kedsarak Harachai Online

Phra Maha Wuttichai Vajiramedhi's Online Program Producer

4.4 Experts in Online Media.

The experts with knowledge of online media who were recognized by the sample and gained highest popularity were:

4.4.1 Pongsuk Hiranprueck

One of the most popular IT program hosts in Thailand

4.4.2 Chatpawee Trichatchawanwong

The IT program host who has been called Thai IT Princess

4.5 Research Tools

The research tools used in this present study were divided into 3 categories; 1) Structured interview 2) Questionnaires to survey the needs of senders 3) Focus group record form to collect the opinions from analyzing the communication styles resulted from the study

4.6 Data Collection

1) The researchers selected the samples that are new generation, both Gen Y and Gen Z, to conduct a survey from online social network and on-site accidental sampling. Then the collected data from Gen Y and Gen Z was summarized to find out the communication styles that are suitable for the target group.

2) The researchers analyzed the survey results to study communication styles that the target group interested and efficient to new generation both Gen Y and Gen Z.

3) The researchers contacted informants related to creative communication styles that suitable for new generation both Gen Y and Gen Z in order to schedule the interview. The experts' opinions would be further summarized to explore the communication styles that are suitable for the target group.

4) The researchers carried out the in-depth interview with the samples and used Snowball Research Technique to coordinate with other people according to suggestion of the samples.

5) The researchers verified the accuracy and validity of the collecting procedures and the collected data. If there was any error, the data would be recollected.

6) After receiving the results, the researchers would use those findings to conduct focus group session with target group in order to collect in-depth results, which would then be adjusted and completed.

4.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were used in data analysis. The researchers brought all data to synthesize according to the following research framework.

1) Preliminary analysis. The data was categorized and analyzed based on appropriateness such as categorizing types of incidents, duration of incidents, relevant people, and environments. Then the researchers considered the consistency of each data formation, which will be the basic factor to explain the reason of a phenomenon.

2) Theoretical analysis. The data was theoretically analyzed.

3) Constant comparison analysis. The data was compared with a phenomenon. For example, when the researchers observed many incidents, the data in each incident was categorized and then compared with each other to find out the relationship or connection.

4.8 Presentation of the Analysis Results

When receiving data, the researchers would categorize and summarize it based on the concepts and theories. Then the data was verified and analyzed to find out the answers according to the objectives of the study. This research used descriptive statistics to describe the number and percentage of variable data. Inferential statistics was used to describe and present data in the table format in order to be consistent with the analysis of qualitative data. This research utilized interpretation criteria and statistical analysis applying a Likert-type scale in the format of average score. The scale ranged from 5 (highest satisfaction) to 1 (lowest satisfaction).

5. Research Results

5.1 Behavior of a New Generation Regarding Buddhist Media Exposure

Considering the frequency of Buddhist media exposure, it was found that 255 participants which are the majority of the subjects obtained low level which accounted for 58%, followed by 154 participants who obtained moderate level (35%), and only 19 participants obtained high level (4.3%).

Most of the subjects received the information unintentionally; 377 people who accounted for 85.7%, followed by 63 people who intended to receive the information which accounted for 14.3%.

Regarding the electronics devices used to receive Buddhist information through online social media, it was found that 223 people which are the majority of the subjects used mobile phone (50.7%), followed by 169 people using computer (38.4%), and 25 people using laptop (5.7%).

It was also found that 225 people connected to internet via Wireless which accounted for 51%, followed by 105 people using EDGE/GPRS/3G and 102 people using ADSL which accounted for 23.9% and 23.2% respectively.

Besides, it was found that most of the subjects (239 people) usually received Buddhist information during 18.01-21.00 which accounted for 54.3%, followed by 66 people receiving information during 21.01-24.00 (15%) and 40 people receiving information during 06.01-9.00 and 03.01-06.00 which accounted for 9.1% each.

The subjects mostly received Buddhist information on Sunday (259 people, 58.9%), followed by Saturday (250 people, 56.8%) and Friday (249 people, 56.6%) respectively.

As for the frequency of receiving Buddhist information via online social media, it was found that the majority of the participants usually received Buddhist information two times a week (144 people, 32.7%), followed by 85 people receiving information 2-3 times a week (19.3%) and 73 people receiving information once a month (16.6%).

Considering the duration of Buddhist media exposure via online social media at a time, most of the subjects took less than 30 minutes per time (255 people, 58%), followed by 30-60 minutes per time (123 people, 28%) and 1-2 hours per time (58 people, 13.2%).

Moreover, it was found that the subjects mostly received Buddhist information at home (216 people, 49.1%), followed by school/office (118 people, 26.8%) and public places (84 people, 19.1%).

Regarding the online social media communication services/programs which were mostly used for Buddhist media exposure (First Rank), it was found that Facebook gained the highest popularity (244 people, 55.5%), followed by Youtube (147 people, 33.4%), and Instagram (17 people, 3.9%).

It was also found that most subjects selected Youtube as the second-ranked service/program used to receive Buddhist information (179 people, 40.7%), followed by Facebook (121 people, 27.5%), and Instagram (60 people, 13.6%).

As for the third-ranked service/program used to receive Buddhist information, most subjects selected Instagram (217 people, 49.3%), followed by Twitter (101 people, 23%), and Youtube (83 people, 18.9%).

Lastly, it was found that most of the participants were alone while receiving Buddhist information (154 people, 35%), followed by being with relatives (110 people, 25%) and being with friends (105 people, 23.9%).

5.2 Buddhist Communication Styles Targeting New Generation in Present-day Thailand

From the study, it was found that the overview of Buddhist communication styles for a new generation in present-day Thailand were as follows.

1) Online communication channels sorted by desirability of target group were online social network such as Facebook, online sharing such as Youtube, Twitter and Micro Blog such as Twitter and Blog respectively.

2) Multimedia presentations sorted by desirability of target group were video presentation, animation presentation, image presentation, text presentation, and audio presentation respectively.

3) Website communications sorted by desirability of target group were one-to-many asynchronous communication such as accessing websites to find information, many-to-many synchronous communication such as posting on web board, one-to-many synchronous communication such as chatting, one-to-one synchronous communication such as chatting, and one-to-one asynchronous communication such as sending emails respectively.

4) Buddhist content sorted by desirability of target group was Buddhist information, Buddhist knowledge and Buddha's biography, Buddhist religious days and ceremonies, teaching dharmic principles, Buddhist practices such as Vipasyana meditation process, various chants and spells.

5) Communication language styles sorted by desirability of target group were informal language and formal language respectively.

Apart from Buddhist communication styles that were presented overall and by demographic factors, this research finds out communication strategies for Buddhist online media targeting a new generation which users can take into account together with the above information.

1. Catching up on online Buddhist information seems to cling to specific individual

2. Presentation must be interesting and suitable for target group

3. Difficult content must be arranged until it is easy to understand

4. Buddhist topics should be carefully selected to meet the needs and everyday life.

5. Successful online communication requires teamwork.

5.3 Policy Suggestions Will Bring About a Guideline to Create Appropriate Buddhist Communication Style for a New Generation in Thailand

From data collection including survey, focus group, and in-depth interview, the findings from this study indicated the following policy suggestions which would result in a guideline to create appropriate Buddhist communication style for a new generation in Thailand in short term.

1) Promote online media to disseminate religious information of monks, Buddhist agencies and organizations which were already recognized.

2) Increase the frequency and amount of Buddhist communication

3) Use online media communication that could reach the target group by adopting the results of this research as communication guideline

4) Study the pattern of Buddhist communication model from Phra Maha Wuttichai Vajiramedhi, Phra Maha Sompong Talaputto, and other experts.

While policy suggestions for long-term implementation included:

1) Compliment Buddhist personnel and organizations promoting their value and making them widely recognized

2) Develop the human resources by providing them with technological knowledge

3) Promote knowledge of integrated communication and increase proactive public relations via integrated online communication

4) Produce new Buddhist communicators to the society

5) Reduce the online media access gap between urban and rural youth

6) Continually cultivate Buddhist information to Thai youth since they were young

7) Encourage previous generation to express solid interest in Buddhism in order to create good role model

6. Suggestions

6.1 Academic Suggestions for Further Study

1) This research used the samples that randomly selected from the entire population with greatly demographic differences, especially in terms of age and education which are key factors affecting the hypothesis testing. The

researchers think that this research can demonstrate the overall results but if there is a study investigating the insight of each age stratum and education, the results are likely to be more detailed and insightful.

2) Online media is a new media changing rapidly. If this contemporary media is aimed to be earnestly utilized in Buddhist communication promotion, it is needed to continually conduct research studies in order to catch up with media situation in modern times.

3) If there is research that studies communication styles of other religions, it will create learning and comparing resulting in appropriate application of Buddhist communication styles.

6.2 General Suggestions

1) Buddhist communicators, institutions, and agencies can apply the research results to use in Buddhist communication toward a new generation by adapting the content as appropriate.

2) This research studies the communication styles in terms of online media. However, the application will be more comprehensive if it is integrated with other media in order to make the communication more effective.

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