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The Influence of Social Media Engagement on Political Attitudes, Motivation, and Participation

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Abstract

Social media platforms have reshaped political communication, enabling citizens to like, comment, share, and join communities at scale. This conceptual review synthesizes evidence on how social media engagement (SME) relates to political attitudes, political motivation, and political participation. Drawing on 15 peer-reviewed studies published between 2019 and 2025, together with four classic frameworks—Uses and Gratifications, Agenda-setting/Framing, Social Capital, and Political Participation. Thailand provides a particularly dynamic context. The country has one of the world's highest rates of social media use and has witnessed youth-led political mobilization since 2020. These features make Thailand a critical case for understanding how SME influences political behavior, highlighting both opportunities for civic engagement and risks of polarization through selective exposure. Findings across recent studies show consistent links between SME and attitudinal change (e.g., political efficacy, polarization) and suggest that motivation—via gratifications sought, perceived efficacy, and collective identity—mediates the SME → participation pathway. However, causal direction remains contested due to reliance on cross-sectional designs. Platform affordances, content type, and network structures further moderate these relationships. We propose an integrative conceptual model positioning SME as a proximal driver of attitudes and a catalyst of motivation, jointly predicting political participation. This review contributes a consolidated framework, identifies key gaps, and outlines implications for future empirical testing in Southeast Asian contexts.

Keywords: Social Media Engagement; Political Attitudes; Political Motivation; Political Participation; Thailand